



## NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

July 14, 2021

By NCTA News and Nebraska Extension Frontier County

### Youth in the field navigate new heights

CURTIS, Neb. – Use of drones for crop management and weed control was a highlight at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Agronomy Youth Field Day in Curtis.

Twenty youth and four adults gained new perspectives and knowledge both in the field and indoors at the soils laboratory of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

One of the most popular sessions for youth was out at the campus farm, where a drone flew over a field to assess crop health. Later, the older youth could pilot the drone through an obstacle course.

Participants learned about weed control, planter technology, creating healthy soil, plant disease identification, and drone technology.



*Youngsters 9 to 11 years learned how a drone can apply pesticides to crops at the 2021 Agronomy Youth Field Day at NCTA. (B. Ramsdale/ NCTA photo)*

Nebraska Extension and NCTA partnered in the one-day program hosted on July 7. Fun activities engaged youth ages 9 to 18 years. Youth came from Ewing, Paxton, Gering, Gothenburg, Cozad, McCook, Trenton, and Curtis.

The day was a great opportunity for youth statewide to gain technical and life skills while learning about careers in science, agronomy, irrigation, and mechanized agriculture.

Interactive and hands-on sessions were offered in two tracts, for youth ages 9-11 years and 12-18 years. Classroom and lab activities in the Nebraska Agriculture Industry Education Center enabled youth to see disease characteristics up close, under microscopes in the soils lab. Other sessions discussed soil health and crop management.

Outside, in the field, participants also gained hands-on experience in understanding cropping and water systems. Brad Ramsdale, NCTA agronomy professor, demonstrated how seed count and planter operations such as planting depth affects a crop.

“The agronomy youth day was a great success,” said Ramsdale. “All the youth were very interactive during the sessions and displayed great excitement towards the diverse professional opportunities in the field of agronomy.”

Student comments included:

- “I learned how drones can be used for different types of crop and soil management, and the different soil types and ag jobs.”
- “The \$30,000 drone with the sprayer was really cool!”
- “I liked all the subjects discussed. I always learn something when I attend!”

Frontier County-Nebraska Extension hosted activities with Nebraska Extension educators, the University of Nebraska’s West Central Research, Extension & Education Center, North Platte, and NCTA staff and faculty.

Topics and instructors were:

- Crop disease - Sarah Sivits, cropping systems extension educator, Dawson/Buffalo Counties
- Soil health - Todd Whitney, water cropping systems extension educator, Phelps County
- Pesticide application with a drone - Jeff Golus, research manager at West Central Research, Extension & Education Center, with Trenton Houston, graduate student
- Plant technology - Brad Ramsdale, NCTA agronomy professor
- Drone use for field sensing and drone obstacle course - Chuck Burr, irrigated cropping systems extension educator, WCRE&EC

*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.*

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Online article: <https://go.unl.edu/pw4d>

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