In the fall of 2011, 4-H Cargill grantees administered a survey to youth participants in their programs. This survey was developed by 4-H and Policy Studies Associates (PSA) and is designed to measure the attitudes that youth in Cargill programs hold towards science. Out of the 41 Cargill-funded programs in Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, 33 were surveyed and 33 returned surveys. A total of 582 surveys were sent and 415 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 71 percent.

The results of this survey are a snapshot of the opinions and attitudes of participants in 4-H Cargill programs. However, this survey cannot isolate the effects that these programs may have had on participants. Participants may have entered their 4-H Cargill program with established skills and interests in science; we cannot say that their program created these skills and interests. Nevertheless, these survey results can be used to paint a picture of the youth that Cargill programs serve, as well as describe the environments of their programs.

Many youth in Cargill programs were new to 4-H. One of the goals of the 4-H Science Initiative is to attract new youth to 4-H through science programming, such as Cargill programs. Many of the youth surveyed in this evaluation were indeed new to 4-H: 73 percent of respondents said that this was their first year. For 64 percent of participants, their 4-H Cargill program was their first 4-H science program or project.

Youth are enthusiastic about science. Overall, the 4-H Cargill participants surveyed were enthusiastic about science and reported having strong science skills. Seventy percent agreed that they like science, and 61 percent agreed that they are good at science. Sixty percent of participants agreed that they wanted to pursue a science-related career after graduating from high school. Sixty-two percent of Cargill participants reported helping with a community service project related to science in the past year, such as planting trees or cleaning up a stream.

Hands-on science and relationships are important to youth. 4-H Cargill participants were attracted to the hands-on science they get to do in their programs, as well as the opportunities to learn with their friends. When asked to select the three things they liked best about their program, 54 percent of youth said that the opportunity to spend time with their friends was one of their favorite parts of their program, and 54 percent of youth cited the hands-on science activities they get to do. Additionally, 38 percent said a favorite aspect was that they can use tools and materials in their program that they don’t have at school or at home; 35 percent said that the fact that adults were caring and kind was a favorite aspect.

Youth described their program climates positively. According to youth reports, 4-H Cargill programs established positive youth development contexts for learning. Sixty-seven percent of participants said that in their 4-H program, all kinds of kids are welcome “always”; 22 percent of participants said this was “usually” true. Youth with more self-reported hours of participation in their programs rated their program’s climate more positively than did youth with fewer hours of participation. This finding suggests, but does not prove, that programs with better climates for positive youth development may set the stage for sustained youth participation.