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Dean's Column by Ron Rosati, PhD

Students take trail to success



Mary Crawford, NCTA photo
NCTA students, from left, Garison, Damian, Frances and KeAnn with Farm Manager Roy Cole moved cows from summer pasture.

Fall harvest at our agricultural campus brings exciting learning opportunities for our students.

Last Saturday that meant participating in a trail drive to bring home the college cow herd. Four students were responsible for assisting farm manager Roy Cole in this work, one of many experiential learning activities involving our students at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

In addition to operating a productive farm and outdoor classroom in Curtis, NCTA also uses other locations for haying, summer pasture and outdoor classrooms. One location is the Graves Ranch in Garden County, where the college has a partnership with the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

On Friday after their classes, KeAnn Jacobs, Frances Holley, Damian Wellman and Garison Fisher joined Roy Cole for the drive to Garden County. They traveled with a pickup and horse trailer packed with their gear and five horses, and a second pickup pulling a large trailer with portable steel panels for the temporary corral.

The group headed north of Oshkosh to reach the remote headquarters of the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge is in the beautiful Sandhills region, dotted with lakes, vast pastures of grasses, many birds and wildlife, and it borders the Graves Ranch property on two sides. In fact, access to the Graves Ranch is only possible by crossing through the wildlife refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service graciously partners with NCTA and the Graves Ranch owner, Nature Conservancy, to allow access through the Refuge to the ranch.

A bunkhouse at the Refuge headquarters served for overnight lodging, and the NCTA crew was out at daybreak setting up the portable corral along the oil-strip road about two miles south of the headquarters. Marlin French, wildlife biologist, dropped off a portable loading chute and the collection point was ready for the livestock hauler to arrive after lunch.

Students gathered and saddled their horses, rode west across the Refuge property and over to the Graves Ranch pasture. When cows were not seen at the first windmill, the group rode further west to locate the small herd of cows, 21 in this bunch.

It was a very windy, cool and overcast day yet the cows trailed fine through their pasture, next through the Refuge pasture and to the gathering corral. As scripted, and without incident, the cows easily moved into the corral setup and settled in for a rest while the crew ate lunches from the cooler packed by NCTA Food Services.

Time for conversation while sitting on the ground, avoiding spurs and sandburs. All four students are experienced aboard horses, and know a lot about livestock.

They enjoyed sharing about their horses and were looking forward to their next adventure. On Sunday, they could participate in a reining and horsemanship clinic at campus, put on by trainer Sherman Tegtmeier.

KeAnn and Frances are majoring in veterinary technology. KeAnn will also earn a second degree in equine management. Frances has her Quarter Horse, Sissy, at college and boards her in Curtis. Both students have part-time jobs on campus, working for Roy on the NCTA farm crew.

Damian and Garison are livestock management majors, first-year students at NCTA, and each has a horse at college as well and is a member of the NCTA Ranch Horse Team.

A refuge visitor from Louisiana, James Nowell, pulled up along the group and offered conversation and hot chocolate he prepared out of the back of his vehicle. He'd driven to Nebraska to bow hunt during deer season, to enjoy the sights and people.

Soon, the semi from Curtis arrived and cows were on their final journey back to campus. Students helped with safely sorting and carefully loading the cows up the ramp and into the cattle pot.

A unique day on the trail in the life of an NCTA student.



*The 2017 fall roundup of NCTA cow herd from summer pasture at the Graves Ranch, Oshkosh
(Mary Crawford/NCTA News photo)*

25 – Flu Shot Clinic, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Student Union
25 – Breast Cancer Awareness “Bra Race”, 8 p.m. LTC Arena
25-28 – 90th National FFA Convention & Expo, Indianapolis
26-28 – Livestock Judging, American Royal, Kansas City
28-29 – NCTA Stock Dog Trial, 8 a.m.-6 p.m., LTC Arena
30 – Aggie Haunted Hallows, Aggieland
30 – Frontier County Extension Board, 7:30 p.m., Ag Hall
31 - Cup of Joe on the Go Coffee Shop, 7:30-10:30 a.m., Ed Center
31 – STVMA hosts Halloween Dance, Student Union
Nov. 1 – Cup of Joe on the Go, 7:30 -10:30 a.m. Ed Center
2 – NCTA Career and Job Fair, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Ed 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.

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