

Utah Youth Teach and Lead at National “Ignite by 4-H” Conference

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Kendall Burch, Sharon Bee, Emily Davis, and Rylee Ward at the Great American Agriculture Celebration on the White House South Lawn.

A delegation of 66 teen leaders, volunteers, faculty, and staff from Utah State University Extension 4-H recently attended “Ignite by 4-H” in Washington, D.C. The conference is designed to strengthen workforce readiness by helping youth explore career pathways, build confidence, develop leadership capacity, and apply real-world problem-solving skills. This year marks the state’s largest delegation to date.

Utah youth served as both learners and leaders at the conference, presenting 15 youth-led workshops for peers from across 53 states and territories and nine U.S. Naval installations. Topics included mental health strategies, equine science, STEM outreach, and culturally responsive programming. Through these presentations, youth strengthened skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking.

“This national visibility for our youth is more than recognition – it is proof that when young people are given real opportunities to lead, they rise to the occasion,” said Dave Francis, USU Extension youth development director. “Watching Utah 4-H youth teach, present, and represent our state on a national stage shows exactly what Beyond Ready is about: building confidence, career skills, and leadership that prepares them for work, life, and meaningful service in their communities.”

While at the conference, three Utah 4-H AgriScience Ambassadors and one advisor were invited to attend the Great American Agriculture Celebration on the White House South Lawn, marking the 250th anniversary of American agriculture. This invitation further highlights

the importance of Utah’s youth leadership and workforce development efforts.

“It was an amazing experience, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to attend,” said 4-H ambassador Kendall Burch. “Being able to hear the President of the United States of America speak about things that will impact me and my family’s future and things I hold so close to my heart was an incredible experience that words can barely describe.”

Emily Davis, 4-H ambassador, said it was truly an amazing opportunity to attend the Great American Agriculture Celebration at the White House.

“I felt as if I was walking amongst giants,” she said. “To be able to gather with agricultural people of all kinds and celebrate America and its producers opened my eyes to see how many people are really involved in the agricultural scene to help keep our country running. I am honored to be included, and grateful I was able to participate in this monumental experience.”

Francis said the strong showing for Utah 4-H demonstrates both the reach of the program and the readiness of 4-H youth to lead, teach, and engage with their peers.

“We are incredibly proud of our youth,” he said. “The experience reinforces the impact the 4-H program has on preparing our young people for work and life.”

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