

June 19, 2017

Dean's Column by Ron Rosati, PhD

NCTA partners on land, ag resources

We are fortunate to have a productive land and natural resource base for our educational mission at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, allowing students to learn practical agricultural skills amid the plentiful regional resources of crops, pastures and livestock.

NCTA includes a 580-acre farm, field laboratory and Aggieland pasture contiguous to our main academic campus. This resource, which this year includes corn, alfalfa, soybeans and wheat, is owned by the University of Nebraska and is managed by NCTA staff and faculty.

Roy Cole, farm manager, guides young people as they learn agricultural basics as well as in-depth aspects of operating farm equipment and machinery, building and repairing fences and corrals, and animal husbandry as they feed the livestock and animals on campus. NCTA operates a fully functioning farm, which includes three fields irrigated with center pivot systems.

His "farm crew" usually includes five to six students during the school year and two fulltime students during the summer. Summer students are enrolled in a 6-credit-hour internship who learn from a very knowledgeable supervisor and teacher. Some students are experienced hands, coming from a farm and ranch background, while others are gaining new insights from their courses and work-study on campus. The college farm allows the students to learn about work expectations in an agricultural environment.

Students assist Roy in a variety of duties including moving cattle, feeding animals, mowing, weed control (chopping thistles), harvesting alfalfa hay for feed, planting hay or harvesting crops.

Aggieland

Over the hill just north of campus and down a trail through a canyon is the pasture and wooded area called Aggieland. Our cattle graze there and equine students ride in classes and individually in the large, flat grass area which is surrounded by trees. Historically, since the early days of the institution's founding a century ago, the location was prime spot for social gatherings by students who had picnics, bonfires and outdoor recreation.

Graves Ranch

Three years ago NCTA forged a partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Nebraska to lease 840 acres of grazing land in Garden County on property known as the Graves Ranch. Access to the off-campus location enabled expanded pasture for the NCTA cow-calf herd, which includes the animals in the student-managed Heifer Link program, a cow ownership/scholarship for livestock management students to retain a bred heifer upon graduating from NCTA.

We are in our third year of trucking the herd to the pasture situated near the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Crescent Lake Wildlife Refuge, where we unload and trail by horseback the cows and calves across a Refuge pasture to reach the Graves Ranch.

This is a scenic area of Sandhill grasses and lakes, with a unique resource of vegetation that differs from our pastures in Frontier County. The ranch includes the endangered plant *Penstemon haydenii*, or blowout penstemon, and provides an excellent outdoor classroom for teaching range management.

Leu-Scholz Ranch

Recently, we just started a new partnership in Hayes County with Sandra Scholz, granddaughter of rancher Frank B. Leu who founded the historic Leu Ranch in 1889. Sande is leasing to NCTA a tract of land for haying, and eventually for grazing. The tract had been enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and is now available for the college's livestock program.

Roy and student employees used a rotary mower early this spring to reduce the fodder in the CRP and improve the regrowth for first hay crop. We are grateful to Sande that she wants to preserve her family's pioneer land and provide opportunities for NCTA students to learn about managing this resource.

I look forward to reporting more about the status of the NCTA crops, cattle herd and outdoor resources as the summer and season progresses.

For additional overview of our NCTA programs, visit ncta.unl.edu or give us a call at 1-800-3 CURTIS.

Upcoming events:

June 19-20 – Holdrege High/ESU #11 crop production session, Dr. Ramsdale, Agronomy

June 19-23 – NRCS Agency training program

June 24 – UNSTA/NCTA Aggie Alumni Association banquet, Broken Bow

June 28 – Frontier County 4-H Photography Judging, Education Center

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.



Roy Cole, far right, is assisted in moving cattle at the Graves Ranch by students Cassie Bratton and Cody Brown who are serving their summer internship with the NCTA farm crew. (Crawford/NCTA News photo)