A lot of people politely (and sometimes not so politely) say they don’t understand what 4-H is. It has been 110 years since 4-H started and the name still conjures up corn, canning, and cows. To expand upon this, we have been saying, “4-H is more than cows and cooking.” However, telling you exactly what we are is a tough job. We are an organization that teaches youth important life lessons in safe and nurturing environments through hands-on activities, which allow them to grow as people while they are having fun.

In North Carolina there are more than 200,000 4-H members. In 2011 more than 6,500 youth took part in Robeson County 4-H. We have a wide range of activities that appeal to almost everyone and youth can pick and choose what they want to try. If I had to give you a list of our top five areas of 4-H participation you might be surprised. This year Citizenship and Civic Education, Plants and Animals, and Consumer and Family Sciences had a combined total of 661 participants, and those are the three categories with the lowest participation at just 10 percent of our total membership.

Environmental Education and Earth Science was the fifth most popular category with 659 participants. Those who take part in this category include youth who attend our weeklong overnight camp at Betsy-Jeff Penn in Reidsville, N.C. Youth have the opportunity to learn about weather and climate, energy, soil and water conservations, geology, recycling, fisheries, and may also take part in our shooting sports program.

Communications and Expressive Arts came in fourth with 663 participants. Youth who participate in this category often compete in our public speaking and/or presentation contests on the county, district, and possibly state levels. They may take part in our Talent Showcase or complete a project record book (a report similar to a book report, but summing up a specific 4-H project they completed over the course of the year).

Our third most popular category was Healthy Lifestyles Education with more than 938 participants. Thanks to the efforts of our Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program Assistant and Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agents students in the schools get a chance to learn about the benefits of healthy eating and fun ways to be active.
According to parents, youth are making a healthier food choice, which means they will be less likely to face heart disease and diabetes as they get older.

Personal Development and Leadership came in second with 1,584 participants. These activities include officer positions and youth who take the opportunity to learn about different careers as part of our Summer Fun program and gain social recreation skills.

Our category with the most participation (drum roll please) was Science and Technology. This encompasses activities such as our Biotech Day Camp, Animal Science Day Camp, Embryology, Aerospace, and so much more. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM as it is more commonly referred to is a hot topic these days and our youth can’t get enough. Our Biotech Day Camp is the first camp to fill up each year. Our youth are learning about ideas and careers and what they need to do now to ensure their futures.

Maybe this can give you a better idea of some of the things 4-H offers for our members. For many youth we are the start of their future, making the best better as our motto says and we’re having fun while we do it. Wouldn’t you like to find out what 4-H is?

For more information, please contact Shea Ann DeJarnette, Extension 4-H Youth Development agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Shea_Ann_DeJarnette@ncsu.edu or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.