

The 2006-7 Michigan 4-H Participation Fee

Beginning with the 2006-7 program year, the Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development program will ask youth participants to pay an annual \$10 participation fee to support the development, implementation and maintenance of new or updated 4-H programs.

Why is MSU Extension (MSUE) implementing an annual youth participation fee for 4-H?

For nearly 100 years, Michigan 4-H has offered youth a breadth of program options that reflect both traditional areas of interest (such as livestock, crafts and food-related topics) and emerging areas of interest (such as computers and technology, communications and entrepreneurship). Declining levels of funding for MSUE from the State of Michigan and from many county governments has made it increasingly difficult to continue offering both the quality and quantity of programs Michigan's youth expect, deserve and need from 4-H. In order to maintain the quality and depth of 4-H programming in Michigan, several options for making up the funding deficit were explored. Charging a small, annual youth participation fee emerged as the best solution.

What other funding options were explored?

MSUE looked at increased fund-raising at local, county, regional and state levels; an attempt by the legislature to provide increased funding directly to 4-H; reducing expenses; and charging a "per event" participation fee, in addition to the annual youth participation fee.

Why was the annual youth participation fee chosen?

MSUE always presents a strong case to the legislature for increased funding during each budget cycle and will continue to do so. However, given Michigan's tough financial position, we can't place all our eggs in that basket. Increased fund-raising will also be pursued at all levels, but the outcome is uncertain and inconsistent. A "per event" fee could price many events out of reach for some participants and have a negative affect on event registrations. It also unfairly places the financial burden on fewer shoulders, rather than spreading the cost out among all 4-H youth participants.

It has become very common for parents to pay fees for their kids to participate in most community and school activities. In a survey of 4-H families, nearly 70 percent said they are willing to pay at least \$10 or more as an annual youth participation for 4-H. Nearly two-thirds of 4-H families responding to the survey preferred a one-time annual \$10 fee to increasing all 4-H event fees by 10 percent.

How was the decision made?

A statewide task force made up of 4-H staff, volunteers and youth was created to gather as much input as possible. Input was sought in many ways, including electronic and hard-copy surveys of members and their families, volunteers, and state and county 4-H staff members. The task force analyzed the information and made a recommendation to the MSUE director in the spring of 2006.

One Michigan legislator proposed that \$300,000 be included in the state budget, specifically to support 4-H programming. A final decision on implementing the participation fee was delayed, pending the success or failure of the proposed \$300,000 in 4-H funding. The proposal for \$300,000 in 4-H funding failed to make the final budget, and the MSUE leadership made a decision in August 2006 to proceed with implementation of an annual 4-H youth participation fee.

What will the fee be used for?

The fee will be used to develop and implement new 4-H programming and update existing 4-H programming. Five dollars will remain in the originating county and \$5 will be sent to the state 4-H office on the MSU campus out of each \$10 fee. 4-H staff members would be able to write proposals and submit them to the state 4-H office to make use of the state office's portion of the funds. Examples of how the money might be used include:

- ❖ Purchasing or developing materials for brand new program areas, such as “e” communications or bio products.
- ❖ Updating existing program materials to reflect the latest research, such as new animal science practices, new nutrition information (i.e. Food Pyramid) or new plant growth techniques.
- ❖ Improving/expanding programs that build life skills in communications, citizenship, leadership and decision-making.

Is the fee for youth, volunteers or both?

This fee is only for youth participants.

Will it be per individual or per family?

Families with one youth participant will pay \$10; families with two youth participants will pay \$20 total; families with three *or more* youth participants will pay an annual maximum of \$30 total.

What is the definition of a family?

A family is all siblings.

Will every youth involved in 4-H in any way have to pay the fee, or only those in a club?

In the 2006-7 pilot year, youth involved in clubs will be charged the \$10 annual participation fee. We will also charge youth who are NOT a member of a 4-H club \$10 to attend paid 4-H events, in addition to the normal registration fee. For instance, a teen who is not in a 4-H club that registers to attend Exploration Days would be charged the normal registration fee, plus an additional \$10.

As the fee program evolves, we will investigate the possibility of additional participation fees for youth involved in 4-H through schools and community partnerships, where fees are deemed appropriate.

Will everyone pay the same, regardless of project area?

All youth involved in clubs or attending 4-H events as non-club members will pay the same \$10 annual participation fee, regardless of the projects in which they are involved.

Will the fee vary by county or region?

No, the *state level* annual youth participation fee of \$10 will be the same throughout the state. If counties or clubs charge their own participation fees, these would be in addition to the \$10 state level fee.

Can a county choose to collect only the 4-H state office portion of the fee (\$5) instead of the entire \$10?

No, although the county could choose to cover \$5 of the fee on behalf of the youth participant, through fund-raising, sponsorship or their 4-H council. However, the portion covered by the county must go into the county's "fee" fund and those dollars must be used to develop, implement and/or update 4-H programming.

What if a family can't afford the fee?

4-H will not turn away any youth who wants to participate in 4-H. Based on recommendations from club leadership, county 4-H educators would be able to determine which youth are eligible to have the fee waived. Eligibility for free or reduced school lunch might be one guideline to use in determining who should receive a fee waiver. We will use the 2006-7 pilot year to explore ideas and options for developing a system for determining fee waivers.

Will there be additional fees throughout the year?

The state level annual 4-H youth participation will only be charged once per year. Any other fees that have previously existed as part of the 4-H program will continue to apply, as usual.

Will there be increases every year? Is the fee being phased in?

The fee is not being phased in, and we don't anticipate fee increases every year. There may be a need at some time in the future to increase the fee, but the \$10 annual fee should not increase for at least the next few years.

When will it go into effect?

The original plan was to implement the fee starting September 1, 2006, but waiting to see what the legislature would do about the \$300,000 proposed for 4-H put us seriously behind schedule. We

would like counties to begin collecting the fee with their 2006-7 enrollments, however we know that might be difficult for all clubs because of the late start in getting the new fee information out. Please do your best in this first year to collect fees from the youth who will be part of your program for 2006-07. Fee collection should begin as soon as possible and include all youth in your 4-H clubs.

How will the fee be collected?

Clubs/counties have a number of options:

- ❖ The club leader will collect the fee from families at the time of youth enrollment in a 4-H club.
- ❖ The club leader will collect the fee from families of youth in the club at a time other than during enrollment.
- ❖ The club undertakes a fund-raising event or finds a sponsor to cover all or part of the participation fee for all or part of its club members.
- ❖ The county undertakes a fund-raising event or finds a sponsor to cover all or part of the participation fee for all or part of the county's youth members.
- ❖ The county's 4-H Council covers all or part of the participation fee for all or part of the county's youth members.
- ❖ Some combination of the above.

The Blue Ribbon Enrollment form will be modified to include a check-off box for fee payment and a box to indicate if the fee has been waived. If clubs collect the fee or engage in fund-raising or sponsorship to raise the fee, the club leader sends the money to their county office by no later than August 15, 2007. County offices must send the 4-H state office portion of the fee to the state office by no later than August 31, 2007. Clubs/counties may send the money earlier, either in one lump sum or in a series of payments. Please do what works best for your county.

Where should these fees be deposited, in the county office or with the County Leaders Council/Advisory Group?

This decision is up to the local county unit. For some of you, it may make more sense to have the funds in one or the other of the structures for ease of collection, tracking and accountability and for disbursement for programming. Accounting practices will be the same for either.

If a youth joins partway through the year, will the fee be prorated?

No. The annual participation fee covers one 4-H programming year, which runs from September 1 to August 31. The fee would be the same no matter when the youth joined during the year.

Who will keep track of who's paid and who hasn't?

Club leaders will keep track of which of their members have paid. Counties will track and report how many participant fees are included when money is sent to the state office, and how many participants have qualified for a fee waiver.

Will ten percent of the 4-H fee revenue go to support the director's office, as is the case with PEF?

No, all of the money collected through 4-H participation fees will be used only for 4-H programming.

What do participants receive for our \$10 membership fee?

We are working on this! We envision some type of premium item that would be provided for each participant at the time of enrollment (this year, counties will receive this item some time during the year to distribute to clubs).