

Abstract

Background: According to Google Trends, interest in homesteading has increased by 25% in the last 5 years and the USDA reports that 15% of Americans have moved to rural areas in search of a homesteading lifestyle. The Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp provides youth with hands-on experiences to develop life skills centered around self-reliance, sustainability, and health-conscious living. By learning traditional homesteading practices, such as gardening, food preservation, and foraging, campers gain a deeper appreciation for sustainable living.

Objectives: The primary objective of the camp is to teach youth (ages 8-14) practical skills in gardening, food preservation, foraging, and homesteading history. The camp aims to foster self-reliance, healthy living principles, and self-confidence while offering a historical perspective on homesteading practices. **Methods:** The camp utilizes a series of hands-on activities, including gardening, preserving food, foraging for wild edibles, meat processing, grain milling, and basic sewing. A field trip to a pioneer farm provided experiential learning on early homesteading. The program was supported by local agricultural agents, volunteers, and community partners.

Results: Survey results from 22 participants revealed that 83% gained knowledge of foraging, 89% learned to prepare fresh vegetables, and 100% acquired gardening skills. Additionally, all participants expressed an interest in returning. Youth demonstrated an understanding of the environmental benefits of reducing waste, with a broader impact on their communities through sustainable living practices. **Conclusion:** The Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp successfully equipped youth with valuable life skills while fostering a deeper connection to history and sustainability. The program promotes self-reliance, resilience, and community-mindedness, preparing the next generation to positively influence their environments. Volunteers and community partnerships were essential to the camp's success, enhancing the educational experience and community impact.

Scope and content of the program, evaluation or research project

The Homesteaders Day Camp, conducted by Lafayette and Union County 4-H, was a three-day program designed to teach youth the practical skills and traditions of homesteading. The camp offered participants the opportunity to explore a variety of hands-on activities, including gardening, food preservation, foraging, meat processing, and basic sewing. By engaging in these activities, campers gained valuable knowledge about self-sufficiency, sustainability, and healthy living practices. The camp also emphasized the importance of connecting to the past through a field trip to a living historical pioneer farm, where youth experienced first-hand the daily chores and homesteading practices of early settlers. Throughout the camp, participants developed critical life skills, a deeper understanding of sustainability, and built confidence as they learned to create and care for their own food, preserve resources, and contribute to a more self-reliant lifestyle.

Program Components:

1. **Gardening:** Youth visited a garden and harvest vegetables to be used in food preparation.
2. **Food Preservation:** Campers discovered various methods of preserving food, including making jams and jellies from wild and farm-grown berries. They also participated in food preservation activities, such as preparing and canning green beans and peas.
3. **Foraging:** Youth were introduced to the art of foraging for wild berries and other edible plants. They identified safe, edible wild foods and incorporated them into meals and preserved foods.
4. **Meat Processing:** Campers explored the processes involved in butchering and processing meat, with hands-on experience using traditional hand tools to grind sausage.
5. **Grain Milling:** Youth learned the process of turning corn into meal and grits using hand mills and sifters, offering them a connection to how early homesteaders prepared their food.
6. **Basic Sewing Techniques:** Participants learned basic sewing skills, such as sewing on a button and making minor clothing repairs. These skills promote independence and self-sufficiency in everyday life.
7. **Homesteading History:** A highlight of the camp included a field trip to a state park with a living history pioneer farm. There, youth will experienced first-hand the daily chores and homesteading practices that pioneers used more than 150 years ago, offering a connection to the past and an understanding of the hard work that went into sustaining a homestead before modern technology and conveniences.

Learning Objectives:

- **Self-Reliance:** Campers develop practical skills that foster independence in day-to-day life.
- **Health Consciousness:** By working with fresh produce and learning food preservation methods, youth gain an understanding of the benefits of healthy, sustainable living.
- **Self-Confidence:** Engaging in hands-on tasks and learning new skills help campers build confidence in their ability to succeed in a variety of areas.
- **Connection to History:** Through the field trip and hands-on activities, youth connect with the traditions of homesteading and develop an appreciation for the resourcefulness and hard work of early settlers.

By the end of the Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp, participants acquired a variety of practical skills, gained a greater appreciation for sustainable living, and strengthened their sense of self-reliance and confidence in their abilities. The camp offers a unique opportunity to experience homesteading practices in a fun, interactive, and educational forage for edible berries in the woods, which could then be preserved. UF-IFAS Agricultural agents contributed by teaching campers simple yet effective gardening techniques, helping them understand the fundamentals of growing their own food. The Florida State Park Service and Dudley Farm State Park played a crucial role in sharing the primitive living practices of early homesteaders, giving youth insight into how those methods could still be applied today. The County Department of Health also played a key role by educating campers on staying safe while working in the sun and in very high temperatures, ensuring they understood the importance of hydration and sun protection. The Florida Forest Service offered knowledge on identifying safe edible plants and wild berries. Through these partnerships, the camp was able to provide a fun, educational experience that emphasized self-reliance, sustainability, and an appreciation for both modern and traditional homesteading practices.

Educational Value and Significance of Program

Teaching youth homesteading offers valuable benefits by instilling practical life skills that promote self-reliance, sustainability, and healthy living principals. Through hands-on experiences like gardening, food preservation, and foraging, youth learn to grow and prepare their own food, while gaining an appreciation for resourcefulness and hard work. By incorporating traditional practices alongside modern techniques, campers also develop a deeper connection to history and the environment. Additionally, lessons on safety, teamwork, and problem-solving enhance their self-confidence and ability to thrive in both rural and urban settings. Overall, homesteading education equips youth with lifelong skills that foster independence and resilience.

Impact of the program, evaluation, or research project on youth, the 4-H program, or the community.

The Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp, attended by 22 youth ages 8-14 from Lafayette and Union Counties, has already shown significant positive impact on both the participants and their communities. Through surveys and observations, it was clear that the camp provided valuable learning experiences: 83% of participants (n=22) gained knowledge about foraging, 89% (n=22) learned to prepare a fresh vegetable for eating, and 100% (n=22) acquired gardening skills. Additionally, 100% (n=22) of youth understood the environmental benefits of reducing waste, and all expressed interest in attending the camp again. The long-term impact of the camp extends beyond the individual, as these young people are now equipped to contribute to their communities by growing and sharing their own food, promoting sustainability, and practicing resourcefulness. By building self-reliance and fostering an understanding of sustainable practices, the camp is helping to cultivate a generation of resilient, community-minded adults who will positively influence their local environments for years to come.

Involvement of Adults and Teen Volunteers

Volunteers were a vital component in the success of the Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp, contributing their time and expertise to enrich the learning experience for youth. They played a key role in teaching essential skills such as basic sewing techniques, including how to repair clothing and sew on buttons. Volunteers also helped guide campers through the preparation of fresh produce, simple food preservation methods, and the process of making jams and jellies. Local farmers generously opened their farms to the campers, offering a hands-on experience of harvesting fresh crops and berries. Through these contributions, volunteers not only enhanced the camp's educational offerings but also fostered a strong sense of community, demonstrating the importance of collaboration and shared knowledge in building resilient, resourceful youth. Their support was instrumental in making the camp a memorable and impactful experience for all involved.

Collaboration

The success of the Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Summer Camp can largely be attributed to the collaborative efforts of a variety of organizations and agencies that provided expertise and support throughout the program. Lafayette and Union County 4-H agents worked alongside foresters from the Florida Department of Forestry, who taught youth to identify and safely harvest wild berries. Community partners offered valuable resources including knowledge and donations. This collaborative effort also raised awareness of beneficial 4-H programs in the communities. Other partners participating in the camp were the Department of Health as well as the Florida State Park Service.



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Up-Coming Events

Thursday August 8, Forest Management and Wildfire Mitigation Workshop, 9:00-12:00, Lafayette Co. Extension Office

Tuesday, August 13, Regional Peanut Field Day, 9:AM-1:00PM, North FL Research Education Center Suwannee Valley

Wednesday August 14 Chick-Chain Practice, 3:00-4:00, 4-H Classroom

Wednesday August 21, Chick-Chain Practice, 3:00-4:00, 4-H Classroom

Tuesday September 3, Lafayette County Chic-Chain Show, 6:00PM

Tuesday September 3, Community 4-H and Cloverbuds Club. 3:00 PM 4-H Classroom

Tuesday September 10, Quad County Chic-Chain Show, Madison Co. 6:00PM

Tuesday September 17, Anglers Club meeting. Picket Lake, 3:00PM

Tuesday September 23, Archery 4-H Club Meeting. 4-H Classroom, 3:00 PM



4-Hers Learn self-Sufficiency at Homesteaders Camp

Shawn Jackson

The Youth Homesteaders Camp provided a unique experience where participants learned traditional homesteading skills, focusing on self-sufficiency and a connection to the land. Youth from Lafayette and Union Counties enjoyed activities that included grinding fresh pork into sausage, making cornmeal and grits with a hand-cranked mill, and crafting jelly from wild Mayhaws and hog plums. Each youth prepared their own homemade buttermilk biscuits, enjoyed with fried sausage and grits, and made butter from scratch. Youth also learned about basic gardening and even spent time shelling peas and shucking corn. A field trip to Dudley State Park in Newberry offered a glimpse into historical homesteading practices, showing how tasks were once done without modern technology. Everyone had a greater appreciation for today's comforts and a renewed understanding of living more independently. Special thanks the many volunteers who helped with the 4-H Homesteaders Camp including our partners at the Florida Forestry Service, Florida State Park Service, and the department of health.



Meagan Daniel, Union County 4-H Agent helps campers prepare a delicious meal from scratch.



Lafayette 4-Hers working hard to grind pork and preparing to make fresh sausage.



Shucking corn and remove silks then cooking the corn and toasting with homemade butter.



Supporting documentation Search for Excellence in Camping Award
Growing Skills, Building Confidence: The Jr. Homesteaders 4-H Camp

Michael S. Jackson, Megan Daniel, Emily Beach



UF | IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



JUNIOR HOMESTEADERS 4-H DAY CAMP

Join us!

This is the perfect opportunity for youth to explore homesteading while learning valuable life skills that inspire self-reliance, promote healthy living, and build self-confidence. Through engaging, hands-on activities, campers will discover how homesteading practices can be adapted to fit modern lifestyles, fostering a deep appreciation for sustainable living and the heritage of early settlers. We will visit local sites, and camp will wrap up with a trip to Dudley Farms State Park and the UF Blueberry Lab.



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July 9-11, 2024



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Visiting the local meat butcher.



Making Mayhaw Jelly



Union Co 4-H at Dudley Farm State Park



Lafayette Co 4-H at Dudley Farm State Park



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