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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

Ag teachers closing the gap

CURTIS, Neb. – When Kara Reimers graduated from high school in 2012, she briefly thought about becoming a teacher but instead started college in animal science at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis.

This week, she launches her second year teaching high school agricultural education, helping Nebraska gain traction in a field calling for more agriculturalists as teachers and FFA chapter advisors.



Wade Overturf and Kara Reimers

“I’d always wanted to be involved with teaching about agriculture, and found my goals aligned when I gained experience through Dr. (Doug) Smith’s program at NCTA,” says the native of Boelus, Nebraska.

For her second year NCTA studies, Reimers switched and then graduated in 2014 with her associate degree in agricultural education. The next step was two years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the state’s only program for degreed agriculture teachers.

“We have been steadily growing our program here at NCTA, with a goal of having two students each year preparing for their student teaching experience,” said Doug Smith, chair of the NCTA Animal Science and Agricultural Education division.

With a doctorate in agricultural education, Smith is now in his sixth year at NCTA where he also is the livestock judging team coach. He also carries two “professor of practice” titles with UNL’s Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication Department, and the Animal Science Department.

His duties include teaching NCTA courses which agricultural education students then transfer to UNL, and to supervise ALEC student teachers as they are out in the field. This fall, he will make visitations to Valentine, Southwest and Southern Valley High Schools to observe student teachers in training.

Reimers credits Smith’s teaching and leadership style plus varied teaching and FFA roles for students at NCTA for defining her career path which first led to teaching at Elba High School, then to the Anselmo-Merna High program.

A similar influence guided Sutton native Wade Overturf.

“I started as an animal science major at NCTA and wasn’t really quite sure about my path, when Dr. Smith said, ‘Why don’t you become an ag teacher?’ I explored that idea, consulted with a family member who teaches agricultural education, and have really enjoyed the students and program here at Wisner-Pilger,” Overturf said.

“Dr. Smith helped a lot in engaging my interest by how he taught,” said Overturf, who hopes to emulate that fun, engaging style in his classrooms too. During the summer months, Overturf also participates in rodeo and works as a crop scout.

Another recent NCTA and UNL graduate is Evey Choat of St. Edward, who begins her agricultural education teaching career this month at Laurel-Concorde-Coleridge School. She was the NCTA Aggie of the Year in 2015.

Morgan Fangmeyer, a native of Hebron, will start her student teaching this fall at Overturf’s hometown of Sutton. And, Emily Whipple, Cambridge, and Haley Rogers, Lexington, will be student teaching in the spring of 2018.

Three more NCTA graduates are entering the UNL pipeline this fall to become agriculture teachers. Eleanor Aufdenkamp, North Platte, and Emilye Vales, DeWitt, will be on the UNL Livestock Judging Team, and Trevor Ginkens, Harrison, is on the UNL Rodeo Team. The three are on track to be student teaching in Nebraska high schools by spring, 2019, Smith said.

NCTA and its predecessor, the University of Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture (UNSTA) have nine alumni currently teaching in Nebraska high schools.

They include Julie (Hales) Schwartz, Elgin; Dana (Bailey) Hall, McCool Junction; Evey Choat, Laurel-Concord-Coleridge; Siera Meyer, Bruning-Davenport; Kara Reimers, Anselmo-Merna; Wade Overturf, Wisner-Pilger; Craig Frederick, Seward; Phil Simpson, Burwell; and Randy Vlasin, Hayes Center. Jack Broderick, retired from Seward, and Dan Stehlik, NCTA agricultural mechanics instructor, are both UNSTA graduates.

The teachers might individually cross paths several times a year at statewide functions such as the Nebraska State Fair, Husker Harvest Days and the Nebraska State FFA Conference in Lincoln. This summer, many attended the annual Nebraska Career Conference, a gathering of career and technical educators.

Additional information about the NCTA Agricultural Education is available from Dr. Smith at 308 367-5286 or doug.smith@unl.edu.



High school agricultural education teachers who are alumni of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture or the University of Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture met this summer in Kearney. Front row, from left, Dana (Bailey) Hall, McCool Junction; Evey Choat, Laurel-Concord-Coleridge; Siera Meyer, Bruning-Davenport; and Kara Reimers, Anselmo-Merna. Back row, from left, Wade Overturf, Wisner-Pilger; Craig Frederick, Seward; Phil Simpson, Burwell; and Randy Vlasin, Hayes Center. Not pictured are Julie (Hales) Schwartz, Elgin; Jack Broderick, retired from Seward; and Dan Stehlik, NCTA agricultural mechanics. NCTA faculty Doug Smith and Jo Bek also are members of the Nebraska Agricultural Educators Association. (Courtesy photo)

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Online link: <http://go.unl.edu/4ffs>