Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service
January 18, 2010

4-H: Mobilizing Head, Heart, Hands and Health to Assist Families Coping with Tough Times

Today, our country is in the midst of a serious economic crisis. Men and woman across the country are losing their jobs, homes are in foreclosure, children are going to school hungry, the elderly are unable to afford energy bills, businesses are closing and community resources are being stretched to the limits. As a result, many families are facing economic challenges, some for the first time ever. The current economy has some middle-class families falling through the cracks into poverty. And those families already struggling with poverty before the economic downturn are encountering even more difficult circumstances.

The stock market may be showing signs of improvement however other indicators, such as unemployment rates are not expected to show improvement for quite some time. The financial crisis for families is far from over and it will still take some time for most to recover. In today’s economic climate, civic engagement will play an even greater role in responding to the needs of families and the communities in which they live. President Obama’s call to service points to the need for America to lay a new foundation of recovery and growth – empowering individuals and organizations to take an active role in improving the lives of our fellow citizens. “Economic recovery is as much about what you're doing in your communities as what we're doing in Washington – and it's going to take all of us, working together.”

4-H has a long history of engaging young people individually and collectively in solving problems and making a difference in their communities. However, now is the time for 4-H to renew its commitment to citizenship as an integral and important component of the organization to ensure a lifetime of contribution as youth enter adulthood. As such, 4-H will launch its renewed commitment to service as part of the larger effort to help solve community issues with collective participation in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. The theme for our system will be 4-H: Mobilizing Head, Heart, Hands and Health to Assist Families Coping with Tough Times – focusing on the economic challenges and issues facing American families.

About the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the King Holiday as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day off from work or school, Congress asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy by turning community concerns into citizen action. The King Day of Service is a way to transform Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life and teachings into community service that helps solve social problems.

The King Day of Service takes place each year on the third Monday in January. In 2010, it will take place on January 18. The vision of the King Day of Service is to commemorate the

1 www.serve.gov
2 4-H Citizenship Guiding Document
3 www.mlkday.gov
legacy of Dr. King through service projects that strengthen communities, empower individuals and bridge barriers. The goal is to bring together people in the community that may not ordinarily meet, cultivate ongoing relationships and community partnerships, and engage volunteers beyond the day of service. Dr. King recognized the power of service to strengthening communities, once stating that “Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.”

The King Day of Service is about more than just a one day service project - it is about connecting people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities in a shared commitment to making a difference in their communities. It is also a great opportunity to let people know what 4-H is all about - not just on one day, but throughout the year.

How will 4-H be involved?

There are many types of service that draw on Dr. King’s message of uniting people around a common goal to help solve social problems. Some service may meet a tangible need, such as organizing a food drive, or some may meet a need of the spirit, such as a series of open-forum discussions. No matter the type of service, participation in the MLK Day of Service can be a valuable and transforming experience for 4-H youth, 4-H clubs, the community and the nation. However, the success of this experience has a lot to do with planning. To help clubs get started early, the 4-H Citizenship Task Force will release some tools, resources and project examples to the system on September 15.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Hampton, lhampton@csgreens.usda.gov, 202-720-4087, or Justin Crowe, jcrowe3@utk.edu, 865-974-2128