

My 4-H Story

When the new class arrives at Top Gun, Viper calls them “the Elite, the best of the best”. Then he says, “We’ll make you better”. This is what 4-H means to me. I am Denny Turner, a senior 4-H member from Curry County. This past year I served as the New Mexico State 4-H President. Our theme for State Conference was Top Gun. I appreciated the opportunity to rewatch the movie with the intent of paralleling my 4-H career with the experiences of the Top Gun squad, recognizing that the relationships that build you up, the ones that challenge you to be better, and the people who just show up when you need them make us sharper, steadier, and stronger than we could ever be alone.

4-H has been one of the most formative influences in my life. From my earliest projects to serving at the highest levels of leadership, the program has given me opportunities to grow, to lead, and to serve. What began as a way to learn new skills has become the foundation for how I approach challenges, support others, and pursue my goals.

Through 4-H, I have gained leadership and communication skills that extend far beyond the program itself. These abilities have carried over into my schoolwork, athletics, and other organizations where teamwork and responsibility are essential. Taking on leadership roles has given me the chance to encourage younger members, guide them through their own learning, and witness firsthand the successes of my friends and peers. I have learned that my greatest achievements are not individual awards, but the moments when I can lift others up, celebrate their accomplishments, and model true sportsmanship.

As the New Mexico State 4-H President, I had the incredible opportunity to represent youth across our state. In that role, I worked with hundreds of members, developed statewide initiatives, and served as a voice for young people committed to service and responsibility. It was an honor, but also a tremendous responsibility. I had to learn how to listen carefully, organize effectively, and motivate people with different perspectives and priorities. Those experiences tested me, but they also shaped me into a more confident communicator and thoughtful leader.

My involvement with 4-H and FFA on the national level broadened my horizons even further. By connecting with youth and leaders from across the country, I saw how people from diverse backgrounds can unite around shared values of service, growth, and leadership. Representing New Mexico on this stage gave me a deep sense of pride, but also humility. I learned to see myself not just as an individual leader, but as part of a much larger community where every person has something valuable to contribute.

In the summer of 2025, I had another defining experience through an internship with Zia Radio Group. This opportunity gave me a firsthand look at the world of broadcasting and sports media, a career path I have long dreamed of pursuing. I was able to work on both the morning and afternoon shows, learning the behind-the-scenes operations and the pace of live radio. One of the highlights of the internship was creating and delivering my own on-air sports segments. Reporting on both local and professional stories allowed me to connect with listeners while practicing the communication skills I have developed through 4-H. The encouragement I received from the professionals I worked with, combined with the thrill of going live on air, made this internship an unforgettable experience. It solidified my passion

for sports broadcasting and confirmed that I have both the skills and the drive to succeed in this field.

Looking back, I realize how blessed I have been. My opportunities have far outweighed my challenges—but I also believe that my perspective on challenges has been shaped by 4-H. To me, a challenge is simply an opportunity waiting to be embraced. That mindset has allowed me to step out of my comfort zone, try new things, and grow in ways I never imagined. It is what has carried me through difficult moments and what will continue to push me toward future success.

As I prepare for my next chapter at college, I am excited to bring this same drive and determination with me. I look forward to pursuing a degree in sports media or management, where I can combine my passion for communication with my love of athletics. I hope to get involved in student organizations, service-learning programs, and campus leadership opportunities, just as I have done through 4-H. Most importantly, I am beyond ready to move forward supporting my peers, serving my community, and striving for excellence in all that I do.

I don't know much, but thanks to 4-H, this much I do: Successful leaders know who they aren't as much as they know who they are. They know what their strengths are and play to those strengths, surrounding themselves with people to complement the strengths and weakness. This can be the difference between success and failure. Great leaders don't pretend to be everything to everyone. They're clear-eyed about their strengths and their blind spots. And instead of hiding their weaknesses, they surround themselves with people

who fill in the gaps – who challenge, balance, and elevate them. It's about purpose and humility.

There's one specific phrase that my football coach always says that has stuck with me. "Leave a Legacy." I hope I have left a legacy in 4-H and been someone others can truly rely and count on. I'm proud to be a product of 4-H and look forward to taking that legacy into the future.