

**With many budgets being cut right now, how would you convince your local community that 4-H is worth funding?**

As a 4-H member since the age of 5, I have been afforded countless opportunities to grow and develop as a strong leader in the community. The attention that you give to the 4-H youth now can provide 10-fold returns as they grow up and become strong members of the community. It doesn't cost a lot of money to help this program, it requires more time and attention to teach and be present as a volunteer. Some events do require funding however, and I have seen my community come together to do some amazing things to ensure all our members have access to programs that give endless returns as we grow up in the 4-H. I have not completed my 4-H experience yet, so I understand that the program will have to do more with less in the changing local and political environments.

As an active 4-H member I am very fortunate to also come from a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation 4-H family. You could say that my roots were born into a legacy that was founded on community service and learning through agriculture. My parents are both 4-H leaders and my older sister has also completed the program and has moved on to a University. I am very fortunate to be surrounded with others that value the importance of all programs that I have access to. My family and I own and operate several crop farms where we grow hay, corn, soybeans, wheat, and straw. We use many of these crops to feed the sheep, goats, turkeys, and chickens we raise as livestock projects each year. Our sheep flock expanded from one lamb to hundreds over the course of my sisters 4-H career, building the genetics over time.

There is not one correct way to advocate for the 4-H program to the community at this point. I do this all the time as an officer in my club, as a participant in contests, as a volunteer in the community, and as a small business owner. Not many people as teenagers own their own

business, but my sister and I do. We learned through the 4-H entrepreneurship program how to take something grown on our farm and turn it into profit. We started a dryerball business using wool produced from the Leicester Longwool sheep flock. We transform the raw wool into sustainable dryerballs that can be used to replace chemicals in your laundry. We sell them in local markets throughout the year and use the money to offset a tiny bit of the costs it takes to raise the sheep. We learned how to develop a marketing plan, how to make a budget, and even how to obtain a loan. We would never have had the opportunity to participate in this program without approved funding for the extension agent that led this. This type of program can boost the local economy and create a strong culture associated with kids building their own wealth through agriculture.

In many cases those in the community that value the importance of what 4-H means on a resume will support the program without hesitation. This could be by buying an animal at the local 4-H livestock sale, by donating through a fundraiser, or even by offering a 4-H member a job. They do this because they know that the member has put their heart and soul into the animal, into learning, and even the lessons learned when becoming a good citizen. These types of skills make providing the financial support easier. Every year I take handwritten letters out to community businesses inviting them to visit my family at the fair and maybe even purchase a market goat or lamb. While I might be doing this to gain support for my project, they might then also support another member that they meet along the way. The spirit of giving can sometimes be contagious because all the kids are great. Once the relationship is established it can spread to the local county program, the state, and can last for many years. The opportunities that just a little bit of funding can do in the 4-H program is amazing.