



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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Livestock focused 4-H clubs offer youth unique learning opportunities

Just because youth are growing up in the city doesn't mean they aren't interested in learning about or working with livestock. Peoria County 4-H volunteers have created several unique 4-H Special Interest (SPIN) clubs that invite youth out to the farm to experience first hand the challenges and joys of working with livestock. The Dairy SPIN club began 11 years ago, this year a Sheep SPIN club was launched, and a Rabbit SPIN club is set to begin in fall 2023.

The Neighbor Kids 4-H club began in 1936 as a traditional 4-H club and in 2012 Club leader Fred Rosenbohm rejuvenated the club and created the popular Dairy SPIN club. When first approached about the idea Fred says he doubted it would work. For the first meeting, Fred only set up four chairs around his kitchen table and was pleasantly surprised when over 20 kids and parents showed up. Through the years, members have gained skills like responsibility, leadership, and public speaking in addition to dairy industry knowledge. Fred leads the club at his farm where members work with the dairy cows and assist with tasks such as feeding, tattooing, milking, and grooming. The youth have the opportunity to show the animals in the county 4-H Show and create an educational display for the animal science exhibit class.

"The members love to show the animals at the fair and some of them have even had their animal science projects selected for State Fair judging," commented Kristi Smith, Peoria 4-H program coordinator.

Fred says that the club teaches its members to be "better producers of whatever animal they have, from dairy cows to rabbits." Over the years, the Neighbor Kids Dairy SPIN Club has impacted over 60 youth and growing. Fred says that a majority of the members have been from cities, not farms, and some of the members have special needs. The club will have its new year kick-off meeting on September 30, 2023 and will continue to meet on the last Saturday each month.

In 2023, Sarah Lueschow wanted to share her love of the sheep industry and launched the Sheep SPIN Club. Sarah is both a 4-H volunteer and a sheep producer—the perfect combination for a new 4-H club. Five members joined this club in January and four showed sheep at the 4-H Show in July. Members learned about feeding, supplies, wool production, genetics, and judging, as well as getting ready for the show.

"The Sheep SPIN club was beyond amazing," said Emma Ziegler, club member. "It was really a dream come true to be able to 'play around with sheep' and then show them at the fair. I really had a great time." Emma has discovered a new skill in wool production and is an excellent example of why Sarah started this club. The Sheep SPIN club will kick off again in January close to lambing season.

Both clubs give kids who wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to work with farm animals to enjoy the animals, experience the hard-work and build character traits from it, and even explore potential careers.

Peoria County 4-H is also excited about adding a Rabbit SPIN Club this fall. Contact the University of Illinois Extension office in Peoria County for more information about any of these 4-H opportunities.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Even though she has grown up in town and had no prior experience with livestock, Emma Ziegler was excited to join the Sheep SPIN 4-H Club. Now, she is passionate about the sheep and wool industries, and won the "Rookie of the Year" prize at the 4-H Show. The Sheep SPIN Club started this year and joined the Dairy SPIN club in the livestock learning opportunities in Peoria County 4-H.

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