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“Participation, safety, personal development and learning are the highest priorities for involvement in 4-H.”

Michigan 4-H Youth Development programs are designed with respect for the physical, cognitive (thinking), social and emotional development of youth. When parents and caregivers entrust their children to the care of others in organizations such as 4-H, these organizations must hold themselves to a high standard of accountability for the positive development of those young people.

The following Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy is designed to provide guidelines for age-appropriate youth involvement that is mentally and physically safe, developmentally appropriate and educationally focused.

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## Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy

Michigan 4-H Youth Development programs are open to young people aged 5 through 19. Beginning on September 1, 2004, “4-H age” will be determined by a young person’s age as of January 1 of the 4-H program year (which runs from September 1 through August 31).

4-H participation can involve age-appropriate experiences designed for youth aged 5 to 8 and youth aged 9 to 19:

- **4-H Cloverbud Members (ages 5 to 8)** – Many county 4-H programs offer programs for children aged 5 to 8 (officially called “4-H Cloverbuds” by Michigan 4-H Youth Development). Like 4-H activities for older youth, 4-H Cloverbud programs are designed to be safe, age appropriate, educational and fun. A key difference, however, is that 4-H Cloverbud activities have a noncompetitive focus.

Effective programming with this age group is activity-based, cooperative, fun, experiential and

varied. 4-H participation at this level is considered introductory and less project focused than programs for older 4-H’ers. It allows youth members to experience a variety of learning opportunities.

- **4-H Members (ages 9 to 19)** – 4-H programs are offered in all Michigan counties for youth aged 9 to 19. These activities are designed to be safe, age appropriate, educational and fun. Most counties offer noncompetitive and competitive opportunities (that is, events in which participants’ efforts are judged, ranked or placed) for young people in this age group. 4-H participation at this level can be focused on specific projects with an emphasis on developing and improving skills. (Within this age group, there may also be specific age restrictions on participation in events and activities based on content.) Once a young person passes 4-H age 19, he or she can stay involved in 4-H activities as a volunteer or resource person, but not as a 4-H member.

4-H experiences for youth aged 9 to 13 allow for development of positive self-image, allow for more responsibility and decision-making, encourage independence in thought and learning, encourage teamwork and friend-making skills, and encourage thinking, planning and doing to create positive futures.

4-H experiences for youth aged 14 to 19 are designed to help them increase and maintain their knowledge of self and their self-esteem, increase their independence, increase their responsibility and complex decision-making skills, enhance their goal setting and goal reaching skills, build strong relationships and improve interpersonal communication skills.



## Why the Change?

### The new 4-H Participant Age Policy:

- Reflects the Michigan 4-H guiding principles for positive youth development.
- Aligns the age guidelines for 4-H members of all ages from 5 through 19.
- Creates a much smaller window of time when a younger 4-H member might be placed in an older age category than his or her actual age.

- Clearly specifies the 4-H program year (September 1 to August 31), which aligns with federal reporting requirements.
- Is similar to policies used by 4-H programs in many states across the nation.
- Reflects input from MSU Extension staff and volunteers from around the state.



***The Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy takes effect September 1, 2004. Counties can decide to implement this policy as early as September 1, 2003, but all counties must fully implement the policy by September 1, 2004.***

## What Youth Can Do in 4-H By Age

A variety of 4-H experiences are open to Michigan young people aged 5 to 19. A sampling is listed here. Please note that not all 4-H experiences are open to all age groups.

### Ages 5 to 8

Age-appropriate activities in all 4-H project areas including but not limited to animal experiences with direct one-on-one adult assistance; low-risk community service activities with adult supervision; noncompetitive shows and exhibitions. 4-H Cloverbuds may not participate in competitive classes, sales, treaties and auctions at 4-H events.

### Ages 9 to 13

Age-appropriate activities in all 4-H project areas, community service activities, camps, trips, tours

and exchanges, and fair and non-fair noncompetitive and competitive events including demonstrations, exhibitions, shows, sales and auctions.

### Ages 14 to 19

Age-appropriate activities in all 4-H project areas, teen leadership experiences including leading specific project area learning by younger youth, camps, trips, tours and exchanges, fair and non-fair noncompetitive and competitive events including the state 4-H awards program, demonstrations, exhibitions, shows, sales and auctions.

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## For More Information

You can find out more about the 4-H Participant Age Policy on the Internet at <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/4hagefaq.html>. You'll find more information on age-appropriate youth development experiences at <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/ageapp.html>. You can also contact your county MSU Extension office, found on the Web at <http://www.msue.msu.edu> or:

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