



NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

A degree and a heifer for three Aggie graduates

By NCTA NEWS

CURTIS, Neb. (Sept. 14, 2022) _ In Spring of 2022, a final semester of classes at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture came with an incentive for three Aggie students.

From farms and ranches in western Nebraska, each applied to the NCTA Heifer Link project and received one animal from the campus herd.

Heifer Link was initiated about a decade ago for NCTA students at Curtis to earn a heifer and begin their herd or add to their cattle enterprise.

Michael Comstock of Harrison, Braden Johnson of Gering, and Ryan Liakos of Bayard were three successful applicants in 2022.



The cattle herd at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is part of the teaching program for Aggie students. Three 2022 graduates were awarded a breeding heifer for their participation in the NCTA Heifer Link project. NCTA Dean Larry Gossen, far left, is with Ryan Liakos, Bayard; Braden Johnson, Gering; and Michael Comstock, Harrison. (Doug Smith / NCTA photo)

Just prior to May graduation, each was awarded a heifer that had been born at campus in 2021.

“I had started my own operation right after my first year of college,” said Liakos, a Diversified Agricultural Management major at NCTA. He received an Associate of Applied Science for studies in crops, livestock, ag business, and ag mechanics.

Liakos farms rented ground located between Bayard and Scottsbluff. He added a Red Angus breeding heifer to the family herd. They farm corn, dry edible beans, sugar beets, and livestock feed. Liakos was active in campus clubs. He had earned his American FFA Degree while in the Bayard FFA Chapter.

Braden Johnson, also an American FFA Degree recipient from the Bayard chapter, is back at rural Gering, raising cattle and alfalfa with his family. He said they focus on the cow-calf herd, raising alfalfa for their use and outside sales, and are considering adding a small feedlot at the farm.

“I appreciated the classes and programs that NCTA offered me, and enjoyed the hands-on aspect with the livestock there,” Johnson said. He majored in Livestock Industry Management.

Michael Comstock studied Diversified Agricultural Management and received a certificate in Agricultural Mechanics. He ranches with his family in northwestern Nebraska, in Sioux County and they also pasture cattle just across the state line, near Lusk, Wyoming.

With a goal of assuming management of his grandparents' operation, Comstock is well versed in cattle production and helps manage their small backgrounding lot for yearlings.

NCTA students in livestock classes have hands-on responsibilities in calving, processing cattle, and all facets of production. The livestock and large animal vet technician students also can become certified in cattle artificial insemination through weekend courses at NCTA.

"During calving, we checked on the cows every four hours in a rotation with other students," Comstock said. His calving partner was Liakos. "I enjoyed the calving and classes too."

Participants in Heifer Link complete an extensive application, along with submitting two letters of reference from individuals in the cattle industry. Applicants are evaluated by a review committee headed by Dr. Doug Smith, animal science professor and Aggie livestock judging coach.

The donor-supported project is possible through in-kind gifts of a live animal or financial contribution to the Heifer Link fund at the University of Nebraska Foundation.

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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