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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

Agronomy in action

CURTIS, Neb. – Growing crops and future farm managers starts in the classroom. Yield at harvest and career is proven in the field.

Two years of agronomy studies in field laboratories and the farm at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture campus in Curtis is building crop consultants, researchers, ag producers and teachers.

“NCTA definitely prepared me for the workforce with their hands-on teaching,” says John Paul Kain, a crop production advisor with Frenchman Valley Coop in McCook.

The 2017 graduate from NCTA competed on one of Agronomy Professor Brad Ramsdale’s national champion crops judging teams, also winning the individual title.

Kain credits comprehensive crops judging knowledge and “the total package” of agronomy courses for his career path. He went on to earn a 4-year degree in agronomy through Oklahoma Panhandle State University.

A three-semester NCTA crops practicum is foundational as well. Students make the management decisions for a crop field at NCTA’s farm laboratory.

Three irrigated center pivots and dryland fields, plus pastures totaling 550 acres, lie over the hill, just north of main campus.

NCTA crops practicums

In Practicum I, each student creates a portfolio of resources for management decisions such as variety selection, pest management, and fertility management. A class requirement emphasizes corn and soybean, first.

Then, in Practicum II, students develop a field plan for their crop choice.

Freshman Taylor Sayer of Cambridge and her teammate Lilly Calkins of Palmyra both compete in crops judging. They decided triticale and sunflowers will yield a double harvest.

“I grew up on a farm but never had to make those choices about a crop. I know how important every little aspect is from my class,” Sayer said.

This summer, Sayer can monitor the triticale and sunflowers since her summer internship is based at Curtis under the tutelage of Kelly Popp, a Servi-Tech crop consultant.



Dr. Brad Ramsdale, right, demonstrates planter adjustments at the campus farm of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis. (Photo by Cy Cannon/NCTA News)

Sayer's goal after obtaining her Associate of Science degree is to transfer in 2021 to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and earn a bachelor's. She is exploring a master's in agronomy, as well.

Aggie graduates say their NCTA internships and campus work readily lead to job offers.

Research agronomists

A summer research internship with Monsanto at the Water Utilization Learning Center near Gothenburg evolved into fulltime employment in 2016 for Blue Hill native Amelia Petska.

Today, Petska is as an assistant agronomist in research with the Bayer WULC while also taking a busy online-load of classes through Fort Hayes State University.

In May, Petska's studies done on evenings and weekends will leave her just 10 hours away from a bachelor's degree in agribusiness. She is familiar with juggling a full work load.

While at NCTA, Petska took a semester of crops judging, competed in Aggie rodeo team four semesters, and worked part-time in the IT department.

Recently, in a campus forum, she advised Aggie students to work hard and take advantage of all opportunities. Those paths lead to careers.

"I knew I wanted to be in agriculture, and preferred a crops focus," Petska said. "From NCTA, I have a job that I really like."

Research work at NCTA also was ingrained in North Platte native Dalon Koubek.

In May, he graduates from UNL in agronomy, then leaves for an internship scouting fields in Boardman, Oregon with CSS Farms, a large seed potato producer.

"I come from a family that was not involved in agriculture, so I did a good job of building my agricultural background at NCTA," Koubek said.

"Being there, it helped me ease into it and learn about true production agriculture."

Between crops judging, working in the campus greenhouse, setting up weed and plant samples for Professor Ramsdale's classes, and helping on research at NCTA, Koubek says "it gave me a good foundation for the work I am doing now at UNL."

Like Kain, Koubek also garnered top individual honors at the 2018 national crops judging contest, leading NCTA's championship team. His career goal is agronomy research with a university in the Midwest.

Online article: <https://go.unl.edu/a7z8>

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