



# NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

July 22, 2021

## **Life at the Aggie farm and ranch**

Dean's Message by NCTA Dean Larry Gossen, Ph.D.

CURTIS, Neb. - This week we have a summer progress report about students, field crops and livestock at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

Experiential Learning opportunities are integral to supporting agricultural careers. Our NCTA farm and ranch, faculty, and "ranch crew" enables hands-on learning by youth and adults.

College courses for Aggie students plus University of Nebraska resources which target 4-H, FFA, schools, and Nebraska Extension help all of us in equipping students for successful and rewarding careers.

The NCTA ranch crew keeps the wheels turning all year long. Experiential learning goes into full gear each semester, particularly as we maintain livestock on campus and provide hundreds of teaching moments. In summer, however, when most students are on internships and jobs, the ranch crew's focus is crops and cattle.

Alan Taylor and Roy Cole work side-by-side with six student employees at the farm and facilities which include 580 acres of cropland and pasture here at campus. From weed control and irrigation, to harvesting wheat and sorghum, and fencing pastures and checking cattle, their project list is a long one.

Additionally, in early 2021, we were fortunate to expand teaching programs at the Frank B. and Mabel Leu Ranch, located 24 miles northwest of Curtis in Hayes County. The ranch was gifted by David Scholz and his late wife, Sande Clark Scholz. She spent her early years in the home of her grandparents, Frank and Mabel, and designated the family ranch for educational purposes.

### **Experiential Learning**

The Leu Ranch and NCTA Farm emphasize hands-on opportunities in fully functioning production environments.

Assistant Professor Alan Taylor was tapped last year as fulltime Coordinator of Agricultural Experiential Learning. Since 2007, he's been an adjunct animal science lecturer in nutrition and coach of the Shotgun Sports Team (started in 2013).

"Most of my duties as EL Coordinator are managing the farm operation here to ensure that all students and professors have the animals and resources they need for classes and hands-on learning," Taylor shares.

This fall, Taylor will again teach courses in ruminant nutrition and range management.

Roy Cole, farm manager and instructor of seasonal courses in harvest operations and ag construction, supervises daily farm activities and the student workers while Taylor focuses on ranch management and livestock.

An NCTA Farm Advisory Committee meets monthly and brings in all aspects of NCTA programs. Agribusiness, ag mechanics, animal and equine science, agronomy, veterinary technology, agricultural education, plus myself and associate deans provide input regarding teaching resources, budgets, and operations.

## **NCTA Ranch Crew**

This summer, ranch crew students are Maddie Carr, Kyra Debus, Nathaly Dragoo, Emma Hollenbeck, Mike Keeling and Jacob Surrige. Each works full-time and earns an hourly wage. Keeling is on his internship, earning six hours credit in Ag Production Systems.

“This summer, I’ve built a lot of new fences out at the Leu Ranch. We’ve been pretty busy haying too. I also go out to check water and put out mineral and salt for the cows. This week, we’re working on wheat harvest,” Keeling shared. Duties vary according to weather, crop and pasture status, and priority needs.

Some Aggies have farm or ranch backgrounds; others are new to farm work. Debus and Dragoo, both from Lincoln, began at NCTA in Vet Tech and gained an interest in Animal Science. Cole and Taylor trained the two to run the swather and baler, and they’ve since harvested hay at Aggieland pasture north of campus.

NCTA crops are irrigated corn, soybeans and alfalfa, and dryland wheat and grain sorghum. This year, double cropped systems included a cool season annual mix of triticale/oats/radishes, followed by warm season combination of millet and forage sorghum. The farm irrigates with three center pivot systems.

Agronomy professor Brad Ramsdale designs the cropping systems and management practices, with Cole assisting students on planting, tillage and harvesting. Some crops are marketed while feeds are retained for campus livestock.

In consultation with West Central Research, Extension and Education Center at North Platte, Taylor is developing a grazing system at the Leu Ranch to expand pasture rotations by adding electric fencing, water sources and later this summer, a corral. The University’s longer-range plan includes working facilities and an education center.

For grazing, we rested the campus pasture this summer and moved the spring-calving herd to the Leu Ranch. We purchased 37 head of bred fall-calving cows from WCREEC Gudmundsen Ranch near Whitman. Taylor plans to move the fall herd into campus next month so Aggie students can monitor the cows as calving begins in September. This is an added feature for beef production and VT large animal courses.

Calves from the spring-calving herd will be weaned this fall, and cows returned to Curtis in October. Also, to more fully utilize the Leu Ranch grass resources, NCTA took in 60 privately-owned cow-calf pairs for summer grazing. Those will return to their home ranch near Farnam in October.

For fall semester (which starts August 23), Taylor intends to add feeder lambs and feeder pigs to teaching resources at campus. WCREEC might bring market heifers from North Platte to our small feed yard, where students can apply skills in cattle backgrounding rations and feedlot management.

Also, Taylor acquires cull cows for artificial insemination courses taught each fall and spring. “It’s all a part of our experiential learning. We give students as many skills as possible to prepare them for their careers in agriculture.”

## **NCTA Events:**

July 18-24: NCTA recruiters at National HS Rodeo Finals, Lincoln

July 31: NCTA at Nebraska’s BIG Rodeo, Burwell

July 31: Frontier County Fair & Rodeo begins, Stockville

*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 for 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.*



NCTA animal science students apply skills such as ear tagging and vaccinating calves during spring branding on April 30 at the NCTA Aggieland calving pasture. This summer, "ranch crew" student employees manage cattle at the Leu Ranch. (Photo by M. Crawford photo / NCTA News)