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## **4-H recruitment possibilities among Tennessee suburban seventh grade students : a focus group study**

Sharon Ann Davis

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sharon Ann Davis entitled "4-H recruitment possibilities among Tennessee suburban seventh grade students : a focus group study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Agriculture and Extension Education.

Randol G. Waters, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Roy Lessly, Ben Powell

Accepted for the Council:

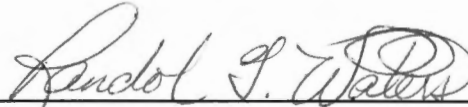
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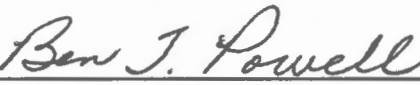
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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

  
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Dr. Roy R. Lessly

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mr. Ben Powell

Accepted for the Council:

  
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Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of the  
Graduate School

**4-H Recruitment Possibilities Among  
Tennessee Suburban Seventh Grade Students:**

**A Focus Group Study**

**A**

**Thesis**

**Presented for the**

**Master of Science**

**Degree**

**The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

*Sharon A. Davis*

**May 1997**

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## **DEDICATION**

This manuscript is lovingly and sincerely dedicated to my husband, Matthew, whose patience and care is inspiring.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere thanks to her Graduate Committee Chairman, Dr. Randol G. Waters, for his generous guidance and unparalleled teaching ability which allowed so much growth and exploration during this educational endeavor. The author also wishes to express her gratitude to Dr. Roy R. Lessly for his genuine concern and inspiring leadership with which he guided the author through her graduate career. The author also wishes to thank Mr. Ben Powell for his supportive suggestions and kind arrangements for making funds available through the 4-H Foundation.

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## **ABSTRACT**

When compared to junior (5th or 6th grade) 4-H members, the number of junior high (7th or 8th grade) 4-H members is significantly lower. In fact, in Tennessee, a major decline in enrollment occurs during the transition between the sixth and seventh grades. Additionally, very few members who live in suburban areas, an area with large member potential, are represented in the enrollment figures. As the enrollment of older members declines, the need to discover ways of recruiting new members into 4-H in order to boost long-run teen enrollment is apparent.

The purpose of this study was to reveal suburban students' perceptions about 4-H, suggestions that would make 4-H more appealing to a similar group of students, as well as reveal programming alternatives for the seventh grade suburban population in hopes of increasing senior participation by retaining newly recruited members. The objectives of this study were to: (1) inquire about the kinds of groups and/or clubs that non-4-H members participate in and their motivation behind participation in this group; (2) examine the awareness of non-4-H members of 4-H in their school; (3) reveal the students' perceptions about 4-H; (4) infer other students' perceptions in the school about 4-H through the focus group participants; (5) reveal the reasons these students do not participate in 4-H; (6) reveal the degree and manner in which other people influence the participants' decisions not to join 4-H; (7) reveal the activities the participants suggest 4-H should offer; (8) reveal participants' perceptions of what types of incentives would encourage participation in 4-H; and (9) reveal participants' suggestions of how 4-H can ultimately increase participation.



The conclusions of this study were based upon the participants' responses. First of all, generally most students in the focus groups were involved in the same types of activities suggesting they are heavily influenced by their physical and socio-emotional environments. They initially choose to participate in a club or group because their friends invite them but choose to continue to participate if they view the purpose as meaningful and have fun. Generally, most students attributed 4-H with projects associated with learning and "making stuff." To a lesser extent, some felt 4-H's activities were largely agricultural and some associated 4-H with contests and awards such as ribbons. However, they did not associate 4-H with development of skills such as leadership, communications, or decision making. Furthermore, they were not aware of the current activities of 4-H and speculated that 4-H had a lot of environmentally beneficial projects. Approximately half of the students stated 4-H was boring and the other half perceived 4-H as being fun. However, when they were asked to report other students' perceptions, they believed most other students felt 4-H was boring revealing a discrepancy between their own reported perceptions and those they believed others had. They also cited peer pressure as the main reason students did not join 4-H but felt students who were high achievers would be more likely to join 4-H. They also cited friends or peers as the most influential entities in their decision to participate in 4-H. Parents and teachers were also reported to be an influence to a lesser extent. Peers were the most influential because of the social aspect they provided the student. Animal, bicycle, and summer camp activities were perceived to be the most interesting probably because of their implication of hands-on activities,

fun, and group involvement. The participants also expressed a desire for outdoor projects and new animal projects such as reptiles and endangered species. They would also like to reinforce learning activities with field trips. They implied that by having other students endorse and advertise 4-H, more students would be interested in 4-H. They also stated most people participate in in-school 4-H meetings to "get out of class" or socialize but if 4-H was engaging enough, students would stay after school for 4-H. Recommendations included updating curriculum and restructuring the planning and marketing of meetings as well as changing the content, organization, and philosophy of meetings.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### History of the 4-H Organization

In the early 1900's, boys' corn clubs and girls' canning clubs were organized by early public school educators (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). These clubs were the basis of Extension education for rural youth. Rural superintendents and country school masters were influenced by the "profound influence of John Dewey and his instrumentalist philosophy" (Aiton, 1956, p. 1). Dewey's influence on education during this time shed light on the different educational needs of rural youth. Two men are credited with first speaking out about the inadequacy that plagued rural education. These men were Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell University and Albert B. Graham, superintendent of schools for Springfield Township, Ohio (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). Together, these men are credited for the beginnings of the 4-H Club in which rural youth would have an opportunity to learn from their environment which Bailey idealized as a classroom (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). The 4-H Organization thrived throughout this period with a significant number of youth actively involved in the Club.

Around 1961, the 4-H Organization began to see a new task before it. Urban youth had a need for Extension programs as well. However, this issue met with some controversy. Many youth agents felt that 4-H had an educational purpose toward all youth, not just those on the farm. For some, however, it was felt that the 4-H Club had

a priority to serve only rural youth. Even so, 4-H began to develop programs geared to develop urban youth. However, as cities begin to expand into the countryside, another demographic need arose. That area was the suburb. Students in these areas represent the smallest proportion of enrolled members demographically.

### **Need For the Study**

#### ***Low Enrollment At the Junior High and Senior Level***

Besides low suburban enrollment, the number of junior high level members was low when compared to the number of junior members. In 1995, the number of junior high (7th and 8th grade) level members represented 24.4% of the enrolled members compared to 43.3% of those enrolled as junior (5th and 6th grade) members (TAES, SP 249, 1995). Thus, the dropout rate is high during the transition between the sixth and seventh grades. Furthermore, there were only 13.5 % of those who were enrolled as senior level (9th through 12th grade) members (TAES, SP 249, 1995). The ability to maintain equitable enrollment among all age groups has been a dilemma for quite some time. Even in the 1930's, the ability to hold the interest of the teenage boy or girl was viewed as a difficult task (Sullivan, 1956). Sullivan (1956) quoted the *1948 Joint Committee Report on Extension Programs Policies and Goals* as follows: "The 4-H program and techniques should be improved in order to hold club members for a longer period of time, to challenge the interest of older club members, and to assure a higher percentage of project completion" (p. 3). Thus, the feasibility of 4-H concentrating valuable resources on retaining, and perhaps recruiting older youth is an area in need of exploration. Perhaps



by recruiting junior high level youth, senior level enrollment could be increased in the long run.

### *Low Enrollment of Suburban 4-H Members*

Furthermore, the 4-H organization has worked diligently to reach both rural and urban youth. However, another sector of society is becoming more prominent with each decade. This sector is commonly known as the suburb. Charles (1993) discussed the epistemology of the suburb as it developed during the 1940's when servicemen returned home from the war in search of affordable housing. Today, the suburb is seen as the "urban fringe" between rural and urban areas (United States Department of Commerce [USDC], 1992, p. A-12). In Tennessee, areas recognized as Metropolitan Statistical Areas, or MSAs, which are "whole counties including their rural areas which meet established criteria of population density and economic integration with a large central city" (Vickers & Kirby, 1991, p. 4) are comparable to a suburb.

Each year, more and more Tennesseans are classified as living in an MSA (Vickers & Kirby, 1991). Three MSA counties surrounding a large central city are Blount, Wilson, and Tipton (these counties were not necessarily used in the study). Each of these counties has experienced significant population growth since 1990 and are expected to report increased populations in the year 2000 as well (Tennessee Economic Development Center, [TEDC], 1997). This presents a new problem for the 4-H Organization. How can Extension develop programs to meet the needs of suburban youth? Further, should Extension develop programs to recruit suburban youth? A logical assumption is that if the

population of the suburbs is increasing, then the potential number of 4-H members in these areas is increasing as well. Determining how and if these students can be recruited into the program could be a possible solution to the problem of the likelihood of students losing interest or not participating in 4-H as they grow older.

### **Purpose Of The Study**

This study identified seventh grade students who lived within a Metropolitan Statistical Area. These students never actively participated in 4-H. Additionally, this study used focus group research to inquire about their motivation not to participate in 4-H. The purpose of this study was to reveal suburban students' perceptions about 4-H, suggestions that would make 4-H more appealing to a similar group of students, as well as reveal programming alternatives for the seventh grade suburban population in hopes of increasing senior participation by retaining newly recruited members.

### **Scope Of The Study**

A type of cluster sampling was used in this study. Agents were asked to contact a person at the school who could access those students who were in the seventh grade and felt like they never actively participated in 4-H. If school personnel were not available, agents provided a list of names of students suitable for the study. The responses reported from the focus group studies are only generalizable to those people who are similar to the sample.

## Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. inquire about the kinds of groups and/or clubs in which non-4-H members participate and their motivation behind their participation in these groups;
2. examine the awareness of non-4-H members of 4-H in their school;
3. reveal the students' perceptions about 4-H;
4. infer other students' perceptions in the school about 4-H through the focus group participants;
5. reveal reasons these students do not participate in 4-H;
6. reveal the degree and manner in which other people influence participants' decision not to join 4-H;
7. reveal the activities the participants suggest 4-H should offer;
8. reveal participants' perceptions of what types of incentives would encourage participation in 4-H; and
9. reveal participants' suggestions of how 4-H can ultimately increase participation.

## Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms used in this study and their definitions.

1. **4-H Participant** - A member taking part in 4-H.
2. **Explorer 4-H Member** - A 4-H member in the fourth grade.
3. **Junior Level 4-H Member** - A 4-H member in the 5th or 6th grade.

4. **Junior High Level 4-H Member** - A 4-H member in the 7th or 8th grade.
5. **Level I Senior 4-H Member** - A 4-H member in the 9th or 10th grade.
6. **Level II Senior 4-H Member** - A 4-H member in the 11th or 12th grade.
7. **Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)** - In Tennessee, a “whole county, including their rural areas, which meet established criteria of population density and economic integration with a large central city” (Vickers & Kirby, 1991, p. 1).
8. **Non-active participation** - Refers to a situation where the student may have been enrolled in 4-H but did not feel like they were an active participant in 4-H. Since 4-H is offered in most 4th, 5th and 6th grade classrooms in Tennessee, (sometimes referred to as blanket enrollment), many students can not be classified as having never been enrolled in 4-H or experienced 4-H in some way.
9. **Organized 4-H Club** - A traditional 4-H Club that meets in the school or community and is not part of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).
10. **Focus Group Study Participant** - A person not active in 4-H taking part in a focus group.
11. **Rural** - A place of 2,500 or less persons which is for the most part, isolated from a large central city (United States Department of Commerce, [USDC], 1992).
11. **Suburban** - A place that is adjacent to a large central city with more than

50,000 people. This term is also known as “urban fringe” by the USDC (USDC, 1992, p. A-12).

12. **Urban** - A place of 2,500 or more persons or a place within an urbanized area (USDC, 1992).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY THROUGH A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **The 4-H Organization**

4-H is a youth education program provided through the Cooperative Extension System. Its beginnings can be found in boys' corn clubs organized in the early 1900's. Later, girls' canning clubs emerged and these two sectors combined, along with other youth organizations, were the basis of the first 4-H Club Organizations.

Inevitably, 4-H Club work had to change to meet the needs of a rapidly growing number of nation's youth. This change was anticipated by 4-H Club workers in the late 1950's. New programming efforts were sought from Extension to "reflect the changing needs of young people and the changing times in which they live" (Reck, 1951, p. 299). As a result, new programs in youth development such as "producer-consumer relationships, career exploration, health programs, mentoring of the younger club members by older club members and volunteer leader training" were launched (Reck, 1951, p. 298). Many of these programs are still active today.

These programs are a direct result of Extension's efforts to encourage youth participation in 4-H. 4-H participants who are involved in these programs are described as "youth taking part in programs provided as the result of action planned and

initiated by Extension personnel in cooperation with volunteer leadership at the local level" (Wessel & Wessel, 1982, p. 331). 4-H is still very much an active organization today.

However, there is growing concern about the number of youth taking part, especially at the senior level. The question of why older adolescents choose not to be a part of 4-H or choose to drop out of 4-H has been asked for many years. It has been said "youth participation is not a frill for the special few or a cure for those in serious difficulty... it is a necessity for many, if not all adolescents" (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1977, p. 10). If youth participation in an organization is a necessity, then society has a great task before it. It must be discovered how, and if, youth can be encouraged to participate. Numerous studies have offered suggestions as to why some youth are not taking part. The Senior Division of 4-H is also exploring the phenomena of declining participation of senior level youth.

#### **4-H Enrollment**

How many youths are "taking part"? The 4-H Organization served 5,600,087 participants in over 100,000 units in 1994 (National 4-H Council, 1996). Of these participants, 1,393,220 were enrolled in an organized 4-H Club (National 4-H Council, 1996). In the calendar year 1993-1994, 157,926 of these youth were enrolled in traditional organized 4-H clubs in Tennessee (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1994). The following year, 1994-1995, Tennessee traditional club enrollment increased to 159,362 (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1995). These figures suggest the number of youths

"taking part" are increasing each year. However, along with many other organizations, the number of youth "taking part" as they grow older is decreasing.

### **The Status Of Other Organizations**

Other organizations are also fiercely competing for the interest of our nation's older youth (Hanson & Carlson, 1972). One such organization is the Boy Scouts of America. This program has many likenesses to 4-H. Their activities consist of "outdoor skills, citizenship, and community living" to name a few and these programs are conducted during nonschool hours (Carnegie Council on adolescent Development, 1992, pp. 143). In 1993, their national membership was 4,625,800 which included cub, boy and explorer scouts (Boy Scouts of America, 1996). Brian Steger of the East Tennessee Council of Boy Scouts states it "has become increasingly difficult to reach early adolescent youth" (B. Steger, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Another similar program, The Girl Scouts of America, report a present enrollment of 2,534,146 girls aged 5 to 17 in the United States (Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1996). This number varies little from approximately 2.5 million reported in 1991 (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992). However, the Carnegie Council further reports "30 percent of these girls were aged eight to eleven while only 6 percent were aged eleven to fourteen with a caveat that the ages overlap because statistics are kept by grade" (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992, p. 145). Even so, it seems there is a drastic decline in enrollment as the participant becomes older.



## **4-H Enrollment Demographics**

For the purposes of this study, the demographic characteristics of previous and current 4-H members are recognized so the demographic characteristics of their peers not participating in 4-H may be conceptualized.

### ***Age***

The ages of the 4-H participants in Tennessee in 1995 range from less than 9 years of age to greater than 17 years of age. A large portion of the participants, 23.6% (38,282), were 10 years of age. (Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service [TAES], SP 249, 1995). This suggests the majority of participation in 4-H occurs at the elementary school level. Furthermore, the major decline in enrollment occurs during the transition between sixth and seventh grades. In fact, in 1993 the number of 6th grade 4-Hers was 32,380 and in 1994 the total number of 7th grade 4-Hers was 19,621 (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1993 & 1994). This is a loss of 12,759 participants.

### ***Place of Residence***

4-H members have traditionally been perceived as having a farm background. However, in Tennessee, while most of the 4-Hers are from a rural area, only 24,607 (15.2%) actually live on farms while 100,609 (62.0%), lived in nonfarm rural areas (TAES, SP 249, 1995). However, only 3,183, (2.0%), lived in suburbs of cities with more than 50,000 persons (TAES, SP 249, 1995).

## **The Concept of a Suburb and Its Significance to 4-H Membership**

Many American cities have seen a steady growth of communities surrounding their borders since the return of the servicemen from WWII in the 1940's in search of affordable housing (Charles, 1993). These communities are commonly known as suburbs. However, the word suburb is not recognized by the United States Census Bureau.

Historically, there has been only two descriptors of a population, urban or rural. However, the population of the areas surrounding the perimeters of the cities is growing and therefore a logical assumption is that the population of potential 4-H participants in this area is increasing as well. This growth in population has spurred many studies attempting to clarify the distinction between urban and rural. Urban territory is defined as a place of 2,500 or more persons or a place within an urbanized area (USDC, 1992). An urbanized area is a "central place" and an "urban fringe" that together have a minimum of 50,000 people (USDC, 1992, p. A-12). An "urban fringe" is the "adjacent densely settled area surrounding the urbanized area" which is somewhat similar to what is commonly known as a suburb (USDC, 1992, p. A-12 ). Another study states "it has long been known that some rural areas are much 'more rural' than others but there has been little means for systematically describing such differences" and therefore a rurality index has been developed (Cleland, 1995, p. 12). For the purpose of this study, the actual findings of the rurality index were not

discussed. However, it was important to note the efforts being made to distinguish intermediate populations between urban and rural centers.

In the *Tennessee Statistical Abstract* (1991), Metropolitan Statistical Areas, (MSAs) are identified. These are "whole counties, including their rural areas, which meet established criteria of population density and economic integration with a large central city" and each year their population is increasing (Vickers & Kirby, 1991, p. 1). Three MSA counties surrounding a large central city are Blount, Wilson, and Tipton Counties (these counties were not necessarily used in the study). Each of these counties have experienced significant population growth since 1990 and are expected to report increased populations in the year 2000 as well (TEDC, 1997). For the purposes of this study, counties within an MSA were identified as suburbs due to their similarity to the previous criteria used to identify comparable areas.

#### **4-H Project Enrollment**

The earliest 4-H Clubs offered projects that mainly dealt with agriculture and home economics. Today, there are a variety of additional projects that include public speaking, citizenship, photography, bicycling, and personal development as examples. In Tennessee during 1994, the highest enrolled project was the Arts and Crafts project, one that can be completed in a rural, suburban, or urban setting (TAES, SP 249, 1995).

## **Characteristics of 4-H Members and Drop-Outs**

Many studies have attempted to reveal the distinguishing characteristics between tenured 4-H members and those who choose to leave 4-H. Sometimes the findings of these studies do not agree with each other. However, it should be kept in mind each of these studies were conducted on students of varying age, gender, and demographic background.

### ***Correlation of Re-enrollment With Record Keeping and Projects***

It has been suggested 4-H members do not like keeping project records which could be a potential effect on re-enrollment in 4-H. One study found this was particularly true for older members who decided not to re-enroll in 4-H (Culbert, 1983). Also, Hartley (1983) found re-enrollment was highly correlated to receiving a project ribbon for completing a project.

Another study found 65% of those members with high 4-H participation levels ironically held "unfavorable feelings toward keeping records" (Warren, 1982, p. 46). Further, one study concluded that a higher percentage of 4-H male members felt the record books "should be dropped" than 4-H male dropouts (McClure, 1971, p. 59). This was true again for female 4-H members as compared to female 4-H dropouts (Jeter, 1971).

### ***4-H Members' Involvement In Other Activities***

The involvement of adolescents in other activities has also been questioned. If the senior 4-H member is involved in other activities, are they likely to remain in 4-H?

A study describing 110 state 4-H contest winners found the majority of these youth were involved in at least two other non-4-H Clubs (Jenson, Young, Adams, & Schvaneveldt, 1982, p. 13). This was also found to be true in a study conducted on ninth grade girls in Blount County (Jeter, 1971). Another study conducted on Bradley County, Tennessee ninth and tenth grade girls found 18% of 4-H members and 8% of 4-H dropouts belonged to two other non-4-H clubs (Byerly, 1972, p. 56). Another study in the same county found more 4-H members were also members of the school paper or school yearbook staff than nonmembers and this was also true for being a part of an organized sports team (Smith, 1982). Also members who reported involvement in other activities remained in 4-H longer (Wedgeworth, 1980). It is evident, then, that most who participate in 4-H also participate in other clubs. Also, of those who participated in other clubs, a tendency to have a more consistent membership in 4-H existed.

### ***Adolescent Development and 4-H Involvement***

Several factors have been found to be significant in the middle school aged child's decision to dropout. These are "feelings of belongingness, interest level, and leader compatibility" (Culbert, 1981, in Culbert, 1983, p. 13). This need to be

accepted by peers and leaders is a powerful one because it fuels the adolescent's decision to stay in or leave the group.

From another perspective, however, one study states "teen dropout continues to be a fact of life for 4-H, Scouts, and similar programs" (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995, p. 2). They suggest from a "developmental perspective, a teen's decision to move on to other experiences is not and should not be unexpected...rather, it is a part of growing up [and becoming more independent]" (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995, p. 2). According to this study, it is not the programming or the peer group that causes the member to leave the group, but the desire to distance themselves from childhood experiences.

Another study conducted on Indiana 4-H dropouts, cited most of the dropouts left 4-H because they did not like the 4-H Club because the "meetings were boring" (Ritchie & Ressler, 1993, p. 3). Furthermore, this study suggests the urge to leave childhood experiences behind can be compensated by giving the youth the freedom to "create their own experiences" (Ritchie & Ressler, 1993, p. 3). This study suggests programming can be modified to meet the needs of older 4-H youth and is supported by Norland and Bennett's (1993) findings.

### ***Families of 4-H Members***

The family of the participant has also been described. Several studies suggest parent and/or sibling involvement play a key role in 4-H participation.

## Parent(s)

Participation In Other Groups. Several studies suggest the participation of the parent(s) is crucial for retention of the 4-H member. For example, one study concluded the 4-H member would be more likely to be a member of a youth group if their parent was a member of a group (Maurer & Bokemeier, 1984). Therefore, those whose parents joined clubs would be more likely to join clubs themselves.

Parent's History With 4-H. Perhaps the parent(s) who were 4-H members themselves encourage a member to continue participating in 4-H. In fact, one study concluded that a long term 4-H participant's mother and/or father were also long-time participating 4-H members (Smith, 1982).

However, in another study conducted on seventh graders in Dickson County, Tennessee, the parent's involvement as a previous 4-H member was not found to be a significant factor in enrollment (Wedgeworth, 1980). This was also concluded in a study about seventh, eighth and ninth grade boys and girls in Bledsoe County (Nichols, 1972). Another study found only a few more members' parents had been in 4-H than the drop-outs' parents (Bailey, 1980).

Support of Member's 4-H Activities. Also, re-enrollment of the participant was associated with "cooperation of the parents and their support" (Hartley, 1983, p. 20). This study is supported by McClure (1971) who found that male 4-H members who remained in 4-H felt that their fathers and mothers were "pleased at the time they first joined 4-H" (pp. 42, 47). This was also found to be true for ninth grade females (Jeter, 1971, p. 40).

Another study recommends the barriers that limit parental participation in 4-H should be examined because more family involvement would improve 4-H re-enrollment (Culbert, 1983). More importantly, it was found the physical participation of the parent was not as important as the perception of the member of their parents' support (Norland & Bennett, 1993). Therefore, the parent's presence is not the determining factor of the member's participation. The most important aspect, according to this study, is how much the member feels his parent values their child's participation in the group. It should also be mentioned that parental support plays a key role in project completion and in the long run, youth participation (Scott, Clark, & Reagan, 1990). This suggests also that the parent(s)' recognition of the member's activities in the club promotes participation in the club.

Marital Status. Findings of one study concluded those whose parents were not married were "significantly more likely" to not re-enroll citing reasons of "transportation was a problem" and "I didn't get enough support or help" (Culbert, 1983, p. 72). Another study concluded 92% of those who were "winners" in 4-H had parents who were married and living together (Jenson, et al., p. 13).

However, another study showed that marital status was not a determinant in the ninth grade male 4-H member's enrollment decisions in Greene County (McClure, 1971). The same was true of ninth grade females in Blount County (Jeter, 1971). This finding is also supported by Joanna Bailey's (1980) study.



### **Sibling(s)**

Sibling involvement has frequently been found to be an indicator of 4-H participation. One study found that sibling involvement was a key factor in maintaining the participant's enrollment (Jenson, et al., 1982). This study is supported by Kaye Smith's (1982) findings.

However, sibling involvement in 4-H was not found to be a significant factor in 4-H enrollment by Wedgeworth (1980). Sibling involvement was also found not to be a significant factor in the level of participation in 4-H by a 4-H member (Nichols, 1972).

### ***Peers of 4-H Members***

It seems likely youth will encourage other youth to belong to the same groups. This is part of the socialization process for the adolescent. At this time, youth are highly influenced by their peer groups (Dworetzky, 1988). It was found in a series of focus groups "young people were more likely to join a group if their friends were in it or were going to participate" (Marketing Resources, Inc., 1990, p. 6). However, one study showed "34% of the respondents had no close friends in 4-H" (Jenson, et al., 1982, p. 14).

The number of friends a participant has in a 4-H group is variable, however. Culbert (1983) found the mean number of friends a past participant had in 4-H was 4.58 (p. 80). Yet, these participants still chose to leave 4-H. It should be noted, however, it was not stated whether or not the participant's peers chose to leave

4-H as well. The peers may have had an influence on the member's decision to leave.

### ***Competitive 4-H Incentives***

Perhaps the incentive system offered in 4-H is such that it encourages, or discourages certain kinds of youth to enroll in 4-H. A major finding of Sheila Forbe's study (1992) was those 4-H members who were "highly successful and had long tenure in 4-H were highly extrinsically oriented" (p. 1). Therefore, those who are not motivated by competition are not likely to re-enroll, or are consequently selected out of, the 4-H Club.

In addition, a study conducted on ninth and tenth grade boys in Greene County, Tennessee found 4-H membership is significantly related to a desire for competition (McClure, 1971). Additionally, Norland and Bennett (1993) concluded a "moderate positive relationship was found between satisfaction and positive experiences with competition" (p. 2).

Alternatively, a similar study conducted on girls in Blount County found competition was "significantly related to 4-H status implying that more activities without competition should be implemented" (Jeter, 1971, p. 81).

### **Characteristics of Perceptions of Nonmembers**

One study conducted in Tennessee investigated the reasons for nonparticipation in 4-H. This quantitative study was conducted on seventh grade students in six counties classified as either urban, suburban, and rural in Tennessee (Essington, 1995). The

major findings of this study were that 4-H "did not meet their interests, followed by they don't have time, other reasons they are not a member; and they did not know enough about 4-H" (Essington, 1995, p. 63). The finding that nonmembers were not well informed about 4-H was supported by Tobey's (1996) focus group study.

### **Focus Groups**

Most of the studies mentioned have been quantitative in nature. Quantitative studies give breadth of information as opposed to the depth of information offered by qualitative studies (Borg & Gall, 1989; Krueger, 1994). Numerous quantitative studies have been conducted on youth participation in 4-H. Those studies have allowed those concerned to generalize youth's attitudes about the 4-H program. Recently however, qualitative methods, such as focus groups have been utilized to gather in depth information about youth's perceptions of the 4-H program.

One of these focus group studies was commissioned by the National 4-H Council and included three different groups of individuals: youth, adult volunteers, and youth and adult volunteers. This study inquired about the groups' satisfaction with 4-H, motivation for leaving 4-H, and suggestions for improving the programming of 4-H and retention of 4-H members (Marketing Resources Inc., 1990). A similar study was initiated by the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service 4-H Teen Priority Program in 1996 and was "specifically geared to discovering the perspectives of participating and nonparticipating teenagers" (Tobey, 1996, p. 1).

A focus group study was also used to gain a better understanding of volunteer/adult teen relations in 4-H (Wingertter, Kleon, & King, 1995). Another study was used to "check youth perceptions of agriculture" (Holz-Claus & Jost, 1995, p. 11). Focus group inquiries allow the moderator to probe the group for in-depth information on the subject in question.

### *Historical Overview of the Focus Group Methodology*

The origin of focus groups lies within the social sciences (Morgan, 1988). Robert Merton and his colleagues first used focus groups during WWII to explore the effect wartime propaganda had on citizens (Morgan, 1988). However, their presence within the social sciences all but disappeared soon after Merton's work. When Merton and his colleagues published another study, *The Student Physician*, the results were quantitative analyses from surveys and excerpts from the students' diaries (Morgan, 1988). The study failed to reveal focus groups had also been used. Eventually, focus groups as a means of qualitative inquiry nearly disappeared from social science literature with the exception of social psychology (Morgan, 1988). However, even this discipline utilized personal observations and interviews more frequently than focus groups (Morgan, 1988).

Focus groups are more widely known for their use in market research where marketing firms use them frequently to discover consumer perceptions, buying habits and suggestions (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Greenbaum, 1993). Paul Lazarsfeld, a social scientist involved in both marketing and academia, was widely known for his

quantitative work as well as qualitative, a balance which he himself deemed important (Morgan, 1988). Today, focus groups are again being used more frequently. Perhaps it is the use of focused interviews, one-on-one inquiries, which have facilitated their reappearance.

Information seekers began to refute quantitative studies because of their lack of sentimentality even though they supplied vast, accurate amounts of information in a timely manner. In the book, *The Focused Interview*, Albert Gollin states "the human element that helps one translate social facts into policy recommendations often appears to be missing in massive quantitative portraits and analyses, and one result has been that qualitative research, most notably in the form of focus groups, has assured greater prominence in many fields of application" (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990, p. xi).

### ***Rationale For Using Focus Groups***

In order to understand the perceptions that Tennessee youth have about 4-H, the use of focus groups is a logical means of inquiry. Decision makers involved in 4-H wish to know why 4-H experiences a decline in enrollment of youth at the senior level. Krueger (1994) gives several justifications for conducting focus group research. There are three conditions offered that apply to the situation in Tennessee and justify using the focus group method.

1. The purpose is to uncover factors relating to complex behavior or motivation. Focus groups can provide insight into complicated topics

where opinions or attitudes are conditional or where the area of concern relates to multifaceted behavior or motivation.

2. The researcher desires ideas to emerge from the group. Focus groups possess the capacity to become more than the sum of their participants, to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone cannot achieve.
3. The clients or intended audience place high value on capturing the open ended comments of the target audience (Krueger, 1994, p. 45).

Certainly these reasons apply to the situation as it presents itself in Tennessee. The focus groups in this study attempted to reveal motivation criteria, ideas, and perceptions that seventh grade nonenrollees had about the 4-H Club in their area.

### *The Nature of Focus Groups*

According to Krueger, there are several characteristics of focus groups which follow.

1. Focus groups are a group of six to twelve participants who are selected because they have certain common characteristics making it a relatively homogeneous assembly.
2. The purpose of a focus group is to gather perceptions in a directed dialogue, not to reach a consensus.
3. Focus groups provide qualitative data.
4. The focus group is directed by a moderator who guides the groups' discussion and assistant moderator who operates a tape recorder and ensures the groups comfort .

5. Focus groups can be used alone or with other methods of inquiry and can be formative or summative (Krueger, 1994).

Focus groups are also unique in their qualifications. They have very high face validity because their users usually trust the participants responses. Also, they have high convergent validity because their results can be verified by future actions (Krueger, 1994). Focus groups, however, have limited generalizability. The results can only be generalized to the those who are comparable with the participants in the focus groups and if the conditions lend themselves to focus group inquiry (Krueger, 1994). In this study, the results were generalizable to suburban Tennessee seventh graders.

There are several advantages and some disadvantages to using focus groups. The advantages are the cost of conducting these groups is relatively low, the design allows the moderator to explore participants' responses, the results are obtained relatively fast, and the group interactions provide unique data (Krueger, 1994). Some of the disadvantages of using focus groups are that the moderator has less control than he or she would in an individual interview and also the results are more difficult to interpret due to the fact that responses may be taken out of context or the participants may change their minds (Krueger, 1994).

### *Some Considerations When Conducting Focus Groups With Youth*

Krueger (1994, p. 213) offers several points that must be considered when conducting focus groups with youth. They are as follows.

1. The group should be conducted away from an institution where rules and regulations are integral to the institution such as churches and schools.
2. The time needs to be limited to less than an hour since youth may become bored after longer periods of time.
3. Dichotomous questions should be avoided since youth tend not to elaborate.
4. Questions should be avoided that may intimidate the youth's independence.
5. The youth should be relatively the same age and ideally in the same grade and the same gender.
6. Efforts should be made to avoid pre-established groups so that the effects of peer influence will be lessened.
7. An ice breaker should be performed at the beginning of the group so that the youth will feel relaxed and free to share their feelings.
8. Adult permission is necessary especially since the responses are to be recorded.
9. The moderator should have a rapport with adolescent youth so that they will feel free to express their feelings, especially if they are negative (Krueger, 1994, p. 213).



## Summary

4-H began as an agricultural and home economics based program in the early 1900's. Today, 4-H club work has evolved to also include other areas such as citizenship and leadership. By doing so, 4-H has evolved to meet the needs of the youth it serves.

The number of adolescent youth enrolling in 4-H is decreasing even though the number of junior enrollees is increasing. This situation is true for many other youth organizations as well. The majority of 4-H participants were ten years of age in 1995 (TAES, SP 249, 1995). Also, enrollment declines during the transition from sixth to seventh grade suggesting that older youth do not wish to participate in 4-H for various reasons.

A growth of communities surrounding urban borders has been seen since WWII (Charles, 1993). The population within this intermediate area is also increasing. In Tennessee, similar areas, known as Metropolitan Statistical Areas, are also increasing in number (Vickers & Kirby, 1991). Most of the enrolled 4-Hers live in non-farm rural areas. Further, the number of urban 4-Hers is greater than the number of suburban 4-Hers. This poses a special task for 4-H membership. Panshin (1992) argues for a balance between rural and urban outreach made by Extension. It is obvious there is also a need for suburban outreach as well.

4-H projects have traditionally been perceived as agricultural pertaining to livestock production or home economics and dealing with cooking and sewing.

However, many participants in 1994 were enrolled in Arts and Crafts (TAES, SP 249, 1995).

There are "various reasons" youth do not wish to participate in 4-H. Many studies, some of which offer conflicting suggestions, have proposed several conclusions as to why youth choose not to enroll, or re-enroll, in 4-H. A summary of the conclusion of the majority of the findings is as follows.

Youth chose to drop out of 4-H because of several reasons.

1. They do not like to keeping records.
2. Programming does not meet the needs of older youth.
3. They have parents who do not participate in groups.
4. They perceive that their parents do not support them.
5. They have parents who are not married which cause them to perceive a lack of parents' physical and emotional support.
6. Their friends are not in 4-H.
7. They do not like contests.

Alternatively, those adolescents who did choose to stay in 4-H had several characteristics in common. The following is a list of frequently cited attributes found in those who remained in 4-H.

1. They do not like to keep records.
2. They are involved in other non-4-H activities.
3. They have parent(s) involved in a group.
4. They feel like their parent(s) support them in their 4-H endeavors.

5. They have friends in 4-H.
6. Their brother and/or sister was/is in 4-H.
7. They are motivated by competition.

Many antithetical studies exist dealing with retention of 4-H members. Each study offers different suggestions as to why some members choose not to participate in 4-H. All of the findings offer a different perspective. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many of the studies were conducted in different areas of the country allowing demographic differences and values among youth in that area to surface. These studies should be dealt with on an individual basis and not necessarily whether or not the studies' conclusions are in agreement with another.

While many quantitative studies have been conducted concerning youth perceptions of 4-H, only a few studies have used a qualitative approach to explore these perceptions. It is for this reason that the focus group methodology is highly appropriate for inquiry into this issue. Krueger (1994) also suggests that focus group studies can complement quantitative findings such as those produced by Essington (1995) regarding nonmember participation in 4-H.

It has been shown that the population of suburban youth is increasing. It has also been shown that decline in enrollment occurs at the seventh grade level. Therefore, the youth that "take part" in 4-H could potentially increase if it is found that there are ways to increase the youth participation of this population.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

#### The Sample

A type of cluster sample was used from nine counties in Tennessee. The participants chosen for this study consisted of Tennessee seventh grade students who never actively participated in 4-H and who lived in a Metropolitan Statistical Area other wise known as a suburb.

#### *Selection of Subjects*

A middle/junior high school was chosen from an MSA in which a 4-H Club met. The Extension agent in charge of junior high 4-H clubs was then contacted and asked to identify eligible participants. In most counties, the agent contacted a school official with whom the researcher collaborated to identify participants. Eligibility was based upon whether or not the students felt like they were active members in 4-H. If they ever participated in 4-H, it was during their 4th, 5th or 6th grade year and they enrolled because the club met during class but did not feel like they actively participated. They were furnished with a letter explaining the purpose of the focus group, details including time and place of the meeting, and a parental consent form.

Further, a follow up phone call was made the day before the focus group was to meet in most cases.

### *Selection of Area*

A suburb, for the purpose of this study, designated an area, whether it was classified as rural or urban in the census, which surrounded a large metropolitan area. According to the *Tennessee Statistical Abstract* (Vickers & Kirby, 1991), examples of entire counties in Tennessee in such a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) were: Knox, Blount, Sevier, Jefferson, Grainger, Union, Anderson, Sullivan, Carter, Washington, Hawkins, Hamilton, Marion, Sequatchie, Rutherford, Wilson, Sumner, Cheatham, Williamson, Jackson, Montgomery, Davidson, Robertson, Madison, Shelby, and Tipton. In order to perform a statewide study, focus groups were conducted in East, Middle and West Tennessee, three in each region for a total of twelve focus groups (one group in each region was segregated by gender). Krueger (1994) recommended that focus groups for youth be segregated by gender due to differences in social conduct between girls and boys this age. Therefore, three representative counties were chosen from each of the three Tennessee regions using stratified random selection in which segregated focus groups would take place. It was not feasible to segregate all groups.

## **The Focus Group Design**

The focus group design allowed the moderator to ask questions of a homogenous group of about six to twelve participants and gather their responses (Krueger, 1994). The responses obtained were then transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis as recommended by Krueger (1994).

### ***Justification of the Focus Group Design***

As seen in the literature review, the focus group methodology lends itself to the kinds of information stakeholders were seeking. This study attempted to derive the motivation behind the behavior of seventh grade suburban students in Tennessee to not participate in 4-H where it was available. In addition, this study attempted to obtain suggestions as to how 4-H might accommodate some of the students applicable to this sample.

According to Krueger (1994), there were several unique advantages to using the focus group design. They are as follows.

1. The responses are obtained immediately.
2. The setting allows the moderator to set the pace of the discussion.
3. The focus group allows group dynamics to influence responses differently than a one-on-one interview. This is not the same as "reaching consensus" or "brainstorming" (p. 19).

4. Focus groups can reveal "shifts in opinion" and take note of this phenomenon (p. 150).
5. Focus groups can also reveal "intensity of comments" and take into consideration "specificity of the comments" which may reveal emotion or motivation about the subject (pp. 150-151).

These were several of the advantages of using focus groups. The design was quite suitable in the context of the problem as stated.

### **Reliability and Validity of Focus Groups**

Focus groups have high convergent and face validity (Krueger, 1994). They have high face validity based upon the nature of responses they produce. For example, a stakeholder could easily view the raw data from a focus group study and believe the results because they are responses from human beings with thoughts and actions based on emotional and logical behavior.

Focus groups have high convergent validity because stakeholders can see the results of the studies are confirmed after a period of time (Krueger, 1994). Borg and Gall (1989) refer to this type of validity as "predictive validity" (p. 252). For example, a focus group finding is respondents don't attend a group because they don't like the meeting times. If the meeting times are changed and the groups enrollment increases, the stakeholders see that the results were true when they were reported.

Focus groups, however, due to their nature, possess very little reliability. Borg and Gall (1989) define reliability as "the level of internal consistency or stability of the

measuring device over time" (p. 257). Obviously, focus groups will never produce the same results over time. This is simply due to the lack of consistency with human beings themselves. In other words, societies, communities, families, and individuals are dynamic as they change over time and space.

Reliability, however, is not a major consideration in qualitative studies such as focus groups. The main concern of a qualitative study is to observe the phenomena that occurs in a situation. From these observations, one can gain insights into highly complex behaviors and emotions. Then, these observations, according to Krueger (1994) can be generalized to some extent to groups similar to the sample used in the focus groups.

### **Pilot Testing**

This study was pilot tested with a group consisting of both males and females in Knox County, a county within a MSA. There were two major changes made in the questioning route as a result of this test. First of all, the question, "how did you hear about these groups and what made you decide to join them?" was added since this question seemed to naturally follow question one. Also, on the list of projects handed out, the actual names of the projects were used since there seemed to be some confusion when just "automotive" was listed for example. Therefore, the list included the actual names to simulate the experience a student would encounter when filling out an enrollment card.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The questions used in the questioning route are directly related to the objectives of the study. The findings of the study are organized around each question in the questioning route except number 14 which summarized the responses and allowed participants to amend their responses if they wished.

The first two questions were considered introductory questions and were used to get participants and moderators familiar with each other as well as gather background information (Krueger, 1994).

#### Questions

##### *Question 1*

**Let's begin by having each of you tell us your name and what kinds of groups you are involved in.**

Question 1 of the focus group questioning route attempted to serve two purposes. First, this question was to serve as an icebreaker. More importantly, however, the question intended to describe the activities of the participants.

A prominent theme that emerged from each focus group session regarding the characteristics of the participants was that generally, each member's involvement in activities closely resembled those of their peers within each group. For example,

involvement in organized sports clubs emerged as a major theme across several groups. Here participants mentioned activities ranging from “**football**” to “**Pony Club**” to “**dance**” (which for the purposes of this study was included in the organized sports realm). Involvement in religious clubs and activities also emerged as a theme across groups in some counties. Participation in “**Church Stars**”, “**church sports teams**” and “**Bible clubs**” were typical responses in these groups. To a lesser extent, noninvolvement in any club or activity began to emerge as a pattern in a few of the groups. Statements such as:

- I like to sit in my room all day and talk on the phone.**
- I used to be involved in [an activity] but not any more.**
- None.**

were some of the responses mentioned in these groups.

Generally, the participants had the same responses as others in their group. All male groups tended to be heavily involved in organized sports activities. Female groups' activities ranged from religious clubs to school sponsored clubs to no involvement. Nonsegregated groups activities' ranged from active group involvement to no involvement. For the most part, participants' involvement in the same types of activities within a single group was a common pattern that emerged across the majority of the groups.

## *Question 2*

**How did you hear about these groups and what made you decide to join them?**

Question 2 of the questioning route was divided into two parts. Part I attempted to reveal the students initial contact with the group or club. Part II was intended to discover the students' motivation for participating in that particular group or club.

In Part I, friends was the strongest response. Participants readily mentioned friends as a way of hearing about new groups, clubs, or activities without any hesitation.

Some of the responses included:

- One of my friends took me to church one night and I got interested and started going.**
- While we were in the sixth grade, my friends told me about STARS and we were against drugs and I thought it would be fun.**

To a lesser extent, group leader visits began to emerge as a pattern as some types of initial contact with a club or group. Here students stated that:

- She just handed out applications in class [for Just Say No].**
- The teacher sent letters to people in church [Priscilla Group].**

as ways of disseminating information to potential members.

There were no substantive differences in responses between groups which were segregated by gender and those which were not. For the most part, all groups felt that they heard about new clubs or activities mostly through their friends of peers and to a lesser extent, through group leaders.

Part II of the question attempted to reveal the motivation behind the students' participation in groups or clubs. While friends played a significant part in the students' initial decision to consider joining a group, they were not the determining factor as to whether or not a person would stay active in a group. In fact, a major theme across all groups was that in order for a student to be an active member of a group, the group or activity must have a purpose in which the member was interested.

Responses such as:

- **I like sports and like to be active.**
- **I wanted to help people.**
- **I was against drugs.**

were typical statements in this category.

A second theme that emerged was that in order for the student to want to participate in a group, the activities had to be perceived to be fun. Some statements such as:

- **I joined basketball because it's fun.**
- **I like to have fun and learn how to play better.**
- **I thought STARS would be fun.**

were made about sports activities and clubs.

There was no substantive difference in the responses of groups segregated by gender to Part II. The males and females tended to feel that the club had to have a purpose the member was interested in as well as be fun as a basis for participation.

However, while the groups that were mixed in gender felt that the club had to be fun, the purpose was a slightly more significant factor when considering to join a club.

The next two questions were intended to begin to focus the participants' attention on 4-H and are called transition questions (Krueger, 1994).

### *Question 3*

**A number of groups and activities have been mentioned. Think about a group offered in your school called 4-H. What do you know about this group?**

The purpose of this question was to reveal the general knowledge these students, who did not consider themselves to be active participants in 4-H, had about 4-H. It was established that many but not all participants had been involved in 4-H at some point in time but did not feel like they actively participated.

Mostly, students would recite what they knew about projects associated with learning. Typical responses related to learning included:

- **You learn how to do different things.**
- **We learned how to make aprons and stuff like that.**
- **Know more about different things and get information.**

Activity was also a major attribute of projects. Responses such as:

- **We did a lot of activities and played games.**
- **You pick activities and do it.**
- **Projects and making stuff.**

were characteristic across all of the groups.

Another primary theme associated with knowledge of 4-H was the existence of contests and rewards. Many participants recited some memory of a contest that they had been exposed to in the past.

Accounts such as:

- They had baking contests, arts and crafts and different contests.**
- Can judge stuff at the fair.**
- Contests and then go to city contests.**

were mentioned. Rewards of contests such as ribbons and winning prizes were also cited.

A secondary theme also emerged quite strongly within most but not across all groups. These groups felt that 4-H had an agriculturally oriented image. Statements such as:

- It teaches about ag things.**
- It's learning about agriculture.**
- They show cows, sheep and stuff.**

were made concerning 4-H's image.

Diverse responses were recorded across all groups regardless of gender. It seemed that the responses were heavily group dependent. However, there was a very slight tendency for exclusively female groups to mention special events such as 4-H camp more so than projects or contests which is what emerged as a theme among most male and mixed groups.

#### *Question 4*

##### **What kinds of activities do you think are offered in 4-H?**

Question 4 of the questioning route was intended to determine how much the students knew about the current activities of 4-H.

When students were asked about the types of activities currently offered in 4-H, eco-projects emerged as a theme. The term, eco-project, was used to describe environmentally related projects for the purposes of this study. Responses such as:

- Trash pickup.**
- Cleaning up parks.**
- Planting trees.**

were typical in this category.

There were no substantive differences in responses to this question of groups segregated by gender.

The following nine questions are termed key questions (Krueger, 1994). The key questions were intended to reveal answers to principal questions of the study.

#### *Question 5*

##### **What is your perception - or opinion - of 4-H?**

The purpose of this question was to disclose the perceptions of 4-H held by the students participating in the focus groups.

Generally, participants were divided on this question. Approximately 50% of the participants perceived 4-H as being fun while the rest perceived it as being boring. Those participants who perceived 4-H as being fun stating that:

- It's fun.
- You do a lot of fun things.
- It sounds fun but I don't know what 4-H stands for.

Others perceived 4-H as boring commenting that:

- I think it's pretty boring, it should have been more hands on.
- My teachers were nice but we didn't do much.
- It's kind of boring at times...too much talking.

A secondary theme that emerged was that some of the group members who had been in 4-H before perceived the agent as being too strict. Statements such as:

- They were too serious.
- Really strict teachers jumping down our throats.
- I liked the projects but sometimes I felt like I was forced to do projects.

were statements typical in this category in one region within the state.

There were slight differences in responses to this questions by exclusively male and female groups. Females tended to have a somewhat positive perception of 4-H in that it provides educational opportunities and is sometimes fun. Males tended to feel 4-H was boring.



### *Question 6*

**What about other kids in the school, what do you think their perception of 4-H is?**

Question 6 was asked to encourage participants to discuss the other students' perceptions of 4-H in their school. By asking what other kids think, feeling responsible for certain perceptions is transferred to "other kids" which was intended to elicit more candid perceptions.

A major theme of this question was most participants felt that "other kids" perceive 4-H to be boring. Many of the participants felt most kids believe that the activities of 4-H were uninteresting and not worth the effort. It was expressed 4-H's activities were not perceived to be engaging. Furthermore, it's structure was felt to be rigid so that if they did not like 4-H activities, they should not participate because they weren't going to get to do the things they were interested in. In other words, they felt like they had no ownership in the activities of 4-H. The following statements were typical in this category:

- **You really don't have nothing to do if you don't like it. They don't give you [anything] you want to do.**
- **I don't think other people like it either. They just talk to you and you never get to do anything.**
- **They don't like it. My friends said it was boring.**

Also, many of the participants felt 4-H was "nerdy" and not "cool" or popular. Additionally, they felt only a certain type of student would like 4-H because it provided opportunities to serve as officers as well as do projects that were considered to be extra

homework and these types of activities were not what the majority of the students were interested in. Therefore, 4-H was not perceived to be popular by mainstream students. Statements such as the following were typical in this category:

- Some kids think it's dorky.
- Peer pressure keeps people from joining it.
- They think it's for smart people. They think it's like doing a science project and they don't even like doing their homework.

Since they perceive the projects as being like their other school work they stated they would rather be involved with other activities. They did, however, reiterate that those people who would like it most likely made good grades and were high achievers.

There were no differences in responses of those groups segregated by gender.

### *Question 7*

**What reasons can you think of why some people don't join 4-H?**

Question 7 asked participants about their opinions of reasons why enrollment is low in 4-H. Again, the question was asked about "other people" in hopes that participants would be more open with their responses.

Mostly it was felt people did not join 4-H because of peer pressure. It was perceived by this age group that friends were the most influential factor in their environments. And since it was perceived generally 4-H was "boring" and "not cool," the majority of students did not join it. Several examples of peer pressure were cited such as the following:

- **Most of the time people don't join it because they go with the people who don't do it so they won't get made fun of.**
- **Some people don't join it because their friends don't and even if they wanted to they would think it's not cool.**
- **If there are people that they know, they might join.**

Another major theme that emerged was that participants again did not like the activities and perhaps felt that 4-H was boring and this was a reason for students not joining the club. Statements such as:

- **Not many activities.**
- **Not enough interesting stuff.**
- **The first couple of times they come it may be alright but after a while it may get boring, I mean you're sitting there and they'll be talking and somehow it gets off the subject and they'll be talking to you. It's just like you're a robot.**

Additionally, some did not like the activities because they perceived them to be agriculturally related. Furthermore, they felt they were unable to accommodate agriculturally related projects.

Statements such as the following typify this theme:

- **How to milk goats and raise chickens is boring.**
- **More city stuff with new titles.**
- **If you live in a house in a cove, you can't raise animals.**

Again, a secondary theme was they did not have enough time and would rather participate in other activities. They felt like their time would be better spent with friends and other activities than with 4-H which many did not perceive to be fun.

There was a slight difference between the responses of males and females. Males tended to be more influenced by peer pressure than were females. Males stated that people might not join because they would be **"afraid they would not be elected"** or **"people might make fun of them."** Females gave such reasons as **"the projects take up too much of their precious time"** and **"If you don't get done with your book, you can't go to the meeting."**

### *Question 8*

**Who are the groups or people that you think influence people participating in 4-H?**

This question was asked to determine whether or not a particular person or group influences participation in 4-H.

Again, friends was the most common response to this question. Students thought friends were the most influential in getting them to come to a group or activity initially. Furthermore, they stated people want their friends to be in the group with them.

Statements such as:

- If your friends join, then you will probably join.**
- You don't want to go nowhere you don't know nobody.**

- **Certain people might go and tell their friends they don't want to go anymore and their friends might not want to go anymore either.**

To a lesser extent, teachers were mentioned as an influence on participation in 4-H. While friends' influences were based upon a relatively mutual relationship, teachers' influences were portrayed as more directive. They generally felt that teachers were telling them to participate in 4-H because they thought it would be "good for them." Comments such as "**they say go do this, it's fun,**" or "**do it or go to study hall**" were said to be made by teachers.

Lastly, they believed somewhat that family members had a minor influence on them. "**Relatives**", "**cousins**", "**siblings**", and "**grandparents**" were said to influence them to join 4-H if they had been in the club at one time. "**Parents**" were also said to be an influence if they "**found out**" about the opportunity to participate in 4-H.

There were no substantive differences between responses to this question by groups segregated by gender .

### *Question 9*

**Here is a list of people or groups that may or may not influence people participating in 4-H, Some of the things you have mentioned may or may not be on this list. Which ones do you think DO NOT belong on this list and why?**

*Parents, Teachers, Principals, Coaches, Friends, Other Youth Groups (sports teams, band, church groups, etc.)*

The students were handed the list in order to stimulate discussion and build upon the responses in Question 8. The students were asked which items did not belong on the list in order to identify those groups they thought had little or no influence on participation in 4-H. This question was designed to enable the students to answer without threatening their maturity as research has shown that they do not want to admit that adults influence their decisions at this point in their development.

One particular item that was discussed across almost all groups was principals. Students in these groups did not feel that principals would encourage or discourage them from joining 4-H. They did not feel that principals had a lack of support for 4-H, but they were simply unaware of extra-curricular activities. Comments such as:

- **Principals are not around during 4-H.**
- **Principals are not interested.**
- **Principals have their own problems and they have to look out for other stuff.**

were typical in this category and it was evident that the students felt that principals had little or no influence in students joining 4-H.

Parents were also mentioned as having little influence on participation in 4-H. However, this item was discussed as though they actually tried to encourage their children to participate in clubs but that the students would try to resist their influence. Statements such as:

- Parents because most don't listen to their parents.
- Parents because you don't do stuff they want you to do.
- Parents because they boss you around.

were typical in this category.

The next most frequently mentioned item was teachers. The students felt that teachers would not share the same interests as students. One person stated that **"teachers are in a different generation"** as a reason for little or no influence on their part. However, teachers were also said to limit participation because they were perceived to be primarily concerned with their own lesson plans since they **"might give homework on 4-H night."**

Lastly, coaches were not perceived to be an influence by students. This theme emerged but not as strongly as the first three. Many participants felt that coaches would only be concerned about sports related activities. Statements such as **"coaches don't tell you or talk to you about it"** were standard in this category.

Additionally, the students were probed on who they felt was the most influential and most of them responded with friends. Again, at this stage of development, peers begin to be a major focus of the participant's life and it is for this reason they readily admit peers are able to influence their actions.

There was a difference in the responses of groups segregated by gender. Females tended to perceive parents, teachers, and band as having little or no influence on participation in 4-H. Males strongly perceived teachers as having little or no

influence on participation and principals as well but not as strong. However, since most of the responses in the parents and teachers categories suggest that some influence actually does exist, perhaps parents and teachers actually do have some influence on females and a stronger influence on male participation respectively. Even so, peer pressure was the strongest theme to emerge in all groups.

### ***Question 10***

**You mentioned [     ]. How do you think that these people or groups influence participation?**

While Questions 8 & 9 were used to identify sources of influences, Question 10 was used to identify the types of influences that certain groups or people have on participation in 4-H as perceived by the focus group participants. Additionally, it was utilized to test the consistency of the responses in question 9.

As was seen in Question 9, parents were identified as having some reverse influence on participation in 4-H. Parents were thought to influence their children initially but they were not seen as a means to consistent participation in 4-H.

Statements such as:

- Parents want us to go.**
- Parents get the wrong idea.**
- Parents don't know anything about it.**



suggest that parents do encourage the students to participate if they know about the 4-H meetings. However, it was implied that the students expected their parents' guidance, yet wanted to rebel against it.

Additionally, as mentioned in Questions 8 and 9, teachers were thought to influence students both negatively and positively. Students perceived teachers as being supportive of 4-H in that it provides an outlet for students who could benefit from group involvement. However, they also felt that teachers did not want 4-H to interfere with the students' classroom assignments. Comments such as:

- Tell you to go to 4-H if you talk a lot.
- If you are interested in a subject the teacher might encourage you.
- Teacher might not want you to do what the 4-H agent tells you.

were typical in this category.

Lastly, it was mentioned in Question 9 that most participants felt that friends were an influence. At this age, most students are very aware of what their influential peers and friends are involved in and they desire to do the same types of activities. Friends can inform, encourage, and discourage their peers about participation in groups.

Participants cited:

- They might talk you into it.
- It's more fun with friends.
- If your friends like it and think you're cool, you will do it.

as examples of peer influence.

There were differences in the responses of males and females. Males generally mentioned teachers and principals as an influence. Principals were not seen as an influence in Question 9. However, they felt principals influenced 4-H activities in that they allow access to the school. Females tended to agree with the mixed groups by strongly reporting peers as an influence and parents secondarily.

### ***Question 11***

**Here is a list of some of the activities that 4-H does. Do you think that these projects would be fun to do?**

#### ***List:***

***Welcome to the World of Autos, Sharing the Roads, Learning About Leadership, My Clubs and Groups, Animal Projects (Beef, Dairy, Goat, Dog, Rabbit, Poultry, Sheep, and others), Soil, Electricity Project Guide - III, How To Identify Insects, Forest Tree Planting, Eating To Stay Healthy, Clothing - III, Shape of Things (Arts and Crafts), The Wise Know the Whys (Drugs, etc.)***

#### ***Other Activities:***

***4-H Camp (Academic Conference, Electric Camp, Summer Camp)***

***Contests (Clothing, Forestry, Interior Design, Land judging, Wildlife)***

During initial contact with 4-H, students are asked to fill out a card and are told about some of the projects and activities of 4-H. This question was used in order to determine the types of activities which interest students during initial contact. The

category of projects was arbitrarily chosen and the actual names of the projects were used.

### **Projects**

A major theme to emerge was most of the participants perceived animal projects to be fun. "**Animal projects**" was stated consistently and frequently across all groups. The majority of the participants did not specify which animal but most felt all animal projects would be fun. Horses were also mentioned which were not on the list.

Additionally, another major theme to emerge was the majority of participants also perceived "**Sharing the Roads**" to be a fun project. Some felt the bicycle project would entail bike riding and anticipated a bike riding trip as part of the project.

Another theme to emerge was generally, students did not perceive the "**Soil**" project to be fun. Comments such as:

- Soil is boring.**
- Soil is not fun.**
- What's soil? It doesn't sound fun.**

were typical in this category.

### **Camp**

Generally, everyone liked the prospect of summer camp. Participants perceived it to be fun as well as hearing positive things about it from their peers.

Statements such as:

- I heard that it was fun. You can do whatever.**

- 4-H camp sounds fun.**

were typical in this category. There was concern among a few groups, however, that 4-H camp would be too expensive and that parents would not pay for it. There was some suggestion of fund raising if the students really wanted to go to camp.

### Contests

Additionally, participants generally held positive perceptions of contests. Some felt that contests might be fun citing:

- Land judging and wildlife contests might be O.K.**

- Contests might be fun.**

- [Like] the challenge of contests.**

Most participants were interested in the Wildlife judging contests. Also, some participants expressed they preferred to compete in groups.

There was a small difference in the responses between male and female groups. Females tended to perceive clothing projects as fun while males did not. The clothing project was explained as a project that examines different types of fabrics, colors, and clothing as well as the possibility of a fashion show at the end of the year. Males tended to agree with the nonsegregated groups and perceived "**Sharing the Roads**" and "**Summer Camp**" to be fun.

### *Question 12*

#### **What other kinds of activities do you think should be offered in 4-H?**

This question was asked in order to gain insight on the participants' perceptions of what types of activities should be offered in 4-H.

The most frequent response across all mixed groups was participants would like to see more projects related to natural resources.

Activities such as:

- **Camping and Fishing.**
- **Hiking.**
- **Hunting/Shooting.**
- **Kayak or river rafting.**

were suggested. These responses indicated the students want learning experiences outdoors instead of the traditional classroom experience. Additionally, these students implied they would rather have hands-on learning experiences to satisfy their needs.

For example, a hunter safety project was mentioned which indicated a need for information about this subject.

Participants in mixed groups also wanted to see more animal projects as they related to exotic animals.

Suggestions such as:

- **Reptile projects.**
- **Endangered Species Projects.**
- **Raising Orphaned Animals.**

were mentioned in this category. Generally, animal projects which could be accommodated in suburban areas were mentioned. Animals such as reptiles and kittens were among those specifically stated. As for endangered species projects, it was indicated students would like to learn more about them and subjects related to them.

A need for more travel activities was also expressed by participants in both mixed and female groups. Students felt the subject could be better understood if there was an opportunity to take a field trip to supplement a project. For example:

- **A trip to a drug rehabilitation center for The Wise Know the Whys project.**
- **A trip to the Corvette Museum for Welcome to the World of Autos.**
- **A field trip that can help someone.**

were some suggestions offered by the students. They felt first-hand experience was a good way to learn and also have fun at the same time.

The males segregated by gender had slightly different emphasis in their responses than those comprised of mixed gender and females. Males felt like more sports activities should be offered in 4-H.

They mentioned:

- **Learn about sports.**
- **Sports Camps.**
- **Bicycle Rodeo.**

as important activities which should be addressed in 4-H. As was mentioned previously, many of the students had participated in 4-H in elementary school which is probably why "**Bicycle Rodeo**" appeared.

### *Question 13*

**What kinds of activities do you think would encourage participation in 4-H?**

This question was asked in order to gather ideas about where 4-H should concentrate targeted activities in order to improve enrollment among a similar audience. Nonsegregated groups consistently stated "advertisement" would encourage participation. Responses such as:

- Tell what might be exciting about 4-H.**
- Commercials of people having fun.**
- Get a famous person (sports) to encourage participation.**

were typical. Additionally, the students strongly conveyed the need for other students to endorse 4-H in the advertisements. Comments such as:

- Let the students make the posters.**
- Let the kids do the announcement over the P.A.**
- Have several kids near the poster display.**

indicated most students would feel more comfortable with 4-H advertisements if they were endorsed by their peers. They believe proof from the other students that 4-H is genuinely fun is essential and 4-H members should have ownership of advertisement.

Another discussion which emerged across segregated and nonsegregated groups was the feasibility of holding 4-H meetings after school. The majority of the participants stated that 4-H should be held during school stating:

- **More would come during school.**
- **Kids have things to do after school like on Fridays you might want to be with your friends or go to the mall and you might have to clean up before you go.**
- **Too much to handle after school.**

However, there was another reason for having the club during school. Some students cited reasons such as "[They go in order to] get out of class." Other students felt 4-H should be engaging enough to captivate an after-school audience. Comments such as:

- **It should be after school, not during school. If it is fun, we would stay after school. Let kids vote on what they want to do.**
- **If it's interesting we would [stay after school].**
- **[You] won't stay if it is not interesting. It would be a waste of my time if I didn't want to do it.**

were typical among these responses.

Generally, at least one theme from segregated groups matched those in mixed groups. In this question, both male and female groups felt field trips and more "hands on" type activities would encourage participation in 4-H. These groups felt the opportunity of field trips would encourage participation in 4-H.



Suggestions such as:

- **Maybe go on field trips if you do the projects.**
- **Nature walk.**
- **There is too much work instead of activities. It should be fun.**

were given by the students. Generally, it was felt the field trips would serve as a reward for completing the projects or as a hands-on component of the projects. What these students were looking for was an opportunity to learn that was different from the traditional classroom setting.

### *Question 15*

**The goal is to find ways of increasing participation in 4-H. What advice do you have for us?**

Question 15 was used to supplement Question 13. However, this question had a broader scope and was intended to focus the students on the main points of increasing participation among audiences of this type. (As was seen in the questioning route in Appendix D, Question 14 was a question to allow participants to revise their responses. Any response given to this question was placed with the appropriate question).

Most participants believed allowing 4-H participants more ownership of their activities would ultimately increase participation among similar audiences. In other words, these students suggested that 4-H "do what kids like to do."

Some of these activities included:

- **Do more social things.**

- Vote on what to learn and do it the next week.**

- I like being free to speak my mind and I want to speak my mind.**

These students perceived 4-H can increase participation if there was an opportunity for involvement in the planning of 4-H activities. Additionally, as mentioned before, they want projects that are more **"active, not just talking"** and are **"more involved."** This might include more group activities which many participants expressed a desire for.

There was no difference in the responses to this question of the groups segregated by gender and those who were not.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Rationale For the Study Through a Brief Review of the Literature

The beginnings of the 4-H Club can be traced back to boy's corn clubs and girl's canning clubs organized in the early 1900's. Later, 4-H Club work changed to meet the needs of the nation's rapidly growing and changing youth. As a result, new programs in youth development such as "producer-consumer relationships, career exploration, health programs, mentoring of the younger club members by older club members and volunteer leader training" were launched (Reck, 1951, p.298). 4-H participants involved in these programs are described as "youth taking part" (Wessel & Wessel, 1982, p. 331). However, there is a growing concern for the number of youth taking part, especially at the senior level.

Nationally, the 4-H Organization served 5,600,087 participants in over 100,000 units in 1994 and 1,393,220 of these members were enrolled in an organized 4-H Club (National 4-H Council, 1996). In the calendar year 1993-1994, 157,926 of these youth were enrolled in a traditional organized 4-H Club in Tennessee (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1994). In 1995, Tennessee traditional club enrollment increased to 159,362 (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1995). These figures suggest the number of youths "taking part" is increasing each year. However, the number of older youths "taking part" is decreasing.

In 1995, a large portion of 4-H's members (23.6%) were ten years old (Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service, [TAES], SP 249, 1995). This suggests the majority of participation occurs at the elementary level. Furthermore, the major decline in enrollment occurs during the transition between the sixth and seventh grades. In 1993, the number of 6th grade 4-Hers was 32,380 and in 1994 the total number of 4-Hers was 19,621 (Tennessee 4-H Enrollment, 1993 & 1994). This is a loss of 12,759 participants.

4-H members have traditionally been perceived as having a farm background. However, in Tennessee, while most 4-H members are from a rural area, only 24,607 (15.2%) actually live on farms while 100,609 (62.0%) lived in nonfarm rural areas (TAES, SP 249, 1995). Additionally, only 3,183 (2.0%) lived in suburbs of cities with more than 50,000 persons (TAES, SP 249, 1995). The *Tennessee Statistical Abstract* (1991) identifies areas called Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) which are "whole counties including their rural areas, which meet established criteria of population density and economic integration with a large central city" (Vickers & Kirby, 1991, p. 1). The MSA is comparable to most people's perception of a suburb. MSAs were used in this study since the word suburb is not recognized by the United States Census Bureau. Each year, the population in MSAs is increasing (Vickers & Kirby, 1991). Three MSA counties surrounding a large central city are Blount, Wilson, and Tipton (these counties were not necessarily used in the study). Each of these counties have experienced significant population growth since 1990 and are expected to report increased populations in the year 2000 as well (TEDC, 1997).

The characteristics of 4-H members and drop-outs varies depending upon the literature. Previous literature has indicated older members do not like keeping project records and were not likely to re-enroll (Culbert, 1983). Also, the majority of high participating members held "unfavorable feelings toward keeping records" (Warren, 1982, p. 46). Also, most members were found to also participate in other groups and clubs (Jenson, Young, Adams, & Schvaneveldt, 1982, p. 13; Jeter, 1971). A study on drop-outs concluded very few drop outs belonged to other clubs or groups (Byerly, 1972).

Two factors in members' decisions to stay in 4-H are "feelings of belongingness" (Culbert, 1981, in Culbert 1983, p. 13) or whether or not they perceived it to be "boring" (Ritchie & Ressler, 1993, p. 3). It has also been suggested that as children grow older, they leave activities in which they participated when they were young as part of a maturation process (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995).

Generally, youths participate in clubs or groups if their parents are members of a club (Maurer & Bokemeier, 1984) or perceive their parents to be supportive of their endeavors (Hartley, 1983, p. 20; Jeter, 1971; McClure, 1971; Norland & Bennett, 1993). It is also very likely youths who do not like competition may be selected out of 4-H (Forbes, 1992). It has also been shown that youths will join a club if they have friends participating in the club (Marketing Resources Inc., 1990, p. 6).

Two recent studies pertaining to nonmembers stated that nonmembers felt that 4-H did not meet their interests, they did not have time, other reasons, and they did not know enough about 4-H (Essington, 1995, p. 63; Tobey, 1996).

The use of focus groups originated in the social sciences specifically for marketing purposes (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups gather in-depth information because of their qualitative nature as opposed to the breadth of information offered by quantitative studies (Krueger, 1994).

As teen enrollment in Tennessee declines, the need to understand more about the suburban seventh grade students' motivation for not participating in 4-H is imperative since this population has many potential members.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to reveal suburban students' perceptions about 4-H, suggestions that would make 4-H more appealing to a similar group of students, as well as reveal programming alternatives for the seventh grade suburban population in hopes of increasing senior participation by retaining newly recruited members.

The objectives of this study were to:

1. inquire about the kinds of groups and/or clubs in which non-4-H members participate and their motivation behind participation in these groups;
2. examine the awareness of non-4-H members of 4-H in their school;
3. reveal the students' perceptions about 4-H;
4. infer other students' perceptions in the school about 4-H through the focus group participants;
5. reveal reasons these students do not participate in 4-H;

6. reveal the degree and manner in which other people influence participants' decision not to join 4-H;
7. reveal the activities the participants suggest 4-H should offer;
8. reveal participants' perceptions of what types of incentives would encourage participation in 4-H; and
9. reveal participants' suggestions of how 4-H can ultimately increase participation.

## **Procedures and Methodology**

### ***The Sample***

A type of cluster sample was used from nine counties in Tennessee. The participants chosen for this study consisted of Tennessee seventh grade students who never actively participated in 4-H and who lived in a Metropolitan Statistical Area other wise known as a suburb.

### ***Selection of Subjects***

A middle/junior high school was chosen from an MSA in which a 4-H Club met. The Extension agent in charge of junior high 4-H clubs was then contacted and asked to identify eligible participants. In most counties, the agent contacted a school official with whom the researcher collaborated to identify participants. Eligibility was based upon whether or not the students felt like they were active members in 4-H. If they ever participated in 4-H, it was during their 4th, 5th or 6th grade year and they

enrolled because the club met during class but did not feel like they actively participated.

### *Selection of Area*

A suburb, for the purpose of this study, designated an area, whether it was classified as rural or urban in the census, which surrounded a large metropolitan area. In order to perform a statewide study, focus groups were conducted in East, Middle and West Tennessee, three in each region for a total of twelve focus groups (one group in each region was segregated by gender). Krueger (1994) recommended that focus groups for youth be segregated by gender due to differences in social conduct between girls and boys this age. Therefore, three representative counties were chosen from each of the three Tennessee regions using stratified random selection in which segregated focus groups would take place. It was not feasible to segregate all groups.

### *Focus Group Design and Data Analysis*

The focus group design allowed the moderator to ask questions of a homogenous group of about six to twelve participants and gather their responses (Krueger, 1994). The responses obtained were then transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis as recommended by Krueger (1994).



## Findings and Conclusions

### *Involvement*

Most participants responded they were involved in the same types of activities as their peers. There are several likely explanations for the homogeneity of responses. First of all, focus groups allow participants to interact and therefore one participant's response may trigger another's response in the group. It should be noted, however, each group was informed the purpose of the focus group was not to agree on every issue but to gather information.

Additionally, those groups which were segregated by gender consistently had a pattern of the same activity emerge. In fact, all of the groups segregated by gender reported virtually unanimous involvement in the same types of activities. Only the groups that were comprised of both males and females were divided in their level or nature of participation in a club or activity which suggests that the more homogeneous the participants are, the more likely they are to have the same interests which may be contingent upon their environment.

Secondly, two aspects of the students' environments are the physical and socio-emotional aspects. There are several factors which comprise physical environment. Some factors which might influence participation are availability of clubs and activities. For example, in some counties, accessibility to sports teams may be unlimited while in other areas, there are not as many opportunities to participate in an organized sports teams. Other elements in the physical environment may include access to transportation and monetary support from parents. The participants' socio-emotional

environments could also have caused the pattern to emerge within the groups if they were indeed homogeneous. How and if they interact with other people in their lives seems to be a major role in their level of participation which is perhaps contingent upon the social groups in their environment.

### ***Initial and Continuing Participation***

The students reported hearing about the clubs or groups they are involved with through their friends. For the most part, the friends were already involved in the group or club and invited the student to attend. If the student liked it from that point, they would continue to participate. Therefore, a positive first impression and peer participation were essential for these particular students to try a new club or group.

However, there was another type of initial contact with groups that was also reported to a lesser extent. Some students reported being contacted by the group leader through correspondence. This correspondence generally advertised a cause the student was interested in or was an activity of an organization to which the student already belonged (i.e. the Priscilla Group in church). Even so, friends of the students were the most frequently reported sources of soliciting participation in a new club or group.

However, even though friends played a major part in getting the student to participate, the student had to eventually decide if the activity was worth participating in for themselves. The major factor students based their decision on was whether the student was interested in the group's purpose as well as felt like the activity was fun. They felt the desire to participate only if the activity was rewarding to them physically

or psychologically. Therefore, 4-H should offer activities that include these types of activities. This subjective evaluation of the group seemed to be unique to each individual. Even if the student's friend was participating in the group, if the student was not rewarded by the groups activities, eventually the student's participation would wane. This phenomena was not gender specific.

### ***General Knowledge of 4-H***

While the students in this study were not actively involved in 4-H, most of them had been involved with 4-H in the past. However, these students felt they did not “actively” participate in 4-H and therefore were considered to be nonusers of the program. Even so, most of these students recited knowledge of projects associated with 4-H which perhaps they had been exposed to in the past. Many responses emphasized learning by selecting activities and making items, a process which takes place in many of the 4-H projects. To a lesser extent, some, but not all groups reported 4-H to be largely a source of agricultural learning activities. Students also cited a knowledge of contests and awards associated with 4-H. However, they did not report any philosophical aspects of the 4-H's purposes such as development of skills such as leadership, communications, or decision making. In fact, probing students regarding the purposes of 4-H provoked responses such as "to keep kids busy and out of trouble" and to "get kids into activities." While these are not negative aspects in themselves, they do not reflect the lifelong skills which can be acquired by participating in 4-H. Further, when several students were probed on what they believe

the purpose of 4-H should be, "to learn stuff in life you'll need down the road," and "preparing you for a career" were some of the responses gathered. Therefore, a discrepancy exists between the students' perceptions of what 4-H currently offers students and what 4-H should offer to students. There were slight differences between the responses of female groups and other groups. Females tended to mention camps and males and mixed groups mentioned projects.

### ***Knowledge of Current 4-H Activities***

While students reported a number of projects associated with 4-H, they did not recite any information to indicate they were aware of the current activities offered in 4-H. They speculated environmentally beneficial projects were a part of current 4-H activities. Perhaps the students' expectations of 4-H are reflected in their responses to this question. The students seemed to respond in the previous question heavily with different types of activities in which one could participate. Possibly their responses are directed toward suggestions for some of the activities they would like 4-H to offer. Again, this relates back to the purpose of 4-H. In order for students to want to participate in a group, they must find they are sincerely interested in the application of 4-H's activities, or purpose. There were no differences in responses of groups segregated by gender.

### ***Personal Perception of 4-H***

The students' responses were divided on this question. Approximately half of them stated they felt like 4-H was fun and the other half stated 4-H was boring. Further, some students which had been enrolled in 4-H before felt the agent was very strict during Club meetings and this made 4-H a negative experience for them. Also, females tended to have a slightly more positive perception of 4-H.

It was definitely apparent most of the participants felt in order for 4-H to be fun, it had to have hands-on activity. Students were very intense when they were talking about times they thought were boring. They want a club to be active and engaging. Also, some of the participants stated 4-H should "do more of what interests us" so it is imperative the participants or potential participants feel they have some ownership in the kinds of activities done in the Club. A negative perception of 4-H exists by those who have used 4-H before. Likewise, positive perceptions were reported by those who had used 4-H as well as those who had not used 4-H. Perceptions are based upon a number of factors such as experience, suppositions, and reports from others. Perceptions are highly subjective but not concrete. They are, however, a person's reality and if their perception of 4-H is negative, then action needs to be taken to change the person's perception.

### ***Other Students' Perceptions of 4-H***

When students were asked to infer other students' perceptions of 4-H, it gave them more freedom to be open in their responses. One reason is accountability for

their opinions is transferred from themselves or another individual onto a group where no one person can be held responsible for their feelings.

This question revealed a discrepancy between their responses pertaining to their own perceptions and those of others. The major theme was most students believed other kids perceived 4-H to be boring but only about half of those students personally felt it was boring.

One reason given for this response was the feeling of having no ownership in 4-H's activities. Also, the need to have more opportunities for hands-on learning experiences was evident.

Additionally, many students felt the club was not approved by existing social groups, or "cool." It is very likely this was a manifestation of students feeling as though they had no ownership of the group's activities. In this age group, students are exercising their independence and have a need to test their own ideas. Lack of independence could be very easily construed as being "uncool" in this population.

However, students reported a high achieving type student would be interested in participating in 4-H because they enjoy extra activities. This phenomena perhaps could be attributed to the fact those high achieving type students actually see the ultimate results of completing the 4-H project without it being very obvious. Because of their high achieving personality, they are able to realize the potential results of the activity without it being explicitly stated to them. The majority of people, however, are not this perspicacious, or insightful, and therefore only see there is a difference in the types of people attracted to 4-H.

### *Reasons Why People Don't Join*

Peer pressure was the main reason cited for people not joining 4-H. It was discussed above a certain type of person would likely be attracted to 4-H. However, these people are not considered typical students and are exceptional and therefore probably attract only others in an equitable peer group.

Additionally, because of the discrepancy of the type of student attracted to 4-H and the type of student which comprises the majority of the student body, the majority felt like the activities were boring which caused people not to join. Keep in mind, there are students who would find the activities rewarding but that they are not the majority of students.

Further, the agricultural perception of 4-H further inhibits typical suburban students from joining 4-H. 4-H has traditionally been geared toward rural youth in need of opportunities to learn from their agricultural environment. However, again, the number of students with agricultural backgrounds is much less than the number of students who do not have agricultural ties.

Also, it was found males tended to be slightly more influenced by their peers than their female counterparts. Males tended to not join because their friends weren't joining while females did not join for personal reasons such as not having enough time. Perhaps, however, not having enough time is a secondary effect of peer pressure since they want to spend time with their friends and 4-H takes away from this time if their friends are not in it.

### *Groups or People Influencing 4-H Participation*

Students were asked to identify those groups who had any influence on their 4-H participation. Then they were asked to identify from a list those who did not have an influence in order to reveal those groups who actually had some influence on 4-H participation and reinforce previous responses. From this, it was determined friends were the most powerful entity in the students' decision to join or not join 4-H. This reinforces what they said about deciding to join other groups. There, the group had to have a purpose regardless of peer participation. Therefore, initial participation, including enrollment, is based upon the presence of friends but continuing participation is still based upon the groups purpose.

One explanation of this phenomena is perhaps 4-H is not readily accepted in typical peer groups. Therefore, even if the purpose of 4-H was obvious to the student and they were interested in joining it, they must first have the endorsement of their peers. On the other hand, this phenomena reinforces the fact that peer perceptions are extremely important in the student's decision to participate in the group. Therefore, it is apparent peer endorsement is a critical step in student involvement in 4-H for this composite of students.

Another theme which emerged from this question was teachers and family members had some influence on the student participating in 4-H, slightly more so on males. However, again, this reiterates the fact that even teachers and parents were perceived to believe 4-H was a series of activities designed to simply keep students busy. In light of this, the perceptions of these groups needs to be changed since these



groups seem to have some initial effect on students initial participation in 4-H.

However, the caveat to this conclusion is students in this age group are beginning to defy authority groups such as parents and teachers. The responsibility of endorsing the 4-H opportunity should not lie solely on the teacher or the parent or even the peer since each group seems to have some influence even though peers seem to have the majority of influence on the student's decision to participate in 4-H.

### ***How the Groups and/or People Influence Participation***

Peers were reported to be the strongest influence on the student. The way peers influence the decision to participate in 4-H is they provide the student with the social aspect which is needed in a learning situation (Houle, 1972). Besides persuading them to come to the activity, the friend provides the student with the opportunity to be social with other students who share a common interest or goal with them. In fact, this seemed to be a focal point of many of the students' environments and was prevalent in most explanations or motivations of decisions they make. With this in mind, peers were also a strong motivation behind students' decisions to not join 4-H and can negatively influence the student.

Also, parents were reported to influence people by desiring for their child to be involved in positive activities. However, they were not seen as a vehicle to encourage consistent participation, only initial participation. Also, there exists the chance students may rebel against their parents on this issue and the parents would probably not fight this rebellion too much if the child was participating in other activities.

Again, teachers were seen as a source of influence, (more so on males), on the student's participation because they were perceived to view 4-H as a vehicle to occupy the student's time or pacify the restless or talkative student. On the other hand, teachers also were perceived to discourage participation if the student's participation in 4-H was impeding on classroom time.

Therefore each group; peers, parents and teachers could have a positive or negative effect on the students' decision to participate in 4-H. However, peers seemed to have the most leverage in convincing the student to participate, or not participate.

### *Perceptions of Current 4-H Activities*

The students participating in the focus groups indicated in order for them to participate in a group, the activities must have a purpose as well as be fun. The first meeting of most 4-H Clubs begins with the students filling out the enrollment cards and checking off which activities in which they would like to participate. Since fun was a critical component of continued participation, students were asked to identify which types of projects they thought would be most fun and those which would not be as much fun.

Animal and bicycle projects were reported as being perceived the most fun at first glance. The soil project was not perceived to be fun. Camp and contests, specifically the wildlife judging contest were perceived to be fun. Additionally, females perceived the clothing project to be fun when they were told it could include a fashion show at the end of the project.

The major implications of these perceptions is at first glance, students perceive those activities which involve physical activities to be fun. They did not seem to perceive projects as necessarily involving project books . They would ask questions such as, "where would we go" when inquiring about the bicycle project. Additionally, it is not the soil project itself they find boring, but their perception of stationary learning. In other words, they indicated projects which had action implied in their names as being fun. For example, the term "animal projects" may imply hands-on activity such as grooming, visiting animals and general care. (Specific animals were listed to the right, see Appendix D).

Another implication is participants also see projects which would entail group involvement and be fun. The animal project is probably perceived as being somewhat autonomous but fun. The group aspects of bicycling, camp and contests were mentioned perhaps because of the perception of the social outlet they provide as well as fun. In fact, when discussing the bicycle project, many participants asked questions such as "where would we go" suggesting they perceive the project as one where they would actually be riding bikes together as a group and taking bicycle trips.

Participants also were very enthusiastic when discussing summer camp. They felt it would be fun and more relaxed than their perception of a traditional 4-H Club. Furthermore, summer camp implies having fun with friends and meeting others their own age, a group process which is essentially the focal point of their lives at this stage in their development.

As for contests, they implied they liked the challenge of contests but also many mentioned they would feel more comfortable competing as a team or group. Again peer equals are crucial to most students this age and perhaps some feel discouraged by contests because the elements of being part of a team or group are missing in some 4-H contests.

Therefore, in order for 4-H activities to be perceived to be fun, which would attract interested students, they must imply hands-on activities and group involvement. The students must be able to see during the first exposures of 4-H, there will be opportunities for each of these elements in their membership of 4-H. Furthermore, their expectations of these activities must come to fruition soon after they have dedicated some time to 4-H in order to keep them interested. There are many other opportunities in which these students could participate and 4-H must be able to compete with them in order to recruit and maintain new members.

### *New 4-H Activity Ideas*

Participants were given the opportunity to express their ideas for activities which they would like 4-H to offer. Their ideas included projects such as camping and fishing, hiking, hunting/shooting, kayaking and river rafting. They also indicated they would like to have exotic animal projects such as reptiles and endangered species. Also, males tended to emphasize sports activities. Lastly, in order to supplement their learning experience, they requested trips to places associated with their projects such as drug rehabilitation centers and philanthropy field trips.

Again, their ideas indicated the activities they desire entail hands-on experience as well as interaction with others. Additionally, they indicated they would like to travel with emphasis on learning more about their area of interest. In other words they want to be able to apply what they learn to a tangible situation. Furthermore, they requested projects which are currently popular such as outdoors projects and endangered species projects.

### ***Boosting Participation***

One of the most overwhelming themes which occurred as a result of these focus groups was peer endorsement. A generic suggestion to encourage participation in 4-H would be simply advertisement. However, advertisement has many different facets and not all angles would work. In fact, the wrong kind of advertisement could even have negative effects. While celebrity endorsement was mentioned, it did not emerge as a theme as strongly as peer advocacy.

In fact, peer endorsement has two advantages. First of all, it is one of the most highly visible, strongly felt type of advertisement available. It has been stated over and over most students in this age group strongly feel the need to belong and "fit in." This is evident in the fact this is one of the phenomena which makes drug use and other negative behaviors so easy for youth to subscribe to. To have one or two students endorsing 4-H not only during recruitment but through their participation is a potentially tremendous impact for enrollment.

This type of advertisement is highly personal and specific for each individual school. While a national campaign would create awareness of 4-H, it would probably not increase 4-H enrollment on its own. However, it could be reinforced by the advertisement through peers which would together comprise a strategy at the national and local level to increase awareness of 4-H, and in the long run, boost enrollment.

### *When To Conduct Meetings*

While asking how to increase participation, another major topic emerged which was whether or not to hold meetings during school. Many participants felt more students would attend meetings during school. However, their reasons for coming during school indicated they had ulterior motives for coming during class time. First of all, they enjoy changing their everyday routine and see the opportunity of a meeting during class time as a source of excitement and a fun time to meet with their friends. It might be disheartening to hear 4-H time is simply a way to "get out of class" but this type of response is to be expected out of students of this age. They desire a social outlet and a chance to rebel and a meeting during school may be disrupted by the students' expectations of this time.

Second of all, they indicated 4-H would not be attended after school because they have to meet with their friends or participate in other activities. This simply reiterates the fact there are other innate priorities in the students' lives which adults can not remove. However, as planners of these activities, adults can manage for this phenomenon by scheduling meetings which allow students to socialize as well as be

meaningful. In fact, a theme which emerged was if 4-H's meetings were interesting enough, they would be attended regardless of the time.

Even so, it would perhaps be beneficial to hold the first few meetings during school to generate interest. After this time, the meetings should be moved to a time is nonconflicting with other school activities and suitable to the participant's needs. By doing this, the number of distractions would be reduced and the student would be able to better focus their energy on the agenda of the meeting.

### **Recommendations for Program Improvement**

1. Before initiation of 4-H Clubs at the beginning of the school year, assess the physical and socio-emotional environment of the target audience. This includes school schedules, extra-curricular activities sponsored by the school such as sports and band, socio-economic status of the target audience, availability of transportation and accessibility of meeting times. The socio-emotional environment assessment should include casual contact with the intended audience, parents, and teachers to get an idea of social group dynamics in the school as well as get an idea of the expectations of 4-H and other needs. The initial meeting and presentation of 4-H activities should be planned according to the information gathered from these assessments.
2. Initial meetings, should be planned to take place at school but should move to an after-school time as soon as possible for this audience.

3. Initial enrollment strategies should concentrate on friends or groups of friends from the target audience. Targeting a few students from different peer groups and motivating them to encourage their friends to participate will produce more potential members during the initial meetings from which larger long run enrollments can be built.
4. Veteran members should be allowed to orchestrate the advertisement and recruitment process since they are familiar with and more well known to potential members. These members should be seen as positive role models to others in the target audience.
5. Initial meetings should primarily emphasize the hands-on "learning by doing" aspect of 4-H and the opportunity to learn and develop these skills with their friends.
6. Initial meetings should also emphasize the long-term benefits of participation such as development of skills such as leadership, decision making, and communications which can help to begin to prepare them for careers.
7. The promise of fun and hands-on activity should be followed through. The participants should be able to experience this soon after if not immediately after the first meeting.
8. Special trips should also be planned and taken to reinforce learning activities.
9. The participants should be allowed to plan the groups' activities and the agent or volunteer should facilitate this planning process and help implement the activities.



10. The traditional 4-H Club meeting should be restructured to allow participants to complete projects as groups. Then those who wanted to complete additional projects could complete them individually.
11. Participants should be allowed to compete in groups in contests as groups if the activities accommodates such.
12. Communications specialists should be consulted in the development of curriculum such as project books. Curriculum names and appearance should be changed and updated to show more action. They should also be age appropriate.
13. The use of project books should be changed. Agents or volunteer leaders should use the project book during a hands-on training session and for the student to make notes or write journal entries in. In other words, a project book should be used as a building block towards hands-on group activity. They should give background information for the hands-on project to follow and allow space for reflection on the activity. They should not be used as a pre-requisite for participation in a hands-on learning activity.
14. The agent or volunteer should be provided with instructor's materials which correspond with the members' curriculum to help with suggestions for activities, objectives, and set up.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

1. This study should be replicated with different audiences to discover their perceptions and motivations for not participating for comparison with the results of this study.
2. Focus groups should not be segregated by gender at this age unless the stakeholders are interested in marketing the program separately to males and females respectively. Generally, focus groups at this age should only be segregated by gender only if the subject is sensitive in nature. While this study uncovered some differences between males and females, they were secondary and did not impact the final recommendations of the study.
3. Focus groups should be conducted with students in the appropriate grade to discover their perceptions of actual current project books and get their recommendations for new material.
4. Focus groups should be conducted with students in the appropriate grade to discover their perceptions of actual current activity and plans to get their recommendation for program improvement.
5. Questions in focus groups should not contain two parts such as "How did you hear about these groups and what made you decide to join them?" because participants this age tended to answer the second part and skipped the first part. They should be divided into two separate questions.

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## **APPENDICES**



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Sample Letter To Participant**

{Date}

{Name}  
{Street Address}  
{City, State}

Dear: {Name}

Hello! Not too long ago, we spoke to each other on the phone about your experiences with

4-H. I hope you haven't forgotten about the meeting we spoke about where you can come and share your ideas about 4-H. The meeting will be on {Date} in Room 166 in the Agricultural Engineering Building. I enclosed a map to help you find the building on UT's Agricultural Campus. The study will start at {Time} and will last until about 6:30. We will have refreshments and sodas and talk about 4-H while we eat so it won't take too long!

With this letter, you will find a permission slip your parent **MUST** sign so you can participate. You'll also find a slip for you to sign letting me know you want to participate.

Don't forget to bring it when you come.

I can't wait to talk with you about 4-H. I think we'll have lots of fun!! See you there!!

Sincerely,

Sharon Davis  
Graduate Assistant, Ag. & Ext. Ed.

Randol G. Waters, Ph.D.  
Professor, Ag. & Ext. Ed.

P.S.

You have been specially selected for this study.

If you can't come, it is very important that you call and let me know. My phone number is 974-7308 if you need to reach me. Thanks A Bunch!!

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Parent/ Guardian Informed Consent Form**

## PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT

My child \_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to participate in  
(Full Name)  
a focus group study where he/she will talk about The 4-H Club and their likes,  
dislikes, and ideas about it for approximately one hour. I am aware that the focus  
group session will be tape recorded so that researchers can be certain of all responses.  
I understand that only the research team will have access to the tapes and that as soon  
as the tape can be transcribed the tape will be destroyed and the transcriptions will be  
kept a locked file cabinet at the address below. I also understand that participation is  
voluntary and I or my child may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.  
I may request the results of this study by writing to the address below:

Ms. Sharon Ann Davis, Graduate Assistant  
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
P.O. Box 1071  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37901-1071  
(423) 974-7308

---

Signature of Parent/Guardian

**PLEASE HAVE YOUR PARENTS READ AND SIGN THIS FORM.  
BE SURE TO BRING IT WITH YOU TO THE STUDY!**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Participant's Informed Consent**

## PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED CONSENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate  
(Full Name)  
a focus group study where I and other teenagers will talk about The 4-H Club and my likes, dislikes, and ideas about it for approximately one hour. I understand that my responses will be tape recorded so that the responses can be easily categorized later. I also understand that confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible pertaining to my participation this study. I understand the tape recording will be heard only by the research team. Once the tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed and the transcriptions will be kept a locked file cabinet at the address below. I also understand that participation is voluntary and I or my parent/guardian may discontinue participation at any time. I understand that every effort will be made not to connect my name with any of my responses however, confidentiality cannot be promised.  
I may request results of this study by writing to the address below.

Ms. Sharon Ann Davis, Graduate Assistant  
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
P.O. Box 1071  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37901-1071  
(423) 974-7308

---

Signature of Participant

**PLEASE READ AND SIGN THIS FORM. REMEMBER TO  
BRING IT WITH YOU TO THE STUDY. SEE YOU THERE!**

## **APPENDIX D**

**Focus Group Questioning Route**

**and**

**Lists To Be Given To Participants**

## **FOCUS GROUP BEGINNING SUMMARY**

I want to thank each and every one of you for participating our discussion today. We will be talking about youth groups and activities, specifically, 4-H. The reason we are going to ask you questions is because we want to have your input about 4-H and your advice about participation 4-H. We would like to hear any ideas you may have about 4-H even if they are negative so feel free to say what is on your mind.

### **Focus Group Questioning Route**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. Let's begin by having each of you tell us your name and what kinds of groups you are involved .
2. How did you hear about these groups and what made you decide to join them?

#### **II. Transition**

3. A number of groups and activities have been mentioned. Think about a group offered your school called 4-H. What do you know about this group?
4. What kinds of activities do you think are offered 4-H?

#### **III. Key**

5. Let's talk about some things that might influence some people's participation 4-H. Feel free to tell us your opinions about any thing that you think is important about 4-H. Let's start with perceptions of 4-H. Perceptions are the way people see something. Kind of like an impression or opinion. What is your perception of 4-H?
6. What about other kids the school, what do you think is their perception of 4-H?
7. What reasons can you think of about why some people don't join 4-H?
8. Who are the groups or people that you think influence people participating 4-H?
9. Here is a list of people or groups that may or may not influence people participating in 4-H. Some of the people you have mentioned may or



may not be on this list. Which ones do you think DO NOT belong on this list and why?

[Distribute List in Large Print]

Parents

Teachers

Principals

Coaches

Friends

Other youth groups (sports teams, band, church groups etc.)

10. You mentioned [ ]. How do you think that these people or groups influence participation?

11. Here is a list of some of the activities that 4-H does. [Distribute list large print] What other kinds of activities do you think should be offered 4-H?

Projects

Welcome To the World of Autos

Sharing the Roads (Bicycle)

Learning About Leadership

My Clubs and Groups (Citizenship)

Animal Projects (Beef, Dairy, Goat, Dog, Rabbit, Poultry, Sheep, and others)

Soil

Electricity Project Guide - III

How To Identify Insects

Forest Tree Planting

Eating To Stay Healthy

Clothing - III

Shape of Things (Arts and Crafts)

The Wise Know the Whys (Drugs, etc.)

Other Activities

4-H Camp (Academic Conference, Electric Camp, Summer Camp)

Contests ( Clothing, Forestry, Interior Design, Land judging, Wildlife)

12. What other kinds of activities do you think should be offered in 4-H?

13. What kinds of things do you think would encourage participation in 4-H?

IV. Ending Questions

12. Lets summarize the key points of our discussion. [Moderator will give brief summary of responses of questions 5-11]. Does this summary sound complete? Do you want to add or change any of the responses?
13. The goal is to find ways of increasing participation 4-H. What advice do you have for us?
14. Have we missed anything?

# **PEOPLE**

**Parents**

**Teachers**

**Principals**

**Coaches**

**Friends**

**Other Youth Groups**

**(Sports Teams, Band, Church Groups, etc.)**

# 4-H Activities

## Projects

Welcome To The World of Autos

Sharing the Roads (Bicycle)

Learning About Leadership

My Clubs and Groups (Citizenship)

Animal Projects (Beef, Dairy, Goat, Dog, Rabbit, Poultry, Sheep and others)

Soil

Electricity Project Guide-III

How To Identify Insects

Forest Tree Planting

Eating To Stay Healthy

Clothing III

Shape of Things (Arts and Crafts)

The Wise Know the Whys (Drugs, Etc.)

## Other Activities

4-H Camp (Academic Conference, Electric Camp, Summer Camp)

Contests (Clothing, Forestry, Interior Design, Land Judging, Wildlife)

## VITA

Sharon Ann Latham Davis was born on November 15, 1971 in Memphis, Tennessee. She is the daughter of Dr. Kent E. Latham and Ms. Kimberly M. Kerr of Rockwood, Tennessee and Knoxville Tennessee, respectively. She was raised in South Knox County and attended South-Young High School until she graduated in 1990 where she was a member of Who's Who Among American High School Students and The National Honor Society.

She entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 1990 where she completed her degree majoring in Animal Science in May of 1994. While at UT, she served as secretary of Sigma Alpha Sorority and a member of Alpha Zeta.

In August of 1995, she enrolled in graduate school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she pursued her Master of Science degree in Agricultural & Extension Education. In November of 1995, she accepted a position in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education sponsored by Philip Morris, U.S.A. where she served as a Graduate Assistant in the department. She was a member of Gamma Sigma Delta, the Honor Society of Agriculture, the American Association of Agricultural Education and also served as a member of the Agricultural Education Admissions Board. She received her Master's Degree in Agricultural and Extension Education in May of 1997.

In her spare time she serves as a Sunday School teacher and Head of the Nursery at her church and enjoys spending time with her husband, Matthew, and pets.

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