

## 10 Reasons Your Child Should Join FFA or 4-H

by:- JoAnn Alumbaugh



It's hard to imagine growing up on a farm without participating in 4-H or FFA. Although there was no FFA in my high school in Ann Arbor, Mich. (there were only about five farm kids in my class of 700), my siblings and I were active members of 4-H. Our woodworking leader had a workshop in his basement, so one Saturday a month, my sister and I would go there to work on projects, like the obligatory three-legged milk stool, a bread board and cribbage board, a tack box and finally, a solid walnut coffee table.

My mom was our sewing leader, with meetings in our basement. I loved sewing, the whir of the machines and the camaraderie. It was a thrill to be named top seamstress for our county my last year in 4-H. Our livestock club was in a neighboring rural town, where we made some great friends for life. I showed horses, dairy cattle, and of course, pigs, along with a host of other projects.

And, like my dad a generation earlier, I attended Club Congress, winning in the swine project. He went in 1943, and I went almost 30 years later.



My kids were in 4-H too (you may have read my [harrowing experience](#) as a first-time 4-H parent, watching my oldest son show pigs), and also had many great experiences.

The county fairs, leadership conferences at Michigan State, exchange trips to other states, the citizenship short-course trip to Washington, D.C. and Club Congress in Chicago are memories I'll never forget.

Michelle Hochstein was a senior at Texas Tech University in December when she came up with the Top 10 list below.

“My involvement in FFA was key in getting me to this point,” she wrote in 2015. “Everyone should take advantage of what this organization has to offer!”

I feel the same way about 4-H, so we’re modifying her list slightly to include both groups. Encourage your sons and daughters to join these organizations. The leadership, work ethic, responsibility and team building skills they’ll learn will serve them well in life.

- 1. Leadership skills.** We all want our children to be successful. Public speaking, group projects and running for offices. All activities that contribute to leadership skills. All found in FFA and 4-H.
- 2. Knowledge of agriculture.** How do tractors run? What exactly is a cotton boll or a barrow? What's the proper way to handle an animal? Just ask anyone involved in 4-H or FFA. They'll tell you.
- 3. Healthy living.** Both organizations provide the building blocks toward a healthy lifestyle. Members learn about food, where it comes from and how to keep it safe and environmentally friendly. They also help bridge the gap between rural and non-rural folks.
- 4. Confidence.** Many children today have no “in-person” social outlets. Giving them a chance to meet people, complete projects and enter contests will spur a self-confidence that many children lack.
- 5. Good sportsmanship.** We live in a world where people like to say "every child is a winner." But the truth – and in life – people have to learn how to accept failure. And in the long-run, the lessons learned in defeat are usually remembered and serve as building blocks. Competition can be healthy and character-building. Stock shows, skills tests and speaking contests are all outlets in which children can participate in friendly, sportsmanlike competition.



- 6. Work ethic.** FFA and FFA members complete a wide variety of projects throughout the year. These projects require dedication, time management and hard work.
- 7. Community service.** "Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve." That's the FFA way. Pledging your “Head to clearer thinking, your heart to greater loyalty, your hands to larger service and your health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world” is the 4-H way. Enough said.
- 8. Lifelong friendships.** All things aside, your children will make friends who share the same passion for agriculture. These friends become peers. Then colleagues. And often, life-long friends.
- 9. Scholarship opportunities.** We all want our children to get a college education. But face it. College comes with a big price tag. Let FFA and 4-H help you. And as an adult, you can give back.
- 10. And many other skills.** Entomology. Communication. Horticulture. Food quality inspection. Economic and business development. The opportunities are endless and expand outside agriculture.

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As mentioned, these are life skills that will serve your child in adulthood. Help them enjoy all the benefits and who knows, you may become a leader or instructor too (if you aren't already).