

Mississippi

William Hall "Corn Club" Smith Superintendent of Holmes County Schools



Home: Holmes County, Mississippi
Nominated by: Mississippi
Year Inducted: 2002

Major 4-H Efforts: Established the first boys and girls clubs in Mississippi. Developed connections with the state land grant university and USDA, thus becoming the first such youth programs that were supported and directed by the federal government. This model helped to establish 4-H as a part of the Cooperative Extension partnership.

Smith's concerns for the need to improve farm education are evident in this statement that he wrote in October, 1920, "It has been demonstrated that our soil is capable of producing one hundred bushels of corn to the acre, yet our average production is less than twenty bushels per acre...We have the best pasture and corn lands, but we are bringing our meat and corn from the West."

William Hall "Corn Club" Smith superintendent of schools in Holmes County, organized the first corn clubs in the state. He called a meeting of volunteer corn growers and teachers to a meeting in the county courthouse in Lexington in February 1907. He was concerned that boys would leave school at age 14 to work on the farm, and he thought that integrating farm education into schools would motivate them to stay in school. He proposed a school contest with corn for boys and needlework, breadmaking and cake baking for girls.

A professor from Mississippi State College and a representative from Seaman Knapp's USDA Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work office attended this meeting. Smith enrolled youth and provided bulletins from USDA. Eighty-two boys exhibited corn at a fair and girls displayed needlework and baking which were awarded ribbons and prize money donated by local merchants. Smith was appointed by Knapp as a USDA collaborator and paid \$1 per year. This was the first time that such youth clubs had sponsorship and direction from the federal government.