



NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

July 10, 2023

New Era for Meat Processing

By Dean Larry Gossen, Ph.D.

Many of you may remember the era when every town had a "locker plant" where the local beef and swine producers took their animals for processing. Families rented frozen storage lockers to preserve their annual meat supply, and these plants supplied the local grocery markets or had a butcher shop.

Over time and with the expansion of large meat processors, this historical practice was lost. However, the impact of Covid-19 on our national meat processing industry has brought awareness of the importance of a more diverse industry and the need to support all sizes of meat processing workforce training.

Consequently, we saw an opportunity and are very excited to be funded to play an important role in developing an innovative program with a \$644,489 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

NCTA has teamed up with UNL Animal Science and diverse industry resources across Nebraska to create something extraordinary. We are crafting a specialized curriculum to equip aspiring meat processors with top-notch skills. Additionally, it will explore the wide range of career options in the meat processing industry and help current employees enhance their skills.

So, why is this program so crucial? Last year, NCTA hosted an incredible think tank gathering over 50 meat industry experts. We highlighted their challenges, including the lengthy training process and the scarcity of skilled workers. It was clear that something needed to be done to bridge this gap.

Our partnership with the Nebraska Association of Meat Processors addresses the essential skills and knowledge required to thrive in the meat processing industry. This collaboration involves big and small local processors grappling with a shortage of trained workers.

All of our collaborators will join forces to recruit trainees for the pilot program, casting a wide and bilingual (English and Spanish language) net to reach potential students.

The training is slated to kick off in January 2024, and it's designed to cater to non-traditional learners seeking immediate employment opportunities. Participants will enjoy hands-on experience at various sites, and thanks to the grant, trainees will receive stipends to cover related expenses.

Once the trainees complete the program, they will receive credentials and digital badges, all sponsored by the grant. Our goal is that these credentials align perfectly with the needs of the processing plants and provide opportunities for additional training to expand their skills in the meat processing industry.

This innovative project is the newest example of how we serve students at NCTA with a mission of student success. We have always endeavored to address the workforce challenges faced by small, local operations that struggle with limited resources for training.

This program will empower both Nebraska processing plants and potential employees by equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge needed for a successful career in the industry.

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 student teams' success 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.

#

NCTA Events:

July 9-14: Tri-State Ag Teacher Conference

July 13: Recruiters at NAYI UNL East Campus

July 17: Recruiters at Nat'l High School Rodeo Finals

July 17: Farewell Reception for Doug Smith

July 18: New Student Enrollment

July 20: Rural Fellow Presentation – Arboretum Tour



The NCTA Ag Teacher Bootcamp has offered a meats course led by Chad Schimmels the past two years and looks forward to expanding innovative hands-on training with the grant received. (P/C NCTA News)