

What the 4-H pledge really means



The Back 40
By GAIL KECK

AS an assistant 4-H adviser and a parent of three members, I regularly stand up and recite the 4-H pledge at club meetings. I do this partially to embarrass my children, but also because I believe that for a 4-H program to be successful, the parents need the

same dedication to head, heart, hands and health as the members. Even so, I've found that those four H's aren't all parents will end up contributing to the 4-H cause. For example:

"I pledge my Help with project problems ..."

This may include, but is not limited to, tracking down and capturing an escaped steer on Christmas Eve; delivering a package of steaks to the neighbor whose yard was tracked up by

an escaped steer on Christmas Eve; and repairing a fence when it is snowing on Christmas Eve.

"... my Hearth to better bake sales ..."

From a 4-H member's perspective, a bake sale is a quick, easy way to raise money for club activities. From a mother's perspective, a bake sale involves spending \$8.74 to buy the ingredients for two-dozen no-bake cookies, two-dozen chocolate chip cookies and a plate of brownies. Add the value of

the hour or so spent baking the cookies (at least \$5.85 based on the federal minimum wage). That makes the total cost of cookie production \$14.59, not counting the paper plates, plastic wrap and green price stickers. The five dozen cookies will sell for a total of \$10, so the net gain for the club will be \$10. The net loss for the mother will be about \$20, because in addition to contributing ingredients and labor, she will buy at least three plates of someone else's cookies.

"... my Hours to club activities ..."

Not only must parents spend time at 4-H meetings, but they also end up hauling members to camps, fairs and field trips. And that doesn't even include the time spent helping with project work, record books and demonstrations. Occasionally, however, parents may also gain skills or knowledge as they work with members on 4-H activities. For instance, as a result of an extensive supermarket search in support of my daughter's international cooking project, I now know that cassava is the same thing as yucca root.

"... and my Home to project storage ..."

For instance, take three children with an average of three projects per summer times 10 years of 4-H membership per child. Before you're done, you will have artifacts from 90 different projects stored somewhere in your home. The ribbons and trophies don't take up too much space, but you may also have to deal with more bulky items such as a dismantled engine mounted on peg-board, a step stool demonstrating a mastery of mortise and tenon joints, electrical wiring demonstrations, and display boards on various subjects such as growing giant pumpkins or giving cows subcutaneous injections. Disposing of any of these items is unacceptable to 4-H members because they worked on them ALL SUMMER.

"...for my kids, their club, my country and my world."

I guess it's all part of "making the best better."

Keck writes from her Midwest farm.



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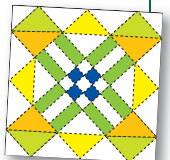
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