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## **“...and my World:” Perceptions of County Educators and Volunteers toward International 4-H Programs**

**Jeff Sallee**

4-H Youth Development  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK  
[jeff.sallee@okstate.edu](mailto:jeff.sallee@okstate.edu)

**Sarah Lancaster**

Plant and Soil Science  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK  
[sarah.lancaster@okstate.edu](mailto:sarah.lancaster@okstate.edu)



**“...and my World:”  
Perceptions of County Educators and Volunteers  
toward International 4-H Programs**

Jeff Sallee and Sarah Lancaster  
Oklahoma State University

**Abstract:** The phrase “...and my world” was added to the 4-H pledge in 1973, forever solidifying 4-H’s commitment to international programming and global citizenship. In 2008, Oklahoma 4-H began to consider revitalizing its international outreach. After researching the barriers to International 4-H projects, Oklahoma 4-H educators and volunteers were surveyed to discover their interests in this area with the intent of beginning a renewed International 4-H program with educator and volunteer support. The survey results indicate that 4-H volunteers and youth educators prefer short term International educational programs that focus on cultural awareness and service-learning for older youth.

**Introduction**

The phrase “...and my world” was added to the 4-H pledge in 1973, forever solidifying 4-H’s commitment to international programming and global citizenship. This phrase, had already been added to the pledge on local and state levels, and was added officially as a result of a grassroots outcry from 4-H members across the nation (Wessel &Wessel, 1982). 4-H was working internationally long before 1973, with club work beginning in Great Britain in 1921 and followed by Denmark and Finland in 1924 and 1926. By 1925, Canada claimed 1,000 clubs with 100,000 boys and girls (Reck, 1951).

The growth of 4-H across the globe was impressive, but it didn’t affect the lives of many 4-H members in the United States. This was changed in 1948 with the beginning of the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE). The IFYE program sent delegates around the world to live with host families, work on their farms, and become immersed in their culture for up to six months. The IFYE program was reciprocal and brought youth from host countries to the United States for similar opportunities. IFYE was eventually changed to the International 4-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) in order to reach beyond its agricultural roots. Since that time, other international 4-H programs have come and gone with similar objectives. 4-H has trained Peace Corp volunteers, developed rural youth clubs around the globe, and organized caravans of

youth for short-term international experiences (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). In 1967 the Youth Development Project (YDP) combined elements of IFYE and the Peace Corps, and sent youth to Africa, Latin American, and the Philippines. Since its inception in 1972, the Japanese Exchange program has engaged 35 states to host over 30,000 Japanese teenagers and sent more than 6,000 American 4-H members to Japan (Radhakrishna & Ingram, 2005). 4-H even negotiated an exchange with the Soviet Union and sent members beyond the iron curtain in 1976 (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

Through all this growth in international programming, 4-H has created global awareness during travel and exchanges. Conversely, international 4-H programs are often fragmented and isolated from mainstream 4-H (Etling, Reaman & Sawi, 1993). The barriers causing the isolation of International 4-H have been identified as expense, lack of a clearly defined project, agent resistance to international activities, problems with state program leadership, inadequate communication, deadlines, and limited opportunities for adults who might travel with youth to provide support (Boyd, et al., 2001; Etling, Reamann, & Sawi, 1993).

With the beginning of the 21st century, Oklahoma, like other state 4-H programs, dropped its international efforts due to a lack of interest from 4-H members, families, and personnel. In 2008, Oklahoma 4-H began to consider revitalizing its international outreach. After researching the barriers to International 4-H, Oklahoma 4-H educators and volunteers were surveyed to discover their interests in this area with the intent of beginning an International 4-H program with educator and volunteer support.

## Methodology

An Internet survey was developed to explore county educator and volunteer perceptions of starting an international 4-H program. The survey instrument was given face validity by review from a panel of experts. The survey instrument was created to determine the perceptions of the 4-H volunteers and educators. Quantitative and qualitative questions were asked concerning the interest in, and design of, an international 4-H program. An email was sent to all Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Educators (201) and all certified club leaders with an email address on record (107).

## Findings

The survey had a combined response rate of 40.93 percent, with a 65% response rate from the volunteers and 31% from County Educators (Table 1). Often 4-H volunteers and educators are also parents of 4-H members. This is evident in that 29.6% of the respondents identified themselves as 4-H parents. The survey respondents were 76% female, 54% county educators, 45% volunteers, and their years of service to 4-H ranged from less than 5 years to over 20 years (Table 2).

**Table 1**

*Summary of survey response rate (N=115)*

<b>Audience</b>	<b># Emails Sent</b>	<b># Emails Undeliverable</b>	<b># Surveyed</b>	<b># Surveys Remitted</b>	<b>% Surveys Remitted</b>
Educators	201	0	201	63	31.34
Volunteers	107	27	80	52	65.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>40.93</b>

**Table 2***Summary of respondent demographics (N=115)*

<b>4-H Affiliation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
4-H Volunteer	52	45.2
Extension Educator	63	54.8
Parent/Volunteer or Parent/Educator*	34	29.6
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	27	23.5
Female	88	76.5
<b>Years of Service</b>		
Less than 5	33	28.7
5-10	29	25.2
11-15	12	10.4
15-20	14	12.2
Over 20	27	23.5

\*4-H volunteers and Extension Educators who are also 4-H parents. Duplicates from 4-H Volunteers and Extension Educators

### Interest in International 4-H

The questions presented in Table 3 were answered with a one to five rating on a Likert-type scale with one being "Definitely No" and five being "Definitely Yes". The data in the table are the mean ranking from the identified response group. Respondents indicated an interest in providing international experiences for youth through the Oklahoma 4-H program. Parent and volunteer responses averaged over 4.0 and educator responses were over 3.5 on all positive questions (Table 3).

**Table 3***Respondent interest in international 4-H**Responses were on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1=definitely No and 5=definitely Yes (N=115)*

<b>Respondent Interest</b>	<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Educator</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Combined *</b>	<b>Standard Deviation Combined *</b>
Oklahoma 4-H should offer an international experience.	4.16	3.87	4.19	4.01	.871
International experiences are important part of youth development.	4.10	3.81	4.19	3.96	.990
Oklahoma 4-H should offer a international hosting program.	4.20	3.89	4.25	4.04	.865
Oklahoma 4-H should offer a international sending program.	4.12	3.69	4.13	3.88	1.00
Oklahoma 4-H should not offer international programs.	1.73	1.84	2.07	1.79	1.07

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

## Design of an International Experience

The questions presented in Table 4 sought to determine the respondents' perceptions of a quality international experience. Questions were answered with a one to five rating on a Likert-type scale with one being "Not Important" and five being "Very Important". The data in the table are the mean answer from the indicated response group. The most positive responses were toward creating a program with strong educational components based in study, cultural awareness and educational tours. Respondents also indicated a preference for youth to have a college credit option for participation and to include a service-learning component during the experience (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Respondent opinion of international 4-H program design  
Responses were on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1=definitely No and 5=definitely Yes (N=115)*

<b>Program Design</b>	<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Educator</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Combined*</b>	<b>Standard Deviation Combined*</b>
Oklahoma 4-H Personnel/staff should attend with the youth	4.12	3.90	4.00	4.01	1.13
Youth should stay with international families when abroad	3.76	3.75	3.69	3.76	0.95
Youth should not stay with families when abroad	2.55	2.43	2.63	2.49	1.26
Youth should participate in Cultural Tours	4.45	4.60	4.69	4.55	0.61
Youth should study the country before traveling	4.64	4.56	4.81	4.60	0.63
Youth should participate in service learning while abroad	4.33	4.08	4.44	4.20	0.85
Youth should participate in educational tours while abroad	4.47	4.63	4.56	4.58	0.60
Youth should have the option to receive college credit for their experience	4.41	4.11	4.50	4.27	0.77
Youth should only travel to English speaking countries	2.78	2.37	3.00	2.60	1.19

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

### Participant Age

Respondents were allowed to select more than one age group in response to the question "What is an appropriate age for international 4-H program participants. Responses were extremely consistent, as 103 of 115 respondents indicated ages 16-17 and 88 respondents indicated participants should be over age 18. A small percentage indicated any age under 16 years old (Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Respondent opinion of appropriate age for international 4-H program participants  
Respondents were asked to select all ages they believed to be appropriate (N=115)*

Age Range	Volunteer		Educator		Parent		Combined Response*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
9-12	3	3.06	0	0.00	2	3.03	3	1.42
13-15	8	8.06	9	7.96	4	6.06	17	8.06
16-17	46	46.94	57	50.44	32	48.48	103	48.81
Over 18	41	41.84	47	41.59	28	42.42	88	41.71
Total Responses	98		113		66		211	

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

### Length of International Experience

Respondents were given the opportunity to identify how long they thought an international experience should last. Over 50% of the surveys indicated two weeks as a desired length of the experience. In general, parents and volunteers were more comfortable than educators with longer experiences (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Respondent opinion of appropriate duration of international 4-H programs (N=113)*

Length of Experience	Volunteer		Educator		Parent		Combined Response*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2 weeks	22	43.14	35	56.45	13	39.39	57	50.89
6 weeks	16	31.37	12	19.36	8	24.24	28	25.00
1 semester	5	9.80	3	4.84	3	9.09	8	7.14
Other	8	15.69	12	19.36	9	27.27	20	16.96

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

### Cost of International Experience

In response to the question "What is an appropriate fee range for an international experience?" \$1,500 to \$1,999 was the price range chosen most often. However, over 20% indicated costs up to \$2,499 were appropriate (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Respondent opinion of appropriate cost of international 4-H program participants (N=106)*

Cost	Volunteer		Educator		Parent		Combined Response*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
\$1,000 - \$1,499	8	16.66	15	25.00	4	12.50	22	20.75
\$1,500 - \$1,999	14	29.17	23	38.33	13	40.63	36	33.96
\$2,000 - \$2,499	10	20.83	12	20.00	6	18.75	22	20.75
\$2,500 - \$3,000	11	22.92	7	11.67	6	18.75	18	16.99
Over \$3,000	5	10.42	3	5.00	3	9.37	8	7.55

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

### Participation in International 4-H Experience

The last two questions on the survey asked respondents to rate their willingness to participate in an international project by travelling abroad or hosting a student on a Likert-type scale with one being "Definitely No" and five being "Definitely Yes". On average, respondents were willing to send Oklahoma 4-H members abroad, but were less willing to host an international student in Oklahoma (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Respondent willingness to participate in international 4-H programs  
Responses were on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1=definitely No and 5=definitely Yes (N=115)*

Willingness to Participate	Volunteer	Educator	Parent	Combined Response*	Standard Deviation Combined Response*
I am willing to host an international student	2.67	3.05	3.25	2.89	1.41
I am willing to send 4-H youth internationally	3.43	3.60	3.63	3.66	1.18

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

The final quantitative question on the survey instrument asked directly if the participants would like to see Oklahoma 4-H start an International 4-H program (Table 9). Choices were "Yes, Oklahoma 4-H should do this" or "No, I do not believe this is important for 4-H." Ninety three percent responded "Yes, Oklahoma 4-H should do this."

**Table 9**

*Respondents interest toward starting an international 4-H program (N=106)*

Respondents Interest	Volunteer Response		Educator Response		Parent Response		Combined Response*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, Oklahoma 4-H should do this	44	91.67	49	83.05	27	90.00	93	87.74
No, I do not believe this is important for 4-H	4	8.33	10	16.95	3	10.00	13	12.26
Total Responses	48		59		30		106	

*\*Volunteer and Educator only. Responses of parents were not duplicated.*

The survey instrument also included two open-ended questions to give the survey participants an opportunity to share more with the researchers. The responses are summarized in Tables 10 and 11. Representative quotes are also included.

**Table 10**

*Responses to "Why do you think youth should have an international experience?"  
Grouped by four themes: education and personal growth, cultural awareness,  
globalization, and experiences.*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Education and Personal Growth (15 similar responses)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning opportunities that just aren't available in our country</li><li>• Give youth a more well-rounded education</li><li>• Allow youth to see the world from a new perspective</li><li>• Learning about other cultures is beneficial</li><li>• Chance to stretch our youth and help shape career choices</li><li>• Broaden the scope of their experiences</li><li>• Give them a larger view of the world</li></ul> <p>Selected Representative Quote: "This is a learning and growing experience that changes the youth in the way they look at other cultures. They change mentally as well as emotionally for the better. They look at the world in a different light"</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cultural Awareness (30 similar responses)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural learning experiences give the participants a sense of understanding for others and themselves</li><li>• Our youth need to be exposed to different cultures and ways of life. This promotes understanding and ultimately peace.</li><li>• Respect for others' traditions and culture is a very important aspect of maturity</li><li>• Helps us all dismiss common misconceptions about those from other countries</li><li>• 4-H members see the world through eyes other than their own</li><li>• Participants see the different life challenges &amp; cultures</li><li>• Promotes understanding of other cultures</li><li>• Volunteering is a worldwide opportunity</li></ul> <p>Selected Representative Quote: "Students need to learn that there is more to life than their corner of the world. Reading about a country does not give the feel for that country. While abroad, you learn that there may be different customs, but they laugh, love, and hurt just like we do. It will give students a new prospective on how to deal with the world and their little corner."</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Globalization (13 similar responses)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We should teach our members more about the world because we live in a global world</li><li>• It is important for people of all ages to understand some of the benefits/barriers to other countries</li><li>• young adults need to see the global picture rather than just have a one sided viewpoint</li><li>• Youth need to understand we live in a global economy</li><li>• The world is bigger than just Oklahoma or the United States</li></ul> <p>Selected Representative Quote: "Going abroad allows the youth to understand that this truly is a global society that we live in. It opens their eyes and minds to new experiences and cultures that will hopefully lead them to a more open minded tolerant view of the world and its people. It also shows them about the world outside of Oklahoma."</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Experiences (14 similar responses)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Might be the only way some youth would have a chance to do something like this</li><li>• The benefits are phenomenal</li><li>• This will help better their life</li></ul> <p>Selected Representative Quote: "An international education experience for 4-H members should allow students to experience life in other countries in order to better prepare them for success in a world that is "shrinking" due to advanced communication and travel capabilities. The experience should be uniquely 4-H. It should not merely duplicate exchange student programs that are already available through the department of education, schools, or other organizations."</p>

**Table 11**

*Positive and negative responses of respondents' additional comments with representative quotes.*

Summary of Additional Comments (26 Responses)
<b>Positive Responses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Great idea (4 Similar)</li><li>• Will help keep older youth involved</li><li>• Eye opening experience (2 Similar)</li><li>• Learn new ways of doing things</li><li>• Young adults should see the global picture</li><li>• Pre study should be required</li><li>• Post report should be expected</li><li>• Staying with families is important</li><li>• Would be interested in hosting</li><li>• Should have a well thought out plan for participating youth</li></ul> Selected Representative Quote: "I was privileged to get to travel in Europe when I was in my 20s and it was the most amazing, eye-opening, mind bending experience I've ever had."
<b>Negative Responses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are important issues and projects to be undertaken in the U.S. before we send 4-H members to other nations</li><li>• There needs to be a well thought out plan for what youth will do to qualify</li><li>• Safety and security issues would be of a concern (5 Similar)</li><li>• Only short term, past exchanges too long</li><li>• Not a major priority of Oklahoma 4-H</li><li>• The risks and costs make it unsuitable for 4-H</li><li>• I believe the same things can be achieved in the United States</li></ul> Selected Representative Quote: "I would need to have more details about the format of the program before I can give any real opinions. At this point, I would tend to think that it will take a lot of time, effort and money to develop an international program that will probably benefit a small number of youth. Oklahoma 4-H may do better to invest that time, effort and money in a program that will benefit more of our youth."

Responses to the question "Why do you think youth should have an international experience?" were grouped into four themes; *education and personal growth, cultural awareness, globalization, and experiences*. The largest number of responses was categorized as cultural awareness; the other categories had approximately one-half the number of responses. In closing the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to express any additional comments. Table 11 summarizes those remarks into positive and negative responses. The most frequent positive comments were general in nature; the most frequent negative comments were related to youth safety.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

These data indicate there is a positive perception among the 4-H volunteers and County Educators toward international programming through 4-H. The volunteers and parents generally gave a higher score to most questions than the County Educators; supporting previous research findings that indicate County Agents are resistant to international programs in 4-H (Etling, Reaman, & Sawai, 1993).

The population surveyed placed highest values on trip design. Particularly on elements that focused on cultural awareness by studying the country prior to the experience and by participating in cultural tours while abroad. They also suggested educational tours, participants receiving college credit for the experience, and conducting service learning projects as part of the experience. The appropriate fee range indicated was reasonable for designing an international experience.

Participant responses dropped somewhat when asked directly if they would host an international student or send a 4-H member abroad, indicating hesitance when confronted by being challenged to actually participate in the program.

Overall the survey results were positive toward beginning a new international program with the following recommendations:

- Experience should include learning about the culture
- Participants should study their destination country prior to travel
- Experience should be educational with tours and a service-learning component
- Participants should be at least 16 years old
- Experience should be limited to two weeks

The Oklahoma 4-H program has used the results of this survey in the design and development of a new short term international program that focuses on cultural awareness and service-learning for older youth. At the time of this article this new program was still in its pilot stages. 4-H volunteers and educators have similar perceptions and opinions as volunteers and staff in other youth serving organizations. The results of this research could be applied to any youth agencies or organization with the goal of extending their international outreach and educational efforts.

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