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Testimony to the Subcommittee on Horticulture, Research, Biotechnology, and Foreign Agriculture

House Committee on Agriculture

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National 4-H Council's mission is to increase investment and participation in high quality 4-H positive youth development.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to be here today, to testify on the importance of the Smith-Lever Act, co-authored a century ago by a fellow Georgian, the late Senator Hoke Smith.

It is an honor for me to share my story. And to tell you how the Smith-Lever Act and one of the world's most innovative educational ideas ever – the Cooperative Extension System of our nation's land-grant universities – has helped to shape my life and the person I am today.

As a young woman growing up in Georgia, I had access to a life-changing experience called 4-H – the youth development program of Cooperative Extension, the largest and one of the most effective youth programs in America.

For more than 100 years, 4-H has stood behind the idea that young people are the single greatest resource we have to create a better world.

I am deeply grateful for the leadership skills I acquired in 4-H and the amazing adults who believed in me, including my county extension agent and state program leaders. Without them, my life would have been very different.

Across our nation, there are thousands of professional Extension educators, who along with half a million volunteers and mentors, make great things happen for more than six million young people each and every day.

Two questions that I want to answer for you today are – “How did 4-H enhance my leadership skills and how am I putting those skills into practice?”

4-H taught me that being a leader begins with confidence. There were three things that helped me develop confidence – participating in a public speaking competition, serving as a state officer, and performing with the musical group *Clovers and Company*. 4-H gave me the opportunity to discover for myself what my gifts and talents are. Moreover, it gave me the tools, the opportunities and the platform to master—and to demonstrate—those skills.

My passion is public speaking. For millions of others in 4-H, it might be creating an enterprise garden in a food desert, cultivating a peer intervention program or designing a smarter robot. Whatever it is, 4-H'ers, in partnership with caring adults, are becoming confident, capable young men and women with purpose—changing and leading the world today and into the future.

There's proof that 4-H works. According to a decade-long research study completed by researchers at Tufts University, 4-H'ers excel beyond their peers.

They are nearly four times more likely to contribute to their communities.

4-H'ers are two times more likely to be civically active, make healthier choices and participate in science programs during out-of-school time.

In addition, they are tackling issues that matter most in the areas of science, healthy living and food security – an issue that is important to me and is the reason I am pursuing my undergraduate degree in agricultural communications at the University of Georgia.

Agriculture touches every person on the planet, every day. It has been part of our story since the beginning of time and it is vital to our very existence. Agriculture has an important story to tell and I want to be one of the voices telling that story.

One in seven people in the world go to bed hungry every night. Food production must double by the year 2050 to meet the demands of our world's population growth. No one knows where the food, water or energy will come from. But we do know that the farmer who will feed the world in 2050 is 13 years old today. This is just one example of why an investment in young people is the most important investment you can make.

The experiences I've shared with you today have brought me to this place and made me who I am. Because others have invested in me, I have a responsibility to make a difference in this world, a responsibility that I am well prepared for, thanks to my family, my faith and 4-H.

There's another number I want to share with you. There are more than 20 million 4-H alumni in this country—many right here in the Halls of Congress—who are leading our communities and our country in remarkable ways.

As a Youth Trustee of the Board of National 4-H Council, I am passionate about empowering youth to serve their communities and make a positive difference in their own lives and those of others.

Our pledge at National 4-H Council is to increase access to the 4-H experience for millions more young people throughout the United States no matter where they live—on a farm, in an urban food desert, on a U.S. military base, or a tight knit small town like Forsyth, Georgia where I grew up.

As we begin a second century of service, our mission is to share the incredible story of Cooperative Extension, the power of the 4-H program to change lives and save lives, and to highlight the urgent need for all of us to invest in young people.

Thank you for your support and the opportunity to share my 4-H story.