

## Extending Knowledge - Changing Lives

### Delaware 4-H for Health Challenge

#### ISSUE

Childhood obesity and its health impacts are well known. The national childhood obesity rate is 18.5% with one-third of children being overweight or obese. The rates vary among age groups, but rise as children get older. Teens who are obese have a 70 to 80% chance of becoming obese adults. In addition, significant environmental changes have decreased physical activity and increased food intake. These changes include increased amounts of screen time, less outside play, less physical education in school, increased food portion sizes, fast food, and food used as rewards. Since it is much easier to start with healthy habits at a young age than try to change as an adult, establishing healthy habits among youth is very important.

#### RESPONSE

In 2018, Delaware 4-H collaborated with Tufts University and the Healthy Kids Out of School Program to adopt the 4-H for Health Challenge. The key components of the challenge are:

- Drink Right – Choose water instead of sugar sweetened beverages
- Move More – Incorporate movement and physical activity
- Snack Smart – Fuel up on fruits and vegetables

The 4-H for Health Challenge encourages 4-H Clubs to offer fruits and vegetables as the snack at three meetings, serve water as the main beverage at six and do 15 minutes of physical activity at six. Challenge materials were customized and packets prepared for each county office. The program kicked off in Sept. 2017 and ended in Aug. 2018. Clubs that completed the challenge were honored at their annual County Achievement programs. To build enthusiasm for the program, each county had youth speak at this event on the impact it made on their program.

#### IMPACT

Twelve clubs and two afterschool programs statewide involving more than 500 youth participated in the challenge. In addition, other 4-H events followed suit by eliminating sugar-sweetened beverages, offering healthier snacks and building physical activity into events. Evidence shows that youth will try new things when they are in a group of peers. By making it simple, achievable and fun, 4-H'ers are changing habits. In this inaugural year of the challenge, we built awareness and enthusiasm. During year two, a fourth social-emotional health element was incorporated and a monthly 4-H newsletter page offers ideas to incorporate healthy snacks and physical activity. Some clubs added a Healthy Living Officer who is responsible for planning snacks and fun active games for club members. By the end of the second year, we hope to double the number of clubs participating. We hope the challenge will become a Policy Systems and Environment (PSE) change and continue to be adopted at camps, meetings and other events.