

New 4-H program sponsorship focused on plant, soil science

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Contact: Dr. Darlene Locke, [979-845-6533](tel:979-845-6533), dlocke@ag.tamu.edu

COLLEGE STATION – The Dixon Water Foundation will provide a \$1,600 sponsorship for the Texas 4-H member with the winning Plant and Soil Science state-level record book.

“The sponsorship, which will be awarded to the 4-H member earning first place at the state level, is to be applied to their registration for participation in the Texas 4-H Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. in November,” explained Dr. Darlene Locke, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialist, 4-H youth development, College Station.

Locke, coordinator of the Texas 4-H Leadership Conference, said the program recognizes youth for their accomplishments while providing enhanced leadership and citizenship engagement for participants while touring Washington.”

“The conference provides an opportunity for 4-H’ers to continue their personal development in leadership and citizenship,” she said. “During the conference, the youth engage in citizenship activities like watching the changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery, where 4-H places a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They also meet with members of Congress representing Texas and their staffs to tell them about their 4-H experiences and record book work.”

The Dixon Water Foundation sponsorship for 4-H focuses on plant and soil health. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo)

Clay Pope, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Southern Plains Climate Hub coordinator in climate conservation, who established a plant and soil science-oriented program in Oklahoma, helped bring Texas 4-H and the Dixon Water Foundation together.

“The USDA Agricultural Research Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas work cooperatively to provide education for farmers and ranchers,” Pope said. “This sponsorship will help support their efforts at the youth level.”

Pope said there has been a concerted effort to try to get farmers and ranchers to look at the practices that improve soil health, primarily by using no-till, cover crops and better pasture management as tools to help deal with droughts, floods and other extreme weather events.

“Soil health is a cutting-edge movement in U.S. production agriculture,” Pope said. “You can’t hardly pick up a copy of Progressive Farmer or Successful Farming without seeing an article about soil health, no-till

or cover crops. Still, as with all cutting-edge information, it takes a while for it to filter out to the countryside.”

He said this creates an opportunity for 4-H members to help inform and educate their parents involved in farming and ranching about soil-improvement practices.

Melissa Bookhout, secretary/treasurer for the Dixon Water Foundation, Marfa, said the mission of the foundation is to restore and preserve watersheds and sequester carbon through economically viable, regenerative and sustainable land management.

“We feel it is important to encourage and support students in agriculture,” Bookhout said. “There are so many learning opportunities out there, and we want to help these kids going forward.”

Texas 4-H members can participate in the multi-state efforts to encourage youth to learn more about soil science as well as benefit from those efforts, Pope said.

“Texas 4-H members, through their participation in activities focused on soil health, can have a leg up on understanding these concepts and will be better prepared to work in the agriculture industry of the future, whether it be farming and ranching or working for an agriculture-oriented agency or agribusiness,” he said.

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