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Florida 4-H Youth Development Program

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## National 4-H Conference Delegates Return to Florida

(Gainesville, FL)— Florida's delegation to the 78<sup>th</sup> National 4-H Conference in Washington, DC, returned home from a week in which more than 350 youth and adults gathered to share ideas and form recommendations to guide the future of national 4-H youth development programs nationally and in their communities.

**Florida 4-H delegates who attended the conference from March 29-April 3, include: Mylo Cheng, Palm Beach County; Ardee Coolidge, Miami-Dade County; Jennifer Sullivan, Lake County; and Natalie Palumbo, Seminole County.**

This year's theme, "Green Aid: Acquire, Inform, Deliver," reflected today's environmentally conscious society. Delegates focused on the question, "As society becomes more environmentally conscious, how can the 4-H Youth Development Program aid in enhancing socially significant and relevant programming to increase the environmental awareness of our clubs, our communities, our country and our world?"

Through conference focus groups, citizenship excursions, workshops, roundtable discussions and a dynamic town hall meeting, students crafted recommendations for the future of 4-H programs. National 4-H Director Cathann Kress presented these recommendations on behalf of the delegates to Agriculture Secretary Ed Schaffer and other 4-H and USDA officials during the USDA Assembly. The recommendations include:

- Strive for a more nationally coherent program, which reflects local needs and priorities. This would include reaching out with relevant programs to youth typically underserved by 4-H, such as urban audiences.
- Develop national opportunities to engage older members and keep them involved in 4-H.
- Encourage 4-H to make greater use of communication to engage members with one another and share curricular materials and program ideas.
- At all levels of 4-H, do a better job of telling the story of 4-H through national promotions and publicity.
- Invest and allocate funds to develop new project areas, deliver the latest technologies to youth at the local level and increase state-level funding critical to their program's health.

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Schaffer accepted the recommendations and promised to give them careful consideration. He referred to the delegates as the “think tank” of 4-H and expressed his pride that 4-H, the nation’s largest youth organization, is part of the USDA portfolio.

Though many 4-H’ers live on farms, a growing number also come from urban and suburban areas. With fewer American farms, there is concern for all young people, even some in 4-H, who don’t have first-hand knowledge and understanding of American agriculture.

Schaffer asked the delegates, as young leaders, to look realistically at today’s demographics, as USDA does. He also asked the delegates to spread awareness of how much we’re all connected to the land, whether buying a loaf of bread, putting on a cotton shirt or drinking a glass of orange juice.

Delegates also met with their legislators on Capitol Hill Day to represent youth from their states and discuss state 4-H programs with congressional members and their staffs.

Since the first conference in 1927, the National 4-H Conference, known as the “Secretary’s Conference,” continues to be USDA’s premier youth development opportunity to engage youth in developing recommendations for the 4-H Youth Development Program.

The National 4-H Conference is an avenue to help youth develop recommendations to guide 4-H programs nationally and in their communities. The National 4-H Headquarters seeks to promote positive youth development, facilitate learning and engage youth in the work of the land-grant universities and USDA to enhance their quality of life. For more information, visit [www.national4-hheadquarters.gov](http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov).

National 4-H Headquarters is located at USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, CSREES focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people’s daily lives and the nation’s future. For more information, visit [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov).

Founded in 1902, Florida 4-H Youth Development Program works with more than 230,000 rural, suburban and urban youth ages 5-18 and is active in all 67 counties, and with the Seminole tribes. The 4-H program is the youth development program of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service (CES) which is headquartered in Gainesville within UF’s IFAS. The CES is funded by a partnership between federal, state and county government agencies.

For more information about Florida 4-H, visit [www.florida4h.org](http://www.florida4h.org) or contact the county extension office in your area for list of 4-H educational opportunities.

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