



NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

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Stock Dog Pair Tops Novice Class

By NCTA News

The NCTA Stock Dog Team, under the guidance of Veterinary Technology instructor Leighlynn Obermiller, stands out as a valuable opportunity for students seeking hands-on experience in training herding dogs. This energized team, part of NCTA's lineup of student organizations, provides members with biweekly training sessions focused on working with various hoof stock. A testament to NCTA's commitment to practical education, Coach Obermiller, an alumna with roots in stock dog training since her days as a veterinary technician student, leads the team towards excellence in this specialized field.

The Stock Dog Team recently competed in the Heartstrong Classic in Yuma, Colorado. The team competitors included three first-year students: Trevor Kaiser of Quinter, KS; Justin Ernest of Dalton, NE; Sierra Holt from Sedalia, CO; and third-year student Brooke Jensen from Sanborn, MN.

"It was a first-time trialing in competition for the first-years," says Obermiller. "We could not be happier with how they all did. These kids put in the work, and it shows". After two full days of trialing, Trevor Kaiser and his dog April earned 1st overall in the Novice class.

"Going into the trial, my goal was just to finish the course. I could not be prouder of my dog's performance; she did amazing, and it was very rewarding to see all the time spent training pay off", shared Kaiser.

Justin Ernest and his dog Goose also performed well, placing 4th overall in the Novice class.

"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 group of students interested in using working dogs. Her support, along with that of Outback Stock Dog Association members Kelly Popp and Eddie Merritt, helped shape 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.

Students are required to supply their own dogs to participate on the team. They will then spend the year working that dog on sheep, goats, cattle, and sometimes, the occasional duck. As they progress and the dogs begin to understand the different commands, obstacles will be introduced.

Many students' primary goal is to produce a dog that can be additional help with their livestock operations. However, students consistently gain enthusiasm at the competitive trials, and the extra training required becomes a passion.

"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 train Border Collies, a breed originating in Scotland that has 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 with Australian Cattle Dogs or Australian Shepherds.

The team appreciated additional support this semester from NCTA alumni Lacey Haskell, who graciously stepped in to coach the team while Obermiller was on maternity leave. Her mentorship was instrumental in the success of our students. "I was absolutely honored to be able to work with them and teach them. It was very enjoyable to be around young minds that want to learn to work their dogs to the best of their ability," said Haskell.

The students will be back trialing in the Fall and invite the public to see their progress at the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island 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 members (L -R): Sierra Holt, Sedalia, CO; Justin Ernest, Dalton, NE; and Trevor Kaiser, Quinter, KS. Event host Rhonda Pletcher is on the far right.