

May 18, 2018

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Colleagues,

Conversations and challenges to Cooperative Extension's commitment and approach to engaging all youth in our 4-H Youth Development programs continue. As we might expect, some perspectives are supportive of our efforts and others are highly critical. Specifically, open controversies escalated by stakeholders have criticized the Extension 4-H policies related to inclusion and diversity efforts to support LGBTQ+ youth. It is unfortunate that our approach to inclusion has been politicized by some. We also recognize that these developments may have raised concern and anxiety on the part of 4-H leaders, workers, volunteers, and supporters. This situation provides the Cooperative Extension System an opportunity to demonstrate our collective commitment to including all youth in our 4-H programs and to speak with one voice.

We want to share with the system that ECOP, through the ECOP 4-H Leadership Committee (includes Extension Directors/Administrators, 4-H Program Leaders, National 4-H Council, and NIFA 4-H National Headquarters), has been engaged in conversations related to these developments, responding to concerns, monitoring the coverage of these issues in the traditional news environment and on social media, and keeping all of our 4-H partners connected, updated, and consistent in our responses.

On May 18, ECOP facilitated a webinar focused on "Conversation about Inclusivity in 4-H Programming" that provided insight and resources from national leaders in this area (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUpTva1kECE>). Furthermore, at our most recent ECOP meeting in July, this motion was unanimously approved:

ECOP encourages all Cooperative Extension Programs to adhere to their Land-grant University nondiscrimination policy in the development and delivery of Extension efforts designed to engage all people.

As Cooperative Extension Directors/Administrators, we encourage all of you to engage in this critical conversation. Our opportunity to be consistent in our commitment to diversity and inclusion in all Extension programming is now. In addition, we encourage you to support your 4-H leaders, workers, and volunteers who may be challenged in their efforts to operate 4-H programs in the most inclusive manner possible, consistent with their respective Land-grant University policies. We also believe it is critically important to acknowledge and back up those who are willing to be champions in this cause.

Cooperative Extension has an opportunity to support civic dialogue around issues of diversity and inclusion, and adhere to our mission of bringing evidence-based information into the public arena to address these important issues. ECOP has authorized the ECOP 4-H Leadership Committee to continue these important conversations, respond to questions and concerns raised by our partners in 4-H, and ensure that as a national Cooperative Extension System we continue to embrace diversity and inclusion, ensure equity, and achieve our goal of a 4-H program that is reflective of the youth of our nation.

Chuck Hibberd, ECOP Chair

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