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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

## **NCTA guides FFA and agriculture students**

CURTIS, Neb. – It may be obvious that students at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis study agriculture.

What many may not realize is that Aggies students also can major in one of NCTA's newer programs.

A dozen freshmen and sophomores are enrolled in agriculture education this year, with the second-year students on track to become high school teachers and FFA chapter advisors in Nebraska classrooms by fall of 2020.

"This is our sixth year of instructing Ag Ed students here in Curtis," said Doug Smith, chair of the NCTA Animal Science and Agriculture Education Division.

"The program continues to grow as more and more students are now interested in becoming teachers and going on to UNL," he added.

Students receive an associate degree at NCTA and transfer to their sister institution, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where they enroll in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication. The next two years of study in ALEC also includes student teaching at the high school level.

"We have a strong program at NCTA that immerses these students in animal science, agronomy, agricultural mechanics, livestock and crops judging, and provides well-rounded leadership and teaching opportunities," Smith said.

Supplying the ag teacher pipeline has been a focus of the University of Nebraska programs at NCTA and UNL in recent years as more secondary programs have started.

Nebraska FFA now exists in 186 chapters around the state. The NCTA Collegiate FFA is the second program in town, along with the Medicine Valley High School in Curtis.

As high school FFA chapters aboard 13 busloads traveled to Indianapolis last month to attend the 90<sup>th</sup> Annual National FFA Convention and Expo, three NCTA Aggies joined in seminars and expo events.

And, though not all could miss classes or attend the national conclave, 10 current students at NCTA were awarded the highest FFA honor, the American Farmer Degree. Recipients were: Emily Smith, Blair; Trey Baum, Elgin; Chandler Logan Ritchie, Loup County; Brendon Hauxwell, McCook; Will E. Kusant, Ord; Dean Flear, Pierce; and Joe Calvo, Jentrie Maurer, Katrina Clay and Bridget Jackson, Rock County.

In early November, nine NCTA students joined about 750 participants at the Pathways to Career Conference at Fonner Park in Grand Island during the Fall Agricultural Education Conference.

"We had great interaction with the FFA members and had a chance to network with current teachers," said Karlee Johnson of Pender. "I appreciate that Dr. Smith provides these types of leadership opportunities as part of our academic program."

Attending from NCTA were: Katrina Clay, Bassett; Haley Farr, Cambridge; Johnson; Jentrie Maurer, Bassett; Kaylee Hostler, Central City; Meghan Hurst, Blair; Claire Schmidt, Arlington; Chantelle Schulz, Syracuse; and Paige Twohig, Wilcox.

Clay, Johnson and Maurer also attended the national convention at Indianapolis last month, helping with outreach at the NCTA recruiting exhibit and attending sessions.

“We communicated with a lot of FFA members from all over the U.S., which was very interesting to hear about their programs and chapters,” said Maurer. “Including we met students from Puerto Rico. It was a wonderful experience.”



Some NCTA students at the Agricultural Education Fall Conference, from left, Haley Farr, Katrina Clay, Karlee Johnson, Jentrie Maurer, Paige Twohig, Kaylee Hostler, Chantelle Schulz, and Claire Schmidt. (Courtesy photo)

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