NCTA links to Omaha in Urban Agriculture program
By Ron Rosati, NCTA Dean
Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture

Food production in the city can be a successful homegrown business, even if the grower is farming less than an acre of land.

The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is helping urban entrepreneurs and beginning farmers in the Omaha area to grow and market local foods through a new program called Urban Agriculture.

Last Fall, NCTA, the University of Nebraska Extension, and the Omaha Home for Boys started a pilot project utilizing land resources of the Cooper Memorial Farm, which is owned and operated by the Omaha Home for Boys.

Together, we announced a program to offer college courses in beginning agronomy and horticulture. We know there is an untapped market for entrepreneurs to grow large-scale vegetable production in the Omaha area. An ideal location is the Cooper Memorial Farm.

We are excited about this venture to teach food production to those who want to grow urban crops for sale, to involve beginning farmers and entrepreneurs, and to reach audiences in the college, adult and even youth areas of urban agriculture.

Healthy individuals and families is a common goal for NCTA, the Omaha Home for Boys and Nebraska Extension.

Our educational and outreach programs are ideally aligned to assist urban food-production enterprises, whether these farmers are growing and selling food for a farmers market, supplying a local restaurant with fresh vegetables, or even producing commodities or ingredients for the cafeteria or dining hall at an area high school.

Last December, our three entities signed an agreement to provide college classes and continuing education. We’ve initiated a program that is an ideal marriage for the expertise of the University of Nebraska (NCTA and Extension) and the Omaha Home for Boys.

Earlier in March, we hired Dr. Connie Fisk for a jointly-funded position to serve as an NCTA assistant professor in Urban Agriculture for 50 percent of her time, and the other half is dedicated to Nebraska Extension programs as an extension educator.

This dual program allows us to reach audiences beyond the traditional audiences in agriculture. Two college courses are now underway: Agricultural entrepreneurship and agricultural carpentry. Both are classes taught on Saturday mornings, at the Douglas-County Extension Office and the Omaha Home for Boys woodworking
Business skills and agricultural marketing are key to successful farmer operations. The course called, “Farm Beginnings,” is a course offered by Nebraska Extension and NCTA.

Horticulture and crops plots will be planted this summer at the OHB farm. The Benson Farmers Market will be hosted at the OHB campus, for the first time this summer.

Dr. Fisk works with all of the programs as the coordinator. A week ago, she was showing Master Gardeners how to prune blackberries and red raspberries in a community garden on West Center Road.

Here at the NCTA campus, we also are preparing garden plots for the Curtis Community Garden. Watch for registration details. Also, mark May 7th for the NCTA Spring Plant Sale by our horticulture students.

- Ron Rosati, Dean
Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture

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.

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NCTA calendar:
March 31 – Trinity Seely cowgirl musician, 8 p.m., NCTA Education Center. Public is welcome for free concert.
April 2 – Livestock Quality Assurance Training for 4-H members, Vet Tech amphitheater, 6:30 p.m.
April 2 – “Farmland” hosted by NCTA and Frontier County Farm Bureau, 7:30 p.m. Star Theater, free public movie.
April 4 – Stock Dog Trials by Vet Tech Dog Obedience Class, 9 a.m., Livestock Teaching Center. Open to public.
April 11 – NCTA “Shaggy Show” for spring horse show, 7 a.m. LTC Arena, open to the public.

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