

February 13, 2018
Dean's Column by Ron Rosati, NCTA Dean

Preparing Nebraskans for a growing poultry industry

The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture has been charged by the Nebraska Legislature with "expeditiously responding to the emerging workforce development needs of Nebraska's agricultural industries", according to state guidance documents. The college takes that charge seriously as demonstrated by the recent development of a poultry science program in Curtis.

Nebraska currently produces approximately one million broilers per year. In the near future, production is expected to multiply 10-fold to more than 100 million broilers annually. Significant new commercial ventures have moved into the state to capitalize on Nebraska's competitive advantages in agriculture. Lincoln Premium Poultry in Fremont and Hendrix Genetics in Grand Island are two examples of industry leaders helping facilitate this growth.

Modern, efficient poultry production is a technical enterprise that requires a skilled workforce. There are currently no undergraduate degree programs available in Nebraska to help our residents develop the skills necessary be successful in this industry. To meet that need, NCTA partnered with Mississippi State University in a creative collaboration that gives Nebraska residents access to a high quality, low cost degree program that will prepare them well to be successful poultry producers.

Poultry is the top agricultural commodity in Mississippi and the Poultry Science Department at Mississippi State University played a central role in helping that industry grow. The Department is a national leader in commercial broiler production. Dr. Doug Smith and I recently visited MSU and met with the nine faculty experts in poultry science. The group was very warm and friendly, with impressive technical expertise consisting of many decades of experience working in commercial poultry production.



Dr. Doug Smith, left, and Dean Ron Rosati, learn about broilers in a Mississippi State poultry barn. Professor Mary Beck leads the tour highlighting for the new NCTA-MSU poultry partnership. (MSU Photo)

The MSU facilities include two commercial broiler houses, a layer house, hatchery facilities, a smaller student-run broiler house, poultry processing facilities, a feed mill, and associated research and support facilities. The Department has a practical, hands-on focus to instruction which fits well with the mission of NCTA. For a number of years, the Poultry Science Department at MSU has had 100% placement of its graduates.

NCTA students in this new program will spend three semesters in Curtis and then travel to Starkville, Mississippi for one semester of intensive poultry production. Graduates will earn an Associate of Applied Science degree from NCTA.

Mississippi State has graciously agreed to adjust their course offerings so that our students can have a concentrated semester of commercial poultry production. While studying at NCTA, students will be exposed to poultry examples through animal science courses, they will have one live distance-learning course taught at Mississippi State relayed to Curtis, and they will have internships and experiential learning activities with Nebraska's poultry industry.

This partnership allows NCTA to offer a high quality program beginning in fall 2018. We are able to introduce new academics quickly because NCTA will use existing facilities at Mississippi State. The collaboration also allows us launch the initiative without building new facilities in Nebraska or hiring additional NCTA faculty. That's a win-win for taxpayers and academic programs.

Poultry production in the United States has evolved to become a highly efficient farming practice. Commercial broiler producers often grow birds from chick to market size in less than 65 days. The food conversion ratio on broilers is approximately two pounds of feed per pound of gain. When you buy chicken in the grocery store you'll notice that you can often find boneless chicken breast on sale for as low as two dollars per pound. This industry has done an incredible job making this high quality protein available to American consumers at a very reasonable price. We are pleased at NCTA to be able to support the growth of this industry as another alternative for Nebraska's agricultural workforce and rural communities.

See more details at: <https://ncta.unl.edu/poultry-program>

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.

Campus events:

- 17-18 – Sherman Tegtmeier Horsemanship Clinic, LTC Arena (open to public)
- 17-24 – National FFA Week
- 17-25 – Nebraska Cattlemen's Classic, Kearney (NCTA students attend)
- 19 – President's Day, Offices open and classes in session
- 19 – Intramural Basketball, 6:30 p.m., Community Center (NCTA)
- 20- Women in Ag club, 7 p.m., LTC
- 22 – Intramural Basketball, 6:30 p.m., Community Center (NCTA)
- 22-23 – Women in Agriculture Conference, Kearney (NCTA WIA attend)

Online article at: <https://go.unl.edu/cdfu>