



NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

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Stock Dog Team One-of-a-Kind

By NCTA News with Leighlynn Obermiller, coach

The Stock Dog Team is one of many team opportunities for students at NCTA. It offers students the chance to train herding dogs. Team members practice with their dogs twice weekly on a variety of hoof stock. Veterinary Technology instructor Leighlynn Obermiller coaches the team. An NCTA alumnus herself, Obermiller got her start with stock dogs while attending school to become a licensed veterinary technician.

“Working with dogs has always been a passion of mine, and training a herding dog was something I really wanted to do; I just never knew where to start. Through my time as a team member, I learned and grew as a handler and trainer, and now I get to give that opportunity to others,” shared Obermiller.

The team was founded back in 2015 through the efforts of Judy Bowmaster-Cole, and a collection of students interested in using working dogs. Her support and that of Outback Stock Dog Association members Kelly Popp and Eddie Merritt helped sculpt the Stock Dog team to where it is today. Kelly Popp mentored many young handlers and provided the team a place to practice for years. With his passing in 2021, the team’s practices have moved on campus, but the spirit of hard work and sportsmanship he instilled in young handlers remains.

The team’s school year started with 12 committed students, comprised of returning members and first-year students. The fall semester saw first-year students learning the ropes with their dogs while second-year members were fine-tuning theirs. Students wishing to participate must supply their own dogs.

“Having the right dog for the job is important,” says Obermiller, “breed and genetics play a big role in a dog’s ability to perform well.” Most team members work with Border Collies, a breed originating in Scotland and having great gathering tendencies. Famous worldwide for their skills as sheepdogs, many Border Collie lines in the United States today are bred to move cattle. Other breeds are also represented, though, with past members having worked Australian Cattle Dogs or Shepherds.

All the hard work from the year paid off, as team members traveled to compete this Spring. In March, team members and their dogs traveled to Clearmont, WY. Students included second-year students Carson Harting, Brooke Jensen, and first-year student Kira Peifer competing in the Novice class.

In this class, handlers accompany their dogs as they move a group of cattle through a timed obstacle course. Placings are based on the highest points earned in the shortest time. “Going out and competing is tough, but it helps get you out of your comfort zone and highlights areas in your training that need attention. The students had a tough go the first day, but by Sunday, I think they all were happy with how their dogs did”, said Obermiller.

The season wrapped up with Kira Peifer and Brooke Jensen competed at the Heartstrong Classic in Yuma, Colorado. “I was really proud of how the students and their dogs performed,” said Obermiller, “the dogs listened well and treated the stock fairly. While winning a buckle would be nice, working stock in a low-stress manner is always the main goal”. The students will be back trialing in the Fall. You can catch them at the Nebraska State Fair in August.

Current or future students interested in participating with the Stock Dog Team should contact coach Obermiller by email: hobermiller2@unl.edu.

Part of the University of Nebraska system, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is a two-year institution with a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology, and related industries. NCTA is known for its affordable tuition, high job-placement rate for its graduates and the success of student teams in competitive activities, including crops judging, ranch horse events, livestock judging, shotgun sports, stock dog trials, and intercollegiate rodeo. The college is consistently ranked as one of the best two-year schools in the nation.

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NCTA Stock Dog Team members Kira Piefer of Etters, PA and Brooke Jensen of Sanborn, MN competed recently at the Heartstrong Classic in Yuma, Colorado.