June 29, 2015

Local Foods, Community Gardens
By Ron Rosati, NCTA Dean

Summertime and gardening go hand in hand here in Curtis and all across the state. On campus, the NCTA Horticulture Club and agronomy division host a community garden.

Now in its second year, the NCTA Community Garden provides an opportunity for teaching, growing local foods, and outreach with the residents and youth of Curtis. Recently, we partnered with Frontier County Extension in hosting an annual youth camp for 4-H youngsters to learn more about plants and 4-H projects in horticulture.

The NCTA Community Garden is located on the west side of the old “football field” and is open to residents and clubs who rent a garden plot for the summer. Ground prep work and irrigation is provided by NCTA. I enjoy the chance to socialize with neighbors and community residents in our campus garden.

The bounty shared by growing local foods will be evident at tables and picnics in the community throughout the summer and this fall. NCTA students will harvest pumpkins, squash and fall produce for the Curtis Farmers Markets which will begin later this summer at the Curtis city park.

Credit goes to Tee Bush, our NCTA horticulture instructor, and student workers for part of this local foods effort. Dr. Brad Ramsdale, agronomy professor, was successful 18 months ago in seeking a 2-year grant through the Nebraska Rural Futures Institute for the project. We appreciate the help from RFI, and all of our program partners.

The funding has helped in staffing, summer internships, and costs for coordinating this local project. We invite visitors to campus to stop by the community garden and if you see someone working there, take a few minutes for a visit.

Across the state, NCTA is partnering with the Omaha Home for Boys and Nebraska Extension in another local foods project. Our Urban Agriculture program offers introductory courses for students earning a college degree or those interested in starting a small ag-related business.

Urban agriculture is designed to support locally-produced food, prepare job-ready agricultural graduates, and foster social and economic development for youth and adults.

On August 14, NCTA will join these partners and US. Department of Agriculture agencies in Nebraska in hosting a “Local Foods” conference for urban ag producers, small businesses and retailers. The Omaha Home for Boys will be the conference site, with tours and hands-on opportunities at the OHB Cooper Memorial Farm.

Fall classes begin later in August with three offerings slated for Urban Ag: Carpentry, Organic Food Production, and Raising Poultry for Profit: Small Scale Production. Information about the courses or any of the Urban Ag programming is available from Urban Ag Coordinator Connie Fisk, PhD at connie.fisk@unl.edu, or call (402) 444-7833.

We will be sharing more details on this program, and the other fall courses offered here at NCTA. Contact us at ncta.unl.edu or call 1-800-3-CURTIS.
This week you may be seeing more guests around campus and in town. NCTA is again host for a professional development workshop for high school agriculture instructors. The week-long workshop includes teachers primarily from Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado. We expect about 50 instructors for the sessions. Please greet these teachers and thank them for educating our youth in agriculture – both in and outside of the classrooms. Have a great Independence Day!

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.

NCTA events:
July 5-11: Ag Teachers Professional Development training, NCTA Campus
July 13: New Student Registration, NCTA Ed Center