

PROJECT CITIZENSHIP



*National Farmers Union
Youth Education
Curriculum*





Greetings!

Through guidance from its national board of directors and state education directors, National Farmers Union has chosen “Project Citizenship” as its 2008 youth education curriculum theme.

The future of family farm agriculture depends heavily upon the civic involvement of the next generation. National Farmers Union believes young people can practice good citizenship now, and not only when they reach adulthood. Farmers Union encourages this through leadership training and opportunities for young people as early as first grade.

The 2008 elections also make “Project Citizenship” a timely topic. Although your students likely will be ineligible to vote in this year’s elections, they will be exposed to campaign signs and ads. Understandably, most will be aware of the elections, yet some may feel confused and left out of the process.

Through the following lesson plans, students will explore their roles and responsibilities as leaders, advocates and citizens. They should begin to realize the power of one through individual activism and the strength that comes from cooperation and teamwork. They will also learn how Farmers Union and its farmer-members and member-owned cooperatives participate in the democratic process and lead as local, state, national and global citizens.

On the following pages you will find background information on these topics and lesson plans for grades 1-12. These lesson plans may be used in a series or as stand-alone activities to supplement your teachings.

Thank you for the time and energy you devote to educating young people.

All the best!

Laura Johnston Monchuk
Director of Education
National Farmers Union

“Project Citizenship”

Youth Leader Overview

What is Citizenship? Wikipedia.com defines “active citizenship” as the act of “working toward the betterment of one’s community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work and other such efforts to improve life for all citizens.” It goes on to say, “The implication is that an active citizen is one who exercises both their rights and responsibilities in a balanced way.”

Most immediately think of citizenship to one’s country. However, citizenship could also apply to one’s school, community, state, and world.

Youth: Citizens Later or Citizens Now?

Some view children as citizens in the future and focus on developing their skills for their future role as citizens. Another approach views children as citizens now and focuses on the ways they can incorporate the elements of citizenship into their lives as youth.

Although American children gradually acquire citizenship rights throughout the years, they are citizens of the United States from day one and can be educated about their rights, roles and responsibilities as citizens no matter what their age.

Even the youngest children can contribute meaningfully to their communities. Studies have shown that youth are more likely to benefit from, and remain engaged in, community activities if they are involved prior to their teenage years. By learning about the causes of a problem, providing service, and having an active role in changing a situation, they learn that their ideas and actions can make a difference.

Youth want to be heard and, furthermore, deserve to be heard. They have new ideas and different perspectives than adults. Young, creative minds are valuable resources for Farmers Union. Allowing youth the chance to be heard will have a strong impact on our organizations, our society and our future. We can provide youth with lifelong values of generosity, leadership and citizenship that will lead to stronger and more caring communities today and in the future.

What NFU is Doing

In its national policy manual, National Farmers Union states the importance of “greater encouragement for Farmers Union youth to attain positions of responsibility within the organization” and “increased involvement of youth in the organization’s decision-making process, group action and conventions.” National Farmers Union and state Farmers Union organizations encourage youth citizenship through educational efforts and leadership opportunities for young people as early as first grade. Through these “Project Citizenship” curriculum activities, Farmers Union strives to foster an even stronger youth voice in the organization.

What You Can Do

Encourage your organization to create a stronger “youth voice” component. Youth voice is the concept that young people are respected and solicited for their ideas and opinions. When creating youth-targeted activities, involve young people. They, in fact, are experts in their field. Their ideas could also be valuable when planning and strategizing for the future of the organization as a whole. Look for authentic ways to involve youth and be careful not to tokenize them. Identify and give clear parameters of what is expected from the young people. For an introduction to youth voice, visit www.freechild.org/youthvoice.htm.



By giving youth a voice today, we give them the strength to lead tomorrow.

Tips for Using NFU's Lesson Plans

1. Do your homework. Make sure you have read through the entire lesson plan before attempting to share the information with children.
2. If working with several age groups, try to present background information and any joint activities to the junior groups as a whole and the senior groups as a whole. Break the age levels up into groups for age-specific activities led simultaneously by additional volunteers. Bring the age groups back together when possible to reinforce the lesson. Younger children can “show and tell” to older students and older students can lead younger children in another activity related to the lesson.
3. Mix it up. Studies have shown that high school and junior high students need a change of activity every 15 minutes in order to remain interested and focused. This time frame drops even lower for younger children.
4. Use your imagination. The following pages are a starting point for teaching children about citizenship. Your creativity is encouraged as you expand on these lesson plans in your area.

Additional Resources

National Farmers Union (www.nfu.org) Check with the National Farmers Union or with your own state Farmers Union to learn more about opportunities for youth leadership and citizenship within the organization and other examples of how Farmers Union displays good citizenship on a local, state, national and international level.

The FreeChild Project (www.freechild.org) for examples of social change led by young people and an introduction to youth voice.

Congress for Kids (www.congressforkids.com) provides an animated tour of government from Uncle Sam himself.

CARE (www.care.org) is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. North Dakota Farmers Union is working with CARE to donate \$50,000 to help indigenous women in Ecuador receive micro-credit to buy seeds to grow for food and sale and to make and sell jewelry through local cooperatives. Take a virtual tour of Ecuador at www.care.org/vft/ecuador/journal.asp

What Kids Can Do (<http://www.whatkidscando.org/>) features voices and actions of youth in planning, delivering and learning from serving their communities.



“Be the change you want to see in this world!”

-- *Gandhi*

“Anyone can serve, because we all have something to give!”

-- *Sharon Davis*

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

-- *Margaret Mead*

“The noblest question in the world is: ‘What good may I do in it?’”

-- *Benjamin Franklin*