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4-H is Going Digital

Just about anyone who has ever been involved in 4-H knows that being a 4-H member or leader can be a great learning experience and a lot of fun. Participating in the interesting things that 4-H has to offer can sometimes mean a lot of paperwork too. There are enrollment forms, project forms, medical forms, and forms for showing at the fair, just to name a few.

That's about to change with the introduction of a new information management system that will allow 4-H members and leaders to go online to do many of the things they have traditionally done on paper.

In January, Cooperative Extension in 17 Pennsylvania counties began piloting a new Extension Data System, called e-data for short, which is designed to make enrolling, reporting, and other "paperwork" faster, easier, and more efficient. 4-H members and leaders in Clinton, Centre, Lycoming, Clearfield, Jefferson, Elk, McKean, Cameron, Potter, Lycoming, Snyder, Union, Mifflin, Northumberland, Montour, Columbia, and Huntingdon Counties will get a chance to try out the new e-data system in coming weeks. If all goes well, the system will be implemented in time for the start of the 2010 program year.

By using e-data, those who want to join 4-H will be able to complete their enrollment applications online. Once they become members or leaders, they will be able to use the online e-data system to register for events or educational programs, record their activities, submit photographs, and obtain 4-H information.

The system was developed in response to requests from 4-H leaders, members, and Extension Staff. It is designed not only to make recordkeeping easier and more efficient, but to cut down on operational costs such as paper and postage and enhance communication.

The 4-H Program is the first of Cooperative Extension's many programs to begin to utilize e-data. Other Extension Programs, such as Master Gardener and Forest Steward will join throughout 2009.

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