

October 31, 2007

Dear 4-H members and families,

As many of you are aware, this year Maine 4-H will be adopting a new set of policies concerning the 4-H participation of 5-to-8 year olds, otherwise known as 4-H Cloverbuds. This is being done to put Maine into compliance with national policy expectations and to insure that the programs we offer to our youngest 4-H members are:

- Safe,
- Developmentally appropriate and
- Fun and engaging.

Being in compliance with national expectations is also a protection for 4-H volunteers and staff. This policy insures that volunteers who are following the policy will be covered by University liability coverage. Volunteers acting outside the policy cannot be assured of this coverage and could incur personal liability in the event of an accident.

Enclosed with this letter is the 2007-2008 Maine Cloverbud policy. Please read the entire policy carefully and feel free to address any questions to your county educator or professional.

In the course of developing this policy, input has been gathered from 4-H staff and volunteers. A group of volunteers and staff, "The 4-H Cloverbud Committee", created a state-wide survey which was sent out last summer. This group studied the survey responses and considered the best way to balance national requirements and local concerns. While the feelings and opinions expressed in every survey could not be completely incorporated, we worked to include as many of the elements that Maine 4-H volunteers found important as possible while still complying with the national expectations.

As you read through the policy, here are some of the things you will find and some of the ways we attempted to address concerns.

- In many states, if 5 to 8 year olds are allowed to join 4-H at all, it is through completely separate Cloverbud clubs. *Maine* volunteers and families strongly voiced the benefits of having 5 to 8 year olds in clubs with older youth. Because we value the mutual benefits of interaction between younger and older members and because of travel and time constraints in our rural state, Maine 4-H continues to support the age range of 5 to 19 for our clubs. Separate Cloverbud clubs may also be formed.
- 4-H Cloverbud work involves activities instead of projects. Projects, defined as long-term, planned series of learning activities around one topic, are appropriate for 4-H members 9 and older. Younger members will instead do a variety of activities, short term experiences (also called "sampler" activities) that introduce them to a wide range of 4-H project areas. This will mean that during some meetings in 5 to 19 year old clubs, younger members will need to work on their own separate activities. If you are a parent, perhaps you can check with your current volunteers to see how you could help with some of these activities.
- The national policy is very clear that Cloverbud members may not have animal projects. Our surveys emphasized the value of engaging youth with animals at a young age in order to build long-term interest. However, youth of this age should combine *short animal related activities* with activities in other 4-H topics. The policy regarding animals is focused on the safety of Cloverbud members and requires one-on-one supervision when Cloverbud members are around animals of any size.

- 4-H Cloverbud activities are to be cooperative instead of competitive. Children ages 5 to 8 are not yet ready for competitive activities, but do best in settings where they can focus on experimentation and process rather than an end product. Also, young children take criticism very personally and perceive competitive rankings as value judgments on themselves rather than on their work. Much of the feedback we received expressed concern that without competition, youngsters would not learn how to improve their work. Therefore, our policy states that Cloverbuds should receive constructive feedback on work they produce and exhibit: positive methods of receiving feedback will continue to be a part of the 4-H program for this age group.
- Cloverbuds may not participate competitively at fairs and other events. However, no one wants them to be excluded from these important experiences. Cloverbuds may exhibit displays about their activities and should receive identical participation recognitions. The form(s) that this will take will be decided by each county/fair. In place of animal shows, 5 to 7 year olds may participate in an unranked clinic, skill-a-thon or other educational activity with one-on-one supervision. Beginning in 2008-2009, eight year olds will be permitted to take part in non-competitive demonstration shows (fair regulations permitting) with one-on-one supervision.
- For the 2007-2008 year only, eight year olds will be allowed to continue in all previously allowed shows and activities.

Over the course of the next two to three months, more information on working with Cloverbuds will become available. We anticipate some live, on-line training sessions, activity materials will be placed in all county offices, fact sheets will be published and monthly articles in county newsletters will offer new ideas and resources for working with our 5 to 8 year old members. We also will be working with fair officials and those of you who work with the fairs to make this transition as smooth as possible.

Many thanks to the volunteers and staff members on the Cloverbud Committee who took the time to create a survey, discuss the results and make recommendations for the policy. While this was not a situation any of them would have chosen, their input and insight has done much to make the policy as close to Maine's values as possible.

Thank you for your participation in our Maine 4-H program. Please be assured that the changes we have outlined here have been instituted in order to make "our best better" by creating a program that is safe, developmentally appropriate and full of new fun, learning, and challenges for our youngest 4-H members.

Sincerely,

Christy Fitzpatrick, 4-H Program Coordinator
Shirley Hager, Program Administrator
On behalf of the 4-H Program Leadership Team

Maine 4-H Cloverbud Policy

This policy has been created for the protection of our youth and our volunteers and staff. The policy will help us make sure that our programs for our youngest members are safe and developmentally appropriate while offering guidance on the many ways that young 4-H members can participate. This policy, which complies with the national Cloverbud policy, insures that volunteers who are following the policy will be covered by University liability coverage. Volunteers acting outside the policy cannot be assured of this coverage.

What is a Cloverbud?

The term Cloverbud is used to identify 4-H members who are 5 to 8 years old. Any Maine youth between the 4-H ages of 5 and 8 years old may join the 4-H program. Children in this age group are a distinct audience for 4-H with developmental and learning characteristics that are different from older members. Participation, safety, personal development, learning, and fun in a cooperative, non-competitive setting are the priorities of the Cloverbud program. Cloverbuds should experience programs that are developmentally appropriate, activity-oriented, involve cooperative learning and are focused on learning activity skills and life skills through a wide variety of topic areas.

Cloverbuds in clubs:

- Cloverbud members may participate in multi-age clubs or in clubs that are limited to members 5 to 8 years old. Counties and volunteers may decide what kinds of clubs they would like to offer.
- No matter what the club format, 5 to 8 year olds must meet the requirements of the Maine Cloverbud policy.
- When 5 to 8 year old members enroll, their project area (on the back of the enrollment sheet) should always be listed as 60074 "Introduction to 4-H Projects" FD
- Programs for Cloverbuds should consist of introductory level ("sampler") activities that build skills in a variety of 4-H project areas. (Fact sheets with information and ideas about these activities will be available soon.)
- When 5 to 8 year olds participate in multi-age club activities, activities should be modified or another activity substituted if the activity is inappropriate for the age group for safety, skill level, or attention span reasons.
- In any setting, the adult: youth ratio for this age group should be 1:6. Adults working with the youth should be VOLT trained or working under the direction of a VOLT trained volunteer.
- While Cloverbuds may not hold elected club offices, they should have a chance to learn about club leadership roles. Assigning short term officer roles by random drawing or rotation or shadowing older officers are ways for Cloverbuds to learn about club officer jobs.
- Business meetings involving Cloverbuds should be brief and run by adults or older teens with the focus on learning about planning, decision-making and leadership skills.
- Cloverbuds may not handle money. They may be involved in club fundraising events with the direct supervision of an adult or older teen. They may not go door to door to raise funds.

Cloverbud Activities:

- The purpose of the 5 to 8 year old program is to introduce young
- 4-H members to the full range of 4-H project areas. Cloverbud “sampler” activities let them learn a variety of topics and skills that provide immediate positive feedback. Curriculum resources specifically for Cloverbuds will be available through your county office soon.
- A Cloverbud activity focuses on developing a skill or concept related to a short term experience. 4-H projects, a long-term planned course of study in one subject area, are designed for 4-H members 9 and older. The skills Cloverbuds learn from their activities will prepare them for project work later.
- The 5 to 8 year old years are the time to build habits and skills to safely participate in 4-H projects independently as older 4-H members. An adult or experienced older teen should provide direct one-on-one supervision of Cloverbuds who are using potentially harmful tools such as scissors, knives, needles, hammers, etc. Cloverbuds may not independently operate power-driven equipment such as sewing machines, power drills, small engines, clippers, etc. By learning a progression of skills under careful supervision of an adult or experienced teen, Cloverbuds should begin to master the skills needed to use this equipment as an older 4-H member. Portions of activities requiring the use of items such as rotary cutters, hot glue guns, power tools, roto-tillers and other tools with high potential for injury should be carried out when Cloverbud members are not nearby.
- Cloverbuds must use appropriate safety equipment such as helmets, life jackets, safety glasses, hard toed shoes, etc as required.
- Cloverbuds should have the opportunity to be introduced to simple record keeping skills using an age appropriate method such as an “Activity Portfolio”.

Cloverbuds and Animals

- The national 4-H policy states that for safety and developmental reasons, 5 to 8 year olds may not have animal projects, but recognizes along with Maine 4-H that engaging 5 to 8 year olds in activities with animals builds long-term interest in working with animals. Therefore, carefully structured, well supervised activities with animals are encouraged.
- Cloverbud animal activities are designed to introduce 5 to 8 year olds to various kinds of animals and to develop safe basic care and handling skills. (See “Cloverbuds and Animal Activities” available in December for more information.)
- One-on-one supervision by an adult or experienced older teen who maintains ultimate control of the animal is required any time a 5 to 8 year old is working with any animal regardless of size.
- The focus of Cloverbud animal activities is on learning through activities other than livestock showing such as clinics, skill-a-thons, and pairing up with older 4-H member “animal buddies” to learn about the care and training of the animals.

Cloverbuds and Fairs

- While Cloverbuds may not participate as competitive exhibitors in any 4-H events, they are encouraged to participate in fairs and other county events on other ways.

- For the 2007-2008 4-H year only, members who are 4-H age 8 may continue to participate in competitive classes as they have done in the past.
- Cloverbuds are encouraged to exhibit their activities in 4-H Exhibit Halls. As exhibitors, they should receive a standard participation ribbon or other small token as designed or chosen by each county/fair. Cloverbuds may not receive premiums. However, a small stipend or honorarium may be paid to the club or the member in an amount to be determined by each county/fair.
- Although Cloverbud exhibits are not ranked or scored, it is important for the children to receive feedback on their exhibits. They may participate in a “show and tell” activity about their exhibit or receive written feedback that includes positive encouragement and constructive suggestions for growth. (A fact sheet “Cloverbuds and Fair Participation” will be available in December.)
- Each county/fair may determine how Cloverbud exhibits will be displayed, either in a separate area, within each club’s area, etc.
- Cloverbuds may not show any animals competitively in 4-H classes at Maine fairs or other 4-H events.
 - a)** Beginning in 2008-2009, 8 year old members may participate in a non-competitive “demonstration show” with one-on-one supervision with a rabbit, dog, poultry, kid goat or non-market lamb.
 - b)** Beginning with the 2007-2008 year, 5 to 7 year olds may participate in a clinic, skill-a-thon or other educational (non- showing) activity with one-on-one adult supervision with adults or older teens with at least 3 years experience maintaining primary control of the animal.
 - c)** Cloverbuds may receive standard participation ribbons or other identical tokens for participation in these events as determined by each county/fair. Premiums are not permitted. A small honorarium or stipend in an amount to be determined by each county/fair may be provided to the club or the member in an amount to be determined by each county/fair, but this should not be comparable to premiums received by older youth showing in competitive 4-H shows.
- Any Maine Agricultural Fair age participation rules more restrictive than those of this policy take precedence.