

# Rural 1st invests \$500,000 to expand 4-H youth leadership, agricultural career programs

*Expanded partnership will support 4-H programs focused on preparing young people for the future*

LOUISVILLE, KY, UNITED STATES, October 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Rural 1st](#) is expanding its partnership with National 4-H Council through a \$500,000 commitment to support youth leadership, career exploration and agricultural education through 2028.

“

4-H gives young people opportunities to explore careers, build leadership skills and bring new ideas back to the places they call home. We're proud to help more young people have those opportunities”

*Art Whaley, chief lending officer, Rural 1st*

The investment expands Rural 1st's support of 4-H's Beyond Ready initiative, which aims to prepare 10 million young people with the skills needed for work and life. Rural 1st and National 4-H Council began their partnership in 2024.

“Young people will play an important role in the future of rural communities,” said Art Whaley, chief lending officer at Rural 1st. “4-H gives them opportunities to explore careers, build leadership skills and bring new ideas back to the places they call home. We're proud to help more young

people have those opportunities.”

The Beyond Ready initiative includes programs like Ignite by 4-H, a national teen leadership conference; Lead to Change, which helps teens develop projects addressing needs in their communities; and the Beyond Ready Innovation Fund, which supports state-led youth development projects.

“When young people are given the opportunity to lead, they bring fresh ideas and real solutions to their communities, demonstrating that our 4-H'ers are Beyond Ready for the future,” said Heather Elliott, National 4-H Council's chief development and marketing officer. “Rural 1st's investment helps more 4-H youth build the skills and confidence to make a lasting impact.”

Rural 1st team members also participate directly in 4-H programming through financial literacy and career exploration activities. At Ignite by 4-H, Claire West, customer education manager for Farm Credit Mid-America and Rural 1st, leads “You Are the Solution for Rural America,” a workshop that asks teens to take on the roles of community professionals and develop solutions to real-world rural challenges.

## About Rural 1st

Rural 1st® is the consumer lending division of Farm Credit Mid-America, a financial services cooperative whose purpose is to secure the future of rural communities and agriculture. Rural 1st is the leader in rural lending and helps those who are seeking open spaces get Closer to What Matters®. Rural 1st offers tailored product options for lot, land, construction and home loans for those who want to live rurally. For more information, visit [Rural1st.com](http://Rural1st.com). NMLS 407249. Equal Housing Lender.

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