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University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

2002 Connect

May

National conversation inspires community action, volunteer pledges

Two University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H'ers who joined 1,200 participants in Washington, D.C., for a "National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century" found there is much to talk about. And do.

Anne Drinkwalter and Eric Whitney were among the 23 Nebraska 4-H'ers at the national event Feb. 28-March 1. It highlighted 4-H's 2002 centennial.

Drinkwalter and Whitney said that during the national conversation they recognized many similarities they share with youth nationwide. Whitney, a Milford Junior-Senior High School senior, said he learned he has much in common with inner city teens from Miami.

"We were able to talk and get along. These were kids who cared about the world," Whitney said.

Drinkwalter, a Chadron High School senior, helped compile recommendations from the national conversation. Recommendations, which were to be forwarded to President Bush in April, include establishing a youth congress and having more youth representation in decisions affecting them.

"I was very impressed by the level of ideas that came out of the conversation and consensus at the national level," Drinkwalter said.

Gary Heusel, Nebraska 4-H program development leader, attended the national conversation. He said he was impressed with the youths' energy, enthusiasm and ideas to help make their communities better places to live.

Cheryl Alberts

Trish Spencer (center), 4-H communications associate, enjoys 4-H Clover Mint ice cream, along with 4-H'ers Michael and Emily Veburg of Lincoln. The three participated in the first 4-H Unicameral Day, which kicked off Nebraska's celebration for the national 4-H centennial in 2002.

"Young people were expressing the thought that if they're involved and help make decisions, they're invested in the community, so they're more interested in coming back," Heusel said.

National conversation participants were among 100,000 youth and adults pledging to collectively volunteer 3 million hours in 2002. Drinkwalter and Whitney pledged to mentor and tutor others, and to enlist more of their peers as volunteers.

The national conversation culminated hundreds of grassroots discussions nationwide. It included youth in 4-H and other groups, and adults representing civic groups and service organizations.

Heusel said nearly 60 local conversations in Nebraska drew almost 2,000 youth and adults. Their recommendations on mentoring, youth empowerment, community networking and collaboration, and community service were forwarded to the state and national conversations.

Nebraska's state conversation Feb. 5 drew nearly 200 4-H'ers invited to Lincoln for the first 4-H Unicameral Day, where youth met with state senators, learned how state legislation is made and kicked off the 4-H centennial in Nebraska.

Nebraska activities celebrating 4-H's centennial include a breakfast reunion at the Nebraska State Fair Aug. 31; auction of an original Garfield print Sept. 1-7; 4-H display at the Nebraska State Historical Society's Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln August-December; and National 4-H Week Oct. 6-12.

Several Nebraska counties will celebrate the 4-H centennial this summer with vintage fashion shows, displays, time capsules and more. For more information see **4h.unl.edu**.

– Cheryl Alberts

Heusel can be contacted at (402) 472-9009.

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University of Nebraska Lincoln

Dean's comments

It is always my very great pleasure to talk about the many exciting benefits University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension provides Nebraska – benefits that grow as extension faculty work with Nebraskans to put research-based knowledge to work.

Elbert Dickey

Today I'd like to tell you about two exciting developments happening at the national level, as well – developments that reflect very well on this state and University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

The first occurred in late February when 23 Nebraska 4-H'ers were among the 1,200 youth participating in a "National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century" in Washington, D.C. The framework of the discussion centered on five themes: power of youth; access equity and opportunity; extraordinary places to live and learn; exceptional people, innovative practices; and effective organizational systems. Action steps within each theme describe how specific suggestions could move forward.

Our 4-H'ers joined youth from across the nation to find common ground discussing ways to improve their communities. Their discussions had roots in conversations held earlier at local and state levels.

These 23 Nebraska 4-H'ers are among the 100,000 youth and adults nationwide who, as part of these local through national conversations, pledged to volunteer a collective 3 million hours in 2002. You can read more about the national conversation and 4-H centennial on page 1.

I'm also very excited about the national "A Vision for the 21st Century" report developed by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP). The authors of this report were charged with formulating a vision for extension that considers the impact of changing demographics, advances in technology and profound social changes confronting our society. It was released in late February at a national meeting of extension directors. Nebraska extension faculty had an opportunity in late December to contribute to a draft document.

What I find especially exciting about the national report is that University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension about five years ago began moving in the direction outlined by the ECOP.

Nebraska completed its own Cooperative Extension in the 21st Century Task Force Report in March 2000 as part of our strategic planning process. The national report parallels Nebraska's in three key areas: Both call for more engagement; collaboration and partnerships; and more accountable reporting systems.

And speaking of reporting systems: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's EARS — Extension Accomplishments Reporting System – is a model for 20 other states.

I hope you, too, feel good about the many benefits University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension provides this state — as well as the national recognition our program participants and faculty bring to Nebraska.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

2002 Connect

May 2002 **Volume 2, Number 2**

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Connect is published three times a year by the Communications and Information Technology unit at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln under the auspices of the Dean of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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There is no charge for this newsletter. Each issue describes a few of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's ongoing, widely diverse programs. The newsletter is an informal report to interested taxpayers. Please send comments, questions and subscription requests to: Editor, *NU Cooperative Extension Connect*, 108 Agricultural Communications Building, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918.

Upon request, this publication can be made available in an alternative format for people with disabilities. For assistance call (402) 472-3031.

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Computer classes help integrate, excite Dawson County's new Hispanic residents

Many members of Lexington's Hispanic population are growing in their computer knowledge as a result of classes taught through University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

Bridging the Technology Gap computer classes are offered in Spanish and English at the Lexington Public Library, said Patricia Sanchez-Stewart, extension assistant in Dawson County. Although the classes are open to anyone, most participants are members of the city's Hispanic community, which grew in the last decade after a Lexington meat processing plant opened and attracted new workers.

The classes are designed to teach computer technology to children, youth and adults who have little or no computer background, Sanchez-Stewart said.

"They absolutely have found it rewarding," Sanchez-Stewart said. "They're using the information we give them."

Francisca Padilla and Raul Saurez bought a new computer for themselves and gave their old one to their children after taking the class.

"We have five (school-age) children and we help them with their homework" using the computer, Padilla said.

Doug Swanson, 4-H project coordinator, said Bridging the Technology Gap classes are part of a federally grant-funded, community-based program designed to help increase self-confidence, volunteer participation, pride and heritage, as well as acclimate newcomers to a different culture. The fact the classes are held at the public library helps achieve this, he said.

"The public library is a very traditional setting," said Swanson, adding positive cultural interaction takes place as Hispanic teenagers help long-time area senior citizens also taking the classes.

"That has created an interaction that ordinarily would not happen in the community," Swanson said.

More than 300 people, mostly new Hispanic residents in Lexington, have participated in the four hours of free basic computer training on the keyboard, mouse, Internet and e-mail, Sanchez-Stewart said. Twelve hours of advanced classes also are available, she said.

Ernesto De Leon took the class in 2000 and now is a basic computer instructor at the library. Students in the class are eager to learn, he said.

"They are very excited," he said, which motivates them to learn more.

Additional grant-funded extension programs delivered in Dawson County, in partnership with more than a dozen federal, state, local and educational entities, include Spanish language child care training, youth day camps, youth and adult leadership development programs, cultural dance and gardening.

– Lori McGinnis

Sanchez-Stewart can be contacted at (308) 324-5501; Swanson at (402) 472-2805.

David Martinez

Patricia Sanchez-Stewart, NU Cooperative Extension assistant, works with Carolina Laudoa on a computer lesson during a Bridging the Technology Gap class at the Lexington Public Library while Angel Dones and Silvia Gonzalez work nearby.

College Spending 101 identifies expectations

A new, six-page University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension workbook helps parents and students discuss, compute and answer college-related financial questions and options.

College Spending 101 was developed by extension educators Cathy Johnston in Scotts Bluff County and Carla Mahar in Deuel/Garden counties. Johnston said the workbook opens the door for parents and children to discuss not only academic costs such as tuition, books and housing, but such topics as car insurance, credit, roommates and even how often students are expected to come home.

Having such discussions before a child attends college helps families identify expectations, Johnston said, as well as potential expenses and responsibilities.

"Some parents have commented that they had not thought about all of the decisions that the student will have to make," Johnston said. "Most parents like the opportunity to have a discussion about finances with their children."

Many parents, she said, "assumed that the student understood their feelings about how money would be spent, where the student would live, who would pay for various services. The student, many times, had different ideas."

Since it was developed in 2001, Johnston and Mahar have provided the workbook to about 200 western Nebraska families. Additionally, this spring the workbook was included in University of Nebraska-Lincoln informational packets provided to 350 Nebraska high school juniors, Mahar said. Extension educators statewide provide information about UNL to potential students expressing interest in the campus.

– Barbara Rixstine

Johnston can be contacted at (308) 632-1483; Mahar at (308) 874-2705.

AgrAbility provides means toward agricultural independence

Where there's a will there's a way. Nebraska AgrAbility helps farmers and ranchers disabled by injury or illness find that way when they want to continue their profession.

AgrAability educates and informs producers with disabilities of technical and financial options, helping them attain greater independence and self-sustainability, said Roger Selley, Nebraska AgrAbility project director and a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension farm management specialist.

AgrAability also supports rural professionals working with producers who are disabled — doctors, counselors, others — to help them better understand a producer's situation. AgrAability educates producers and others through individual counseling and conferences. It identifies funding and ways farm equipment can be adapted to work for producers with disabilities, and helps producers answer questions on Social Security benefits and medical coverage, Selley said.

AgrAability is funded largely through the USDA in about 20 states. The program is administered by extension, which in Nebraska collaborates with Easter Seals in carrying out many of its functions, Selley said.

Becki Koehler, with Easter Seals Nebraska, oversees the Nebraska AgrAability project from her office in Hastings. She notes families of agricultural producers with disabilities face unusual circumstances because of the size and scope of machinery and other investments, as well as the way home and work intertwine. That makes it difficult for producers with disabilities to consider another occupation, Koehler said. AgrAability staff helps educate doctors, vocational counselors and therapists to better understand this fact and better help clients, she added.

Cheryl Alberts

Cindy Hinrichs, rural rehabilitation specialist with Easter Seals Nebraska, and Roger Selley, Nebraska AgrAability project director and an NU Cooperative Extension farm management specialist, look over AgrAability materials at this year's spring conference.

Since it started in 1995, Nebraska AgrAability has helped more than 240 producers, Koehler said, among them Jeff Lutz of Arcadia.

Farming was all Lutz ever wanted to do, but a spinal cord injury in a September 1999 traffic accident left him unable to walk and with limited hand use. During rehabilitation, AgrAability staff visited Lutz and showed him ideas on lifts that, if built on his tractors and combine, could enable him to get into the cab and continue farming. A local machinist built the lifts, and modified the machinery's brakes and clutches with L-shaped hand levers Lutz operates. Lutz continues to cultivate and harvest corn, and put up and move alfalfa hay on the family farm.

"AgrAability has been very helpful," Lutz said. "They've done about as much as anyone could do."

Nebraska AgrAability has a strong emphasis on financial management, said Selley, who can put participants in touch with advisers geared to aid producers with financial planning. He also has contacts with students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Biological Systems Engineering who are willing to design and build devices to modify equipment so producers with disabilities can continue farming.

For more information on Nebraska AgrAability, call (402) 462-3031, Ext. 1.

— Cheryl Alberts

Selley can be contacted at (402) 762-4442.

Cindy Hinrichs

Nebraska AgrAability helped provide Jeff Lutz of Arcadia with a lift for his tractors and combine to enable him to get into the cab and continue farming.

Water-protection measures taken along Lower Platte corridor

Water wellness education from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension has helped identify a safer water supply for some homeowners along the Lower Platte River corridor, said Sharon Skipton, extension educator for Douglas/Sarpy counties.

Groundwater and surface water along the corridor can become contaminated from normal household activities from the kitchen, laundry and bathroom, Skipton said. Concentrations of household septic tanks for wastewater treatment near the river could result in contaminants leaching through the region's sandy soil into the shallow water table, Skipton said. Drinking water could become contaminated from improperly designed and installed septic systems, storm water runoff into the river and use of wells not meeting current construction standards, she said. About 30,000 people now live in the 100-mile flood plain from Columbus to Plattsmouth.

Extension and the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance, a partnership of state agencies and natural resources districts that addresses corridor issues, held a dozen meetings in 2000-2001 to help residents identify potential water quality risks, Skipton said, with about 360 people taking voluntary, confidential water quality risk assessments. She said a follow-up survey showed 42 percent of participating respondents had taken corrective steps to protect their health and the environment, such as installing drinking water treatment systems and new septic systems, and having their septic tanks pumped more frequently.

IANR photo

"The participants' knowledge doubled as a result of attending the programs," Skipton said. "More significantly, they told us they were much more willing to make a change in their practices to reduce risks after attending the program."

Preventing wastewater contamination of surface water and groundwater was the aim of another extension collaboration that in 2000-2001 trained 400 builders and inspectors of residential septic systems and lagoons, Skipton added. Their training, testing and certification has the support of the industry and would be required under a bill introduced in the Nebraska Legislature, she said.

— Lori McGinnis

Skipton can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.

Early childhood professional course provides online training

A University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension online course is helping full- and part-time early childhood professionals earn training hours toward retaining their facility's state license.

Darlene Pohlman, NU nutrition specialist, coordinated development of the Internet Independent Study Course for Early Childhood Professionals in 1999. For $5 per training hour, online participants can study childhood nutrition, food safety, indoor air quality and more. Course participants passing an online test receive a certificate stating the number of training hours earned, Pohlman said.

In Nebraska there are more than 3,200 licensed family-based operations and more than 800 licensed center sites with varying numbers of employees, and about 300 pre-school sites that are required by the state to complete up to 12 hours of training annually. These hours may come from workshops, study groups and other classes, as well as extension's online course, Pohlman said. The online training was developed by extension faculty in NU's College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, Minnesota and Tennessee.

"We offer training hours via the Internet as an alternative way to receive hours," said Pohlman, who encourages those caring for children in child care settings to earn their hours in a variety of ways. "I think they're very appreciative to be able to access their training needs in an 'on demand format.' Not only does the course provide training hours, many use the information as a daily resource."

In addition to providing training hours, the course helps professionals implement dietary guidelines to lessen risk factors for chronic diseases, provide safer facilities for children, and meet the intellectual, social and emotional needs of the children in their care, Pohlman said.

Pohlman hears positive feedback from participants who have taken the online training hours. One said she could not have met the requirement for her facility to be licensed without them. Said another: "This course helped me make a better environment for the children."

— Lori McGinnis

Pohlman can be contacted at (402) 370-4005.

Check out Cooperative Extension's Web site at: http://extension.unl.edu

Test for live cattle enhances food safety, consumer confidence

A test developed at the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center in Clay Center is another step forward in greater consumer confidence and overall food safety, according to Dee Griffin, NU Cooperative Extension feedlot veterinarian.

Those are two goals in the national Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, which teaches producers management techniques for improving beef quality during production, Griffin said.

"We continue as a society to become more safety conscious," Griffin said, adding consumer demand will continue to drive the development of more ways to prove food safety.

One such development is the Pre-Harvest Antibiotic Screening Test (PHAST) Griffin developed about a year ago. It detects traces of antibiotics, given to animals being treated for illness, in live cattle. The USDA tests for residues in carcasses only, he said, so meat containing antibiotics must be destroyed.

Testing is necessary, Griffin said, because some people are highly allergic to antibiotics in any form.

"The test is one more safety step that should lessen the potential even more for a residue to get through to the consumer," Griffin said of his test. "It's one more step to allow food safety to move back to the farm."

The inexpensive test involves mixing cattle urine with bacterial spores extremely sensitive to antibiotic residues, Griffin said. If even trace amounts of antibiotics are present, rings form around the urine samples within six hours. Thus the marketing of the animal will be delayed until further testing shows all antibiotic residues are gone, Griffin said.

While antibiotic residues in meat are very rare, eliminating them is one component of the BQA training program taken by 3,000 Nebraska beef producers. Producers obtaining third-party verification that they are using the techniques can become part of the Nebraska Corn-Fed Beef program and get higher prices for their cattle, Griffin said. He added some restaurants buy beef only under this program, promising customers higher-quality meat.

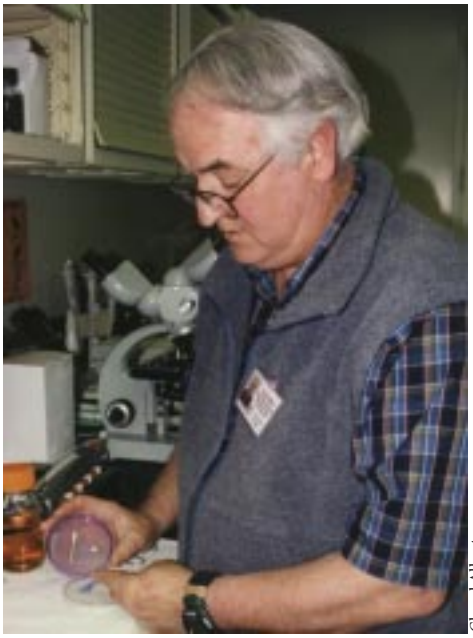
Griffin anticipates the PHAST test in the future will have widespread use among the state's 256 large-animal veterinarians once more scientific validation is obtained. Screening live cattle at risk of having an antibiotic residue is endorsed by the Academy of Veterinary Consultants, a national association representing veterinarians who treat cattle being fed for meat production, he said.

The Sutton Veterinary Clinic uses the test at three cattle feedlots, said veterinarian Michael Cox.

"I think it's a real good test. It's been a valuable tool for us," Cox said.

Considering that nearly 20 percent of all beef processed in the United States is from Nebraska, ensuring its safety is of utmost importance, Griffin said.

"The mission of Nebraska agriculture is pretty impressive," he said. "But it comes with a lot of responsibility."



Cheryl Alberts

Dee Griffin, NU Cooperative Extension veterinarian, developed the Pre-Harvest Antibiotic Screening Test that determines whether traces of antibiotic residues are present in live cattle.

— Lori McGinnis

Griffin can be contacted at (402) 762-4504.

Grants for health issued in 9 counties

Residents in nine north central Nebraska counties are benefiting from health care measures ranging from seat belt checks to regional public health services, the result of $1.2 million in grants that University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension helped obtain.

The grants were issued through the North Central Community Care Partnership, of which Carol Plate, extension educator for Brown, Rock and Keya Paha counties, is a member and former board treasurer. The grants are from state and federal funds received in the last three years, she said.

Plate said one of the partnership's major projects for the north central region is implementing a public health department. These services are quite welcome, Plate said, since public health services such as immunizations were previously unavailable except through local community action agencies.

The partnership also is developing a program to contract for health-related services in areas without a school nurse, she said.

Plate helps extension provide educational support by writing health-related information for regional media. She said the grants have helped regional residents become more health and safety conscious.

"I think people in my nine-county region are healthier because of some of the measures extension has helped the partnership implement," Plate said. These include seat belt and child car seat safety, school health checks, collecting mercury thermometers, providing free radon kits and helping people with fitness information, she added.

— Barbara Rixstine

Plate can be contacted at (402) 387-2213.

Master Gardeners beautify communities through service, advice

More than 120 University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteers help keep parts of Nebraska's largest city looking green and colorful.

Master Gardeners answer questions from the public and provide informational programs and community service at no charge, said Kathleen Cue, extension assistant in Douglas/Sarpy counties. They receive training and education from NU experts on turf, tree and flower management, including weed control and pesticide use, she said, and become Master Gardeners after a 40-hour internship and passing a test.

Part of the Master Gardener community service in Douglas and Sarpy counties includes maintaining seven demonstration gardens in and around Omaha, including two at the Henry Doorly Zoo, Cue said.

"Whether it's ideas for trees that will provide shade to a home and diminish cooling costs, to plant recommendations for stabilizing steep slopes, Master Gardeners not only provide good plant information but also help homeowners see the overall impact their activities have on the environment," Cue said.

Mary Anna Anderson, also an extension assistant for Master Gardeners, said the program aids "not only homeowners but also apartment dwellers and senior citizens whose only means of growing a garden is in containers — whether it's tomatoes, houseplants or petunias."

Cue estimates that more than 400 people have been trained as Master Gardeners in Douglas and Sarpy counties since 1978. Last year, volunteers presented 46 programs, participated in eight "Ask the Master Gardener" sessions and served as consultants to three community gardening projects. Altogether in 2001, she said, Master Gardeners had contact with more than 13,300 people in Douglas and Sarpy counties.

John Christensen of Omaha is a Master Gardener intern now after being a gardening hobbyist for about 10 years.

"I wanted to go to the next level," Christensen said, adding that the Master Gardener program is "an incredible resource for Omaha."

Veteran gardener Nick Pistillo, also of Omaha, became a Master Gardener 10 years ago. He said he now serves as a sort of 'botanical mayor' of his community because people come to him with their questions.

"By being able to help my neighbors, I help my neighborhood look good," Pistillo said.

Cue said Master Gardeners also positively influence Omaha's environmental health with efficient watering and pesticide information for homeowners. For example, she said mites on spruce trees can be controlled by rinsing the trees with water every seven to 10 days during spring and fall, rather than using pesticides.

"Knowing the right product to provide for the right plant at the right time is what Master Gardeners are all about," Cue said.

— Barbara Rixstine

Cue or Anderson can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.

Barbara Rixstine

Irene Eckland and John Christensen, both Omaha, examine a plant during a recent NU Cooperative Extension Master Gardener training session. The statewide program teaches participants to answer yard and garden questions.

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Safeguards similar against bioterrorism, domestic diseases

Awareness and caution are two of the strongest safeguards available to protect the nation's livestock and food manufacturers from bioterrorism, according to two University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension experts.

Last year's publicity about foot-and-mouth disease and anthrax-tainted letters heightened bioterrorism awareness in the United States, said David Smith, NU biosecurity expert and a beef/dairy veterinarian.

Fortunately, Smith said, the same steps that prevent accidental disease in livestock also help prevent intentional introduction of disease. These include checking livestock frequently and reporting unusual illness, not moving livestock that appear ill, safeguarding feed and water supplies and asking visitors to check in before they enter the farm or ranch.

Anthrax isn't the most likely bioterroristic threat to Nebraska's $6 billion livestock industry, Smith said, because anthrax is not contagious. More serious threats are highly contagious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, he said, which has not appeared in the United States since 1929. Biosecurity practices also help protect livestock herds from common domestic diseases such as Johne's, which wastes cattle away from diarrhea; and mastitis, which drastically reduces milk production.

Smith developed a computer model to evaluate testing strategies for Johne's disease, and has written several informational publications for producers and 4-H exhibitors.

Steve Taylor, director of NU's Food Processing Center, said as with livestock, many preventative steps to avert bioterrorism in food manufacturing already are in place. Many biological agents that bioterrorists could use would be inactivated during the food manufacturing process, Taylor said.

IANR photo

David Smith, NU Cooperative Extension biosecurity expert and dairy/beef veterinarian, collects water and feed samples to monitor for pathogens as part of a biosecurity plan for cattle.

"Food processing is not necessarily as vulnerable as people might think," Taylor noted.

Still, he said, the center has taken steps to heighten bioterrorism awareness during its food safety training programs.

– Cheryl Alberts

Smith can be contacted at (402) 472-2362; Taylor at (402) 472-2833.

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