

August 8, 2016

Dean's Column by Ron Rosati, PhD

Grazing partnerships and academic opportunities

One of the hallmarks of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is enhancing opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to enter into production agriculture in an ownership capacity.

This week at the Nebraska Grazing Conference, an annual event hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Grassland Studies, we are sharing an update on NCTA's 100 Beef Cow Ownership Advantage and our Heifer Link program.

The 100 Cow program is designed to help a student develop their ownership goals, business plan and potential financing with low-interest loans through the Farm Service Agency. Heifer Link is a component of the 100 Cow project in which NCTA students apply to become Heifer Link scholars. Successful applicants receive their first yearling breeding heifer during their fourth semester on campus, and when they graduate in May, take possession of the bred heifer which has been managed at campus in the student herd.

Dr. Doug Smith, chairman of NCTA's animal science and agricultural education programs, joins me at the Grazing Conference held in Kearney. Before an audience of cattle producers and industry resource leaders, we will outline the benefits of NCTA's in-depth academic coursework and hands-on education for young men and women studying livestock management, diversified production or agricultural education here in Curtis.

Our goal is to equip industrious livestock entrepreneurs with the financial acumen which matches their technical know-how. NCTA students have a great opportunity to gain hands-on learning by working with the college's beef cattle as we also build the Heifer Link student herd.

Since Heifer Link was initially introduced to our students and industry partners in December, 2014, we have been quite fortunate to have solid backing financially and with donations of several of high-quality breeding heifers. I am grateful to those who responded initially, and to future donors.

To become involved in the program, incoming freshmen will indicate to Dr. Smith their intention to become a member of the 100 Beef Cow Ownership Advantage and Heifer Link program. Their coursework is set up over the next four semesters to include topics such as practical agricultural law, intergenerational ownership transfers, mentorships and training with landowner/stockman partners who want to bring a young producer into their operation.

The "capstone" course during the fourth semester helps all of these topics solidify as students interact with industry leaders, gain financial advice from USDA's Farm Service Agency, and interact with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and other programs which provide incentives to landowners and cattle producers for aiding beginning farmers-ranchers. Our students are also busy assembling their final projects, preparing business plans for lenders and completing final exams.

Student applicants to the Heifer Link program go through a similar process early in their NCTA career. Through discussions with their animal science professors, interested students submit their applications in January, and then go through an interview process and are informed in early March about successful applicants.

To date, two graduates received a breeding heifer in 2015, and in May 2016, four students took home heifers after graduation. For individuals interested in serving as mentors, landowner/cattle partners, or donors of cattle or financial gifts, please contact Dr. Smith at 1-800-3CURTIS or see <http://ncta.unl.edu/specialty-programs-ncta-curtis> for information at the NCTA web site.

Incoming Events:

Aug. 10 – NCTA Agronomy Youth Field Day, 9 a.m., Ed Center

Aug. 11 – State Advisory Meeting, 10 a.m., Ed Center

Aug. 19-22 – NCTA New Student Orientation

Aug. 22-26 – First week of fall classes

NCTA Mission:

The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is devoted to a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology, food and related industries. The college provides open access to innovative technical education resulting in associate degrees, certificates, diplomas and other credentials.

Media inquiries to:

Mary Crawford, NCTA News, 308-367-5231, Mcrawford@unl.edu