As we enter a new century and approach the 100th anniversary of 4-H, it is time to reexamine the role of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System, and land-grant universities specifically, with respect to the evolving nature and importance of community-based youth development.

How Youth Development Occurs
For too long our vision of youth development has been narrowly bounded by our role in specific programs and the examination of development within specific contexts—whether within the relationship with the family system, a peer group, or the school. Through research we now better understand and measure the importance of such relationships and contexts. We have also begun to examine interactions across contexts. But development is still defined as occurring primarily within rather than across contexts.

In the last 20 years we have begun seeing youth development as both cumulative and occurring across multiple contexts. Our vision has shifted to understanding the whole child and allowed for a more balanced weighting of the multiple influences of different contexts. This approach recognizes the importance of parents and the family without making it the only place where we can or should be intentional about development.

We have come to realize that youth development must, at its heart, be about more than just the reduction or elimination of problems. In the last fifteen years there has been growing acceptance of strength-based or asset-building approaches to youth development instead of deficit-driven approaches focused on intervention or prevention of problems. This change means our work must emphasize deliberate investment in positive factors that research has shown to be closely tied to reduced levels of negative as well as increased levels of thriving attitudes and behaviors (see Benson, 1997; Benson, et al., 1998; Leffert, et al., 1998; and Benson, et al., 1999 for examples of such linkages).

Daily Diet for Development
What vision of youth development will best guide us in the 21st century? I believe it is most simply captured in the paraphrasing of a statement from Karen Pittman: Youth development is the result of the accumulation of the everyday people, places and possibilities that youth experience (Pittman & Irby, 1996). Youth development occurs cumulatively and depends on relationships with people as well as the opportunities youth experience every day across the places they inhabit. This means that development occurs whether or not the young person, the larger community, or anyone in the life of the young person is attempting to shape those everyday experiences or influence the nature of what accumulates.
Healthy positive development, however, is more likely to occur when young people experience a developmentally nutritious “diet” of people, places, and opportunities over time and become committed to contributing to their own development. Just as healthy physical development requires certain nutrients, basic “developmental nutrients” or building blocks are essential for youth in their everyday experiences. Research is helping us understand what these essential developmental nutrients are and how they operate.

Quality youth development programs must be sure these developmental nutrients are fostered in their work; intentionally built by community strategies; understood and enhanced by the parents, volunteers, and professionals who work with youth; and enriched through research and evaluation.

The realization of the interconnected nature of the people, places, and possibilities youth experience drives us to operate with an understanding of the multiple interconnected visions of what we want for youth, quality programs, and communities. As educators we must clearly communicate to various public audiences how youth development occurs and what these developmental nutrients are to motivate their support for appropriate collective and individual action.

Outcomes for Young People
While we may agree with Karen Pittman’s crisp statement, “Problem free is not fully prepared,” we need to frame what “fully prepared” looks like. There are a variety of ways to do this including skill-based definitions of outcomes.
and models tied directly to the four H’s in our pledge. These all have value. I’ve chosen, however, six broad descriptors commonly used in different combinations to define the youth outcomes we can expect from successful developmental efforts—confidence, competence, caring, connection, contributing, and character.

- **Confident** youth exhibit a sense of self-efficacy, a belief that they can make a difference and that what they do matters. They can navigate through what comes their way.

- **Competent** youth are able to demonstrate accomplishments through the ability, knowledge, and skills (including social skills) they have developed. The learn-by-doing approach of 4-H is designed to build competence over time.

- **Caring** youth act in caring ways towards others. They can work with people and possess values that promote effective and caring relationships.

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by Angela Goemer

My eyelids flutter, opening to sunlight shining through my windows. Awakening to a new day, I hear my mother slaving over breakfast, probably getting a bowl of cereal and some juice ready. I think of the news I received the night before, that my grandfather had died. Thinking of times we spent together, tears began to trickle down my cheeks.

Thinking of special memories, I wonder if he had sat upon his bed like me? Of course things wouldn’t have been the same, which was interesting to think about. I’m sure back then, it was torture getting up! Climbing from warm sheets into chilly air. Setting your feet on cold wooden floors, no carpeting. Stumbling in the dark during wee hours, until finding a lantern to light. Throw on clothes and off to the kitchen where a warm meal would be waiting. Pancakes, syrup, fresh juice. A better meal than I get! After filling your tummy, you’d pull on warm clothes, and brave the wind and snow as you walked the mile to your little country school. If it was summer, you’d slip into a jacket and head down the road, where daisies would be waiting. Arriving at school, you’d find your seat among the 12 children there and give your teacher a friendly “hello.” A lot has changed since then.

This day and age involves less work. We climb out of bed to warm air seeping from heaters and head off to a shower. Throw on some clothes, spend time primping, then breakfast, but who needs it? Toast is good enough, and to your bus you go. We may have more conveniences, but we miss out on a lot. We don’t sit down to a hearty breakfast with our family every morning. We go about our business wanting to get things done, and ready to move on. When did you last think about how lucky you are to have water ready for you at any moment? As a teen in the new millennium, I know there is a big world out there. How do I view it? I see our planet as a business world, full of impatient people. They spend all day working like mad, trying to make deadlines and yelling at people to get the job done. When the day is over, they go home and take their frustration out on their families. Have all these conveniences improved our lives? When a person is dying, do you think they’re wondering why they didn’t spend more time at work, or more time with their family?

I think we need to start taking our lives more slowly. When we’re consumed by things we don’t have, how can we enjoy the things we do have? We need to take time away for ourselves, and enjoy what our world has to offer. What else is our time on earth supposed to be? One chance to see if you can beat the race of time?
Connected youth have mutually beneficial relationships with people and organizations that provide them with a sense of belonging. Connection can be within the family, peer group, or in a variety of other ways but is an essential part of their daily experiences as well as an outcome of quality youth development efforts.

Contributing youth have both the ability and desire to make a difference in their own development and in their communities. Contribution enriches daily experience and reinforces positive development.

Youth with character exhibit a sense of who they are and what is important as they make decisions about their lives. They are grounded in basic values and guided by a sense of responsibility and honesty.

Youth with this combination of outcomes are most likely to thrive in a rapidly changing, increasingly diverse information age. While such outcomes can help them overcome the negative effects of inequality, this vision of positive youth outcomes cannot be reached if basic human needs for food, shelter, and safety are not also adequately addressed. Both are necessary and

Going into the new millennium is exciting for most, but for me it’s scary. As technology continues to advance, I think people will become more deprived of their privacy. I’m sure we’ll find the cure for AIDS, but will it matter? Our society has become so sickened by money and drugs, we have ruined many of our beautiful gifts. When they do find a cure, an even deadlier disease will have already formed. Our environment will likely continue to be destroyed by the increase of people who need places to live. How can people be so blind? Why can’t they open their eyes and see, that everything they need they have? The beautiful forests, meadows, brooks. The animals and plants in the chain of life. Places you can go to enjoy yourself and find happiness with being alive. I’m afraid for any children I might have. Will they witness what they have been given? Probably not, because people receiving these gifts now don’t realize how precious the world is. In the new millennium there may not be a place where peace and serenity still exist, where people know they are safe and appreciated. All we may find is a rush of people trying to beat the clock.

I’m sure I will find myself facing difficult situations more than my grandfather did. I’m not worried. I have faith that I will make the right decisions when I’m put into that position. I will continue to be active, for I love tennis and softball. 4-H will keep me busy, playing a role in other people’s lives and giving me a sense of leadership which will expand my knowledge and skills. Although the road may be rough, I am grateful for the guidance I have received, which will determine who I am in our ever-changing world.

People say you can make a difference. I believe that, but can I really make a difference? Do people want to face change? Or will that upset their scheduled, busy lives? I know that even if you can’t change others, you can change yourself, and I leave the challenge up to you. Take time to smell the roses. Become a role model to your friends. Don’t get caught up in the rush, instead be caught up in the gift of life.

Angela Goemer
Age 13
neither is sufficient by itself. It is not an issue of which to work on first but rather how we work on both sets effectively and strategically.

Quality Standards for Youth Development Programs

While youth development happens everywhere and not just in programs, youth development programs are perhaps the most deliberate efforts to stimulate development. Therefore such programs must have an especially clear vision of quality standards and how they contribute to development. Once again many lists exist but here I propose seven for consideration and elaboration by others.

- Quality programs provide challenging opportunities where youth feel physically and emotionally safe to explore learning directly and with a likelihood of experiencing success and mastery appropriately.
- Quality programs help youth develop quality caring relationships with people who care about and connect with youth in authentic ways and are run by organizations that support their staff and volunteers’ ability to be caring and connected with youth.
- Quality programs are inclusive and serve youth of many types and help them to understand and value differences as well as develop a sense of personal and shared values.
- Quality programs provide age-appropriate youth leadership opportunities that build effective youth–adult partnerships.
- Quality programs offer a balance of opportunities for youth to excel individually as well as cooperate together successfully.
- Quality programs view youth as resources and add value to their ability to contribute to the world and to their own development.
- Quality programs are based on research, theory, and best practices and seek to frame their work and improve it based on periodic assessments of what they are doing and how it is working.

Each of these qualities deserve elaboration, but it is beyond the scope of this article. They are included here to both engage the debate on how we assess the qualities of good youth development programs and to distinguish program qualities from the outcomes we expect for the youth participants.
Characteristics of Healthy Communities

To help young people attain the developmental outcomes noted above, it is critical to envision what communities that are supportive and intentional about youth development might look like. Whether they are communities of association or geography, healthy communities share the following ingredients:

- A culture that values young people primarily as resources in which to invest, not emerging problems to be solved.
- A commitment to intentionality when it comes to developing and effectively communicating a shared sense of how individuals and the community can help youth develop.
- A deliberate approach to shaping healthy environments of people, places, and possibilities within which youth can develop.
- A support system for families and young people as they work to engage in and manage these environments in age-appropriate ways.
- A robust sense of identity that values and utilizes inclusivity and diversity to strengthen youth’s individual and collective development.
- An alignment of policies, practices, and priorities to assure positive youth development outcomes for all youth.

Growing Up in the 21st Century

In addition to the evolving understanding of youth development and what is needed for success, there are several elements of life over the next few decades that are highly likely to shape the nature of growing up in the United States. For simplicity just four are noted—change, diversity, information, and inequality.

Change

The pace of change is accelerating and the years ahead hold yet more changes in how we live, what we do with our time, and the way we relate to one another. Whatever Extension does in youth development it must do it in a way that helps youth become masters at coping with and thriving in an ever-changing world.

If our pace of change is out of sync with the changes youth experience, our work will fall further behind in relevance and utility. For example, if we think primarily about family-oriented community clubs with volunteers dedicated to many hours of weekly service, we are unlikely to see opportunities to engage youth and adults in new partnerships and delivery modes. Similarly, if we think of fairs only as places to show projects and sell animals, we are unlikely to take advantage of how fairs can impact the way communities think about their youth as resources worth greater investments. In both cases, it is not that what we have done is somehow wrong or not quality youth development. It is that we have institutionalized and frozen in place specific practices rather than letting them evolve in a changing world.

Robust communities can value the uniqueness of their members (individuality) while holding up and connecting core commonalities (integration) that make it possible to thrive together.

Diversity

The United States is made up of a diverse set of cultures, languages, races, ethnicities, family types, abilities, and perspectives. Further globalization of our economies and our media, as well as immigration, is likely to further expand these trends. Far too many people unreasonably fear these differences and communicate that fear to youth.
Youth of the 21st century must be able to build and sustain their own identities within what has been described as robust communities (Oshry, 1999). Robust communities can value the uniqueness of their members (individuality) while holding up and connecting core commonalities (integration) that make it possible to thrive together.

Extension’s work in the next century must help youth understand, value, and constructively work across differences in cultures, perspectives, and ability while building a strong sense of their own individual and cultural identity. To do this, Extension must examine its own culture and especially the culture that surrounds 4-H youth development programs. If and when these cultures are exclusionary, either intentionally or because of the nature of the projects and programs, Extension must change. A white, rural youth with a family tradition in 4-H once said, “It takes two to three years to understand all the rules and opportunities in 4-H.” If it takes that long for a member of our traditional audiences, what hope have we for reaching new audiences? With many of the youth of today and tomorrow we will not have two to three years to help them understand the possibilities of 4-H youth development programs. If 4-H programs fail to adjust, without losing the important sense of psychological ownership by youth and the strengths that come from long-term involvement, we will find ourselves facilitating an increasingly exclusive, and perhaps dying, organization. This area has major implications for how we integrate, rather than continue to segregate, our work. We need to not only reach new audiences but also help our new and current audiences get to know and work with each other differently.
Information
The amount of instantly available information is increasing exponentially. The ability to locate, use, and communicate information is critical to the development and productivity of today’s youth. Furthermore, land-grant universities and Extension will need to radically change how they view their roles in information creation, storage, synthesis, and dissemination. Many of these changes are already occurring. Their implications for Extension’s role in youth development, however, is going to rise geometrically in the coming decades, especially as youth’s understanding and use of new technologies outpaces that of adults. As one youth recently commented, “The Internet is not a tool I use, it’s a part of who I am and how I think.”

This area of change has major implications for 4-H youth development programs and the ways in which Extension educators and campus faculty work at local, state, and national levels. Youth and family development efforts will need to integrate so we can help families cope with the access to information and help youth become technology resources for their families and communities. Educators will need to become experts at the access and use of information for communication and education. Some educators will need to focus their energies on how communities think and operate in the second information age and the roles they can play in promoting a more intentional approach to community-based youth development.

Inequality
In the United States there are major, and often increasing, differences in the ability of families and individuals to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, health, and safety as well as major differences in the quality of the school, neighborhood, community services, jobs, and the daily context in which they grow up.

These inequalities greatly impact how youth develop and the differential nature of the roles Extension needs to play in different communities to be effective. While Extension must continue to guard against its youth development work becoming primarily deficit-based or a new form of social service, it must do more to understand and learn to work effectively in an ever-widening arena where all other things are simply not equal. For example, Extension cannot permit volunteers and staff to simply criticize the lack of involvement and help from poor parents or from families of color. We need to continue developing a range of models of how we work with youth and their families in different communi-
ties. Similarly, in our efforts to create a level playing field for many of our competitive activities, we need to recognize the extent to which such rules and regulations might eliminate some groups from even entering the game.

Challenges Ahead
This concluding section delineates three major challenges that have serious implications for the roles and responsibilities of Extension in its youth development efforts. These challenges are multi-dimensional and interconnected in nature. With each challenge come multiple opportunities. Both the challenges and opportunities they present must continually be addressed if Extension is to be as successful in the next century as it was in the 20th century.

Challenge 1: Recognizing our multiple, complex roles
4-H is recognized as a youth development program, not a complex set of roles played by land-grant universities. If Extension is going to be effective in its youth development efforts during the 21st century, it must become more than high-quality community programs. Extension has neither the resources nor the capacity to run enough programs for enough youth to impact communities as fully as it potentially could by playing multiple, clearly defined roles more effectively. Programs are necessary, but not the only way for Extension to optimally contribute to the development of youth. While it is critical to create and support quality 4-H youth development opportunities, program efforts can and should help ground our other efforts in very real practices. Far too often this grounding is absent in other university-based research efforts on children and youth.

Extension must also work as consultants and leaders to help communities become more intentional in supporting their youth’s development. We must create new and innovative ways for community initiatives around youth development to be planned, implemented, and evaluated in ways that can contribute to a growing research base on such community change efforts. Perhaps only Extension via strategic partnerships—with its combination of multiple community-based staff and presence at land-grant universities—has a chance to conceptually design, implement, and systematically assess enough such experiments in community-based youth development in a way that could significantly improve practice.

Similarly, the network of professional staff and the large numbers of volunteers Extension works with provide a solid foundation for increased efforts to orient, educate, and train the people who are part of and help prepare the daily “developmental meals” youth experience. This effort cannot and should not be limited only to Extension staff and 4-H volunteers around our project areas if it is to be effective. It must reach out and partner with a wide variety of other organizations to help inculcate the principles of youth development in ways that impact how all people work with youth both formally and informally.

Equally important, as a university-based organization, we must play a more significant role in the generation of new knowledge
through major research studies, program and community initiative evaluations, systematic reviews of what is known, and modeling the effective use of data in designing and implementing quality practices. This is not simply a call for more research but for the kinds of reflection, research, evaluation, and synthesis that enriches practice and increases its effectiveness. It also reflects the rich tradition of research in our agricultural and natural resources work.

by Beth Primus

I used to think the millennium was nothing, it will come and go like an overwhelming emotion. In fact, when I first saw this contest, I was going to write “I will be a youth during the beginning of the new millennium and I will be dust at the end of the millennium, just like every other youth at the beginning of the last millennium.”

One hour with an important man changed my view of the new millennium, and it is no longer a, well, depressing view. The man’s name was George. He was important to me because he understood me. All my “weird” theories and predictions, and my “strange” notions, they all made sense to him. While I was talking to him, people would stop and listen, not understanding, they would laugh at our ideas. Then one of my peers said, “Isn’t Beth scary. She is too down to earth.” He simply stated, “It is being down to earth that makes her above it. Beth is going to be the millennium girl. Her understanding of the world will help it to become.”

When someone says something that makes as much sense as that comment did, you just have to leave them alone, so my peers did, but what he said did not leave me alone. I thought about what he said for weeks, and finally, I understood the millennium and the purpose of the people in it.

I like to compare the millennium to a puzzle. The box that holds the pieces is the earth, and the pieces are the people. Just like the pieces of the puzzle determine how the puzzle will turn out, people will determine how the millennium will turn out.

Adults will play the same part as the border pieces of a puzzle. They carry the most memories, the experiences of a changing world, and the history of the old millennium. Just like the border pieces hold a puzzle together, the adults will help keep the world together during the millennium.

Youth will play a part in the millennium that I am proud to play. We will be the picture in the puzzle. The youth will add creativity to the millennium. Whatever we want the millennium to be, that’s what it will be. If each youth is unique the picture will be colorful and fun. If all the youth follow one leader it will be all the same color. Puzzles that look like that are usually taken apart quickly.

If you’ve ever done a big puzzle that’s taken a long time, you know that after awhile you get tired of it, and try to stick a piece where it does not belong. Then, when the puzzle doesn’t look right, you have to admit that the piece you made fit somewhere, doesn’t go there. Just like that piece, some of the youth will try to be who they are not. They will try to be like their best friend or a favorite actor/actress. They will try to fit in, but no matter how much they try, eventually they will have to admit that they do not go there.

Every person will be a piece of the millennium puzzle, and as insignificant as a puzzle piece may look, when a whole puzzle is put together, even the smallest of pieces are noticed.

One important man helped me notice all this, and I want to help others notice that too. We may be dust by the end of the millennium, but we can make the millennium a picture to remember. Memories can’t turn to dust.

Beth Primus
Age 15
Challenge 2: Creating distinct brand names for our program and other roles

4-H youth development programs need a clean, crisp image that stands for hands-on-learning approaches across multiple subject areas with authentic ways of engaging youth and adults in partnerships around learning. We need to fully label and appropriately identify youth who have a psychological sense of ownership and belonging in 4-H from those who participate in activities that may or may not be labeled 4-H. When we do not consistently use the 4-H label, we fail to expand its meaning to new audiences. Without a clearer definition and set of labels that distinguish differences from commonalities, our work remains poorly understood, though widely recognized.

More problematic is the use of the 4-H label on consulting, research, and training efforts that need not, and should not, be limited to the 4-H program work. Extension must find a new language for these roles in youth development that does not rely on the 4-H label. Mixing the dual roles of running a program and the set of university roles (i.e., consulting, research, and training) under one widely recognized program label blurs important distinctions and further confuses our image. Even worse, it undermines the power of the label for programmatic use and tends to suggest that the university roles are very limited and internal versus wider outreach efforts. I hope we will take our 100th 4-H anniversary to more clearly separate and label Extension’s roles so we can more effectively market both sides of our work.

Challenge 3: Investing in and structuring our non-program roles

If Extension is to live the land-grant mission in our youth development work in the next century, it must find ways to invest in and structure these roles in new ways. Without adequate resources, how are we going to research and evaluate our own program efforts, let alone conduct broader research? How are we going to structure appointments in youth development so they connect to high-quality applied research, teaching, and training that will inform what communities, leaders, and programs do to enrich the daily developmental diet of young people in many different settings? How do we build a critical mass across institutions and departments to develop the types of systematic work that will make a significant difference? We must conduct collaborative research that is at least partially supported and recognized by USDA via the National Research Initiatives and Agriculture Experiment Station funds. But these funds are likely to be insufficient to move the needed research forward so that we must seek external funding that is recognized as connected to Extension’s efforts—not just Extension’s 4-H programs.
Conclusion
Are these visions too grand for us to accomplish or the challenges too great to overcome? Possibly, but visions are supposed to aim high and challenges are meant to make us strive harder. Are the roles the right ones for Extension at this time and place in history? I believe so and hope the case I have made is at least provocative if not persuasive. Can we attempt to do anything less if we are serious about supporting the development of youth growing up in the next century? I do not see how. We must honor the wisdom and vision of those that created Extension and the land-grant system and apply it to the development of all youth growing up in the United States in the next century. I hope you will join in this journey and contribute to its success.

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