

4-H: THE FOUNDATION FOR FOSTERING YOUNG FARMERS IN KOREA

In this blog, Dr Song Yong-sup reflects on the evolution of 4-H Clubs in Korea and how it is fostering young farmers.

INTRODUCTION

In late spring, ahead of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, I vividly remember taking my first step into public office. After completing military service, the first task given at the front-line site as a young man and a first-time public official was to foster 4-H with rural teenagers in their 20s. At that time along with the 4-H members, the Olympic torch relay road was created as a cosmos flower road. Also the 4-H outdoor training activities, such as camping, were held in forests and valleys in the middle of summer. A 4-H competition and fair festival was also held for rural youth to exhibit their projects' accomplishments in the harvest season. By publishing the 4-H Bulletin every month containing these activities, I spent valuable time sharing my life with customers and members of 4-H who were the same age as me.



Special Lecture on Developing 4-H Clubs by Dr Song Yong-sup (November 2022)

Since it was a time when *Ichonhyangdo* (rural to urban migration), was at its peak, fostering teenagers growing up in poor rural areas was more important than anything else, but it did not receive much public attention as it was difficult. This is because agriculture was recognized as a declining industry, and there was no hope anymore, so youth were escaping from the rural areas. However, in retrospect, it would have been difficult to lay the foundation for fostering young farmers that this era desperately demanded if we had not fostered and developed the 4-H club with the sense of a calling and patience necessary for the times. Also, they would never have been able to raise many 4-H graduates who have since grown to be good leaders in the country and community.

THE 4-H CLUB

The 4-H club, which is active in more than 70 countries around the world, was founded in 1911 when it organized rural youth clubs spread throughout the United States; in Korea it was introduced mainly in Gyeonggi-do Province in 1947 during the U.S. military government (Box 1). After the Korean War in 1950, it was adopted as a government policy project in 1952 in accordance with the need for rural promotion and youth guidance, and the first 4-H Central Competition was held in 1954.



Summer camping of 4-H Members

Box 1: Evolution of 4-H in Korea

In Korea 4-H started in 1947. Clubs known as 'rural youth clubs' were designed to help youth play a role in reviving underdeveloped rural communities. In the early 1950s there were 1,900 4-H clubs with 50,000 members. During the Korean War, 4-H clubs were not active. After the war, with government and private support, 4-H became a driving force in post-war redevelopment in rural communities. With the industrialization of Korea in the 1990s, more people began moving to the cities from the rural areas, which impacted the agricultural 4-H program. To increase 4-H participation, programming was expanded to urban schools. The National 4-H Center was founded in Seoul in 1990.

Source: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/4_h_around_the_world_south_korea

4-H is an organization that supports various educational and other activities (Box 2) for teenagers since they be the leaders of the future of Korea. This will help them grow into democratic citizens and thus contribute to the local community and national development that is based on the four ideologies of Ji (Head), Deok (Heart), Noh (Hands), and Chae (Health). 4-H is attached to rural areas through youth career guidance and helps them enter farming and grow into young farmers. The 4-H association consists of students 4-H, universities 4-H, and youth farmers 4-H, depending on the age and organizational characteristics – from 7-year olds to 39-year olds – and several developmental efforts are required in the future.

Youth farmers 4-H, a key organization in rural areas, are sometimes confused with social organizations or community service organizations despite their important value as learning organizations. 4-H emphasizes learning to acquire new knowledge and skills through an educational method called 'project'. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and distribute various practical programs centered on hands-on activities by discovering the educational needs and desires of young farmers. Joint tasks operated by some cities and counties are becoming a good means of learning to share new technologies and information among members, and forming a bond through collaboration.

Box 2: Main Activities of 4-H Clubs in Korea

4-H offers a unique educational method known as ‘project based learning’. 4-H members can develop 4-H ideals and foster the spirit of the 4-H association by carrying out their own projects in 4-H clubs. 4-H projects are usually set up to implement targets in which the members can learn through observation or experience. As such, project activities serve as practical learning processes that encourage the identification of problems and the utilization of problem solving skills in one’s everyday life. There are group projects and individual projects. Group projects are accomplished through the cooperation of more than two group members, such as joint practice of set-aside lands, exploring traditional culture, nature conservation activities, etc. Individual projects are carried out by one person, such as raising crops and pets, computer science activities, etc.

Various 4-H education and training programs are designed to promote the learning of new life skills among members through peer group learning and activities, as well as to encourage cooperation, endurance, and positive thinking. Also the programs foster learning experiences intended to nurture the kind of sound, democratic minds that are integral to any citizen of a society. During the competition and fair festival, 4-H members exhibit their projects’ accomplishments in the form of a competition. The purpose of this event is to provide the members with an opportunity to compare and evaluate each other’s accomplishments from a more comprehensive and broad viewpoint. Also, through outdoor training experience in the natural environment, 4-H members develop their social skills and a positive attitude as well as the spirit of cooperation and service.

Source: Korea4-H[4-H in Korea

4-H members must have practical authority and participate autonomously and actively. The initiative for business activities is with the institution that fosters, and members should not just stay at the level of participation. Recently, operating a drone control group centered on 4-H members is a developmental field case. We need to make use of the great 4-H creed of ‘learning by doing, good things better’. As of 2021 the country has more than 70,000 members including 1,087 members of universities 4-H, and 7,026 members of youth farmers 4-H.



Middle school 4-H members being provided with relevant field experiences

STRENGTHENING 4-H: THE WAY FORWARD

If the members of the 4-H headquarters, a well-organized 4-H senior group nationwide, become mentors and pass on their valuable experience as resource leaders, 4-H will be able to develop further.



In addition, it is necessary to further revitalize the university 4-H and expand the International 4-H Youth Exchange (IFYE), which began in 1963, so as to develop the expertise and global leadership abilities of future generations, for crises such as climate change, food shortages, and rural regeneration.

END NOTE

In order to overcome the aging of rural areas along with the disappearance of local areas, fostering young farmers is the most urgent and important solution. Young farmers are rural jewels, and the factory where they grind and polish jewelry is 4-H. As a leading player in the era of the 4th Industrial Revolution, Korea should continue to write about the 75 years of proud 4-H history by incorporating it into the spirit of the new era. I am happy to feel valued and rewarded now by the pride that 4-H is becoming the mother who fostered the good young farmers of today.

This blog is an updated version of the article by the author that appeared in Chungbuk Daily Newspaper (June 26, 2022) in the Korean language.



Dr Song Yong-sup , holds a PhD in Education from Graduate School, Seoul National University, and served as the Director General of Chungbuk-do Provincial Agricultural Research and Extension Services. Recently, he published a book (NongdamMidam) on the future stories of agriculture; and through monthly newspaper columns and nationwide lectures, he emphasizes the need to see agriculture as a hope industry and rural areas as healing spaces for people. Dr Song is also a member of the APIRAS Steering Committee.