

Utah 4-H Youth Get World Perspective in Ireland and Peru

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Danika Davis, 4-H

member from Kane County, holds a sheep. (Courtesy of Kaitlyn Lunt)

This summer, two groups of Utah State University Extension 4-H youth experienced life way beyond the county fair. They built roads and friendships in Peru and explored agricultural innovation in Ireland.

The Utah 4-H international travel program was established to provide youth with opportunities to broaden their understanding of agriculture, culture, leadership, and personal growth through experiences abroad. Reflections from participants on trips to Ireland and Peru show that these programs create lasting impacts that extend far beyond sightseeing.

During the trip to Ireland, youth discovered that while agriculture varies around the world, farmers everywhere share similar values.

Sharon Bee, Weber County 4-H program coordinator, said her group observed that successful farming there is very un-Utah-like in its climate, geography, and natural resources.

"Irish agriculture is highly export-oriented and relies on technology to remain competitive," she said. "Robotic dairy operations, apple processing facilities, and modern crop production systems demonstrated how innovation is transforming agriculture there."

Entrepreneurship was another important lesson, Bee said. The 4-H youth saw how international businesses continually refine products and services to create greater value.

The Peru experience, led by Vernon Parent, Extension professor, 4-H statewide youth leadership and civic engagement, emphasized personal relationships, cultural understanding, resilience, and self-confidence. He said whether playing soccer with neighborhood youth after visiting Machu Picchu or living in a remote village while completing a road-building service project, they formed genuine friendships that left lasting impressions.

"Many of the 4-Hers gained a deeper appreciation for their own lives after witnessing the living conditions in rural Peru," Parent said. "Despite limited resources, local residents displayed remarkable optimism and resilience. Happiness often comes from perspective rather than possessions, leading to meaningful discussions about gratitude and perseverance."

The Peru trip was also physically and mentally challenging, he said. Hiking at elevations between 7,500 and 14,000 feet, hauling rocks, and helping construct village roads tested the youths' ability to accomplish difficult tasks. Their hard work earned the respect of local villagers, and the blending of cultures created new perspectives for everyone.

"Students learned traditional dances, explored local customs, and discussed family roles in Peru," Parent said. "Visits to ancient historical sites and conversations with local guides also enriched their appreciation for Peru's heritage and history. The youth also met families living on floating reed islands; a centuries-old way of life. They experienced the challenges of preserving culture while adapting to change."

Both the Ireland and Peru trips helped youth recognize the value of earning and saving money to pay for their trips. They gained a sense of independence, responsibility, and pride. Although the journey included challenges, most agreed the experience was worthwhile, and they were going to start saving for the next international trip!

For more information about 4-H programs, visit extension.usu.edu/utah4h/.



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