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Assuring Quality livestock program focuses on consumer confidence

A quality assurance program is teaching 4-H livestock exhibitors more about the responsibilities of raising their animals to be healthy and to ensure meat quality and safety.

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Assuring Quality program focuses on quality assurance for swine, cattle, sheep, dairy cows and dairy goats, said Rosie Nold, animal science youth specialist.

"The program is designed to teach kids about their livestock production," said Nold, who developed the program materials. "The end product is food. They need to do everything possible to make that the highest quality and safest that they can."

Nebraska 4-H'ers are required to take Assuring Quality before exhibiting large animals at a county or state fair.

"We're sending the message this is really important," Nold said. "You need to think about what you're producing. This isn't just a show."

Over a three-year period, the program aims to teach 4-H'ers daily care and management of livestock, animal handling and carcass quality and proper

use of medication and animal health products, Nold said.

In 2002, the first year of the program, more than 6,500 Nebraska 4-H'ers participated in Assuring Quality. Children 12 and older may complete the program through options such as written tests, she said, but children ages 8-11 are targeted with hands-on activities. One hands-on activity is having children fill buckets with water so they can better visualize the quantity an animal needs to be healthy, and that failure to meet those requirements could affect meat quality.

Nold said the youth program is patterned after similar adult programs for pork and beef quality assurance, and includes discussions on ethical issues.

Maggie Baliman, 14, of Kimball, took a pork quality program for youth when she joined 4-H at age 8, and last year started the expanded Assuring Quality program. She says it taught her more about how to care for animals on the farm.

Maggie's mother, Kim Baliman, said the program has benefited Maggie as well as her other children, Mollie, 12, and Hunter, 10.

"Kids need to know more about the production of meat," Baliman said. "They need to know what they're putting out there for the American consumer. This is something they're doing for America and they're not just doing it for themselves."



Rosie Nold, NU Cooperative Extension animal science youth specialist, developed the Assuring Quality program that teaches 4-H exhibitors greater responsibilities for livestock care and a safe food supply.

Lori McGinnis

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Nicole Snyder, extension assistant in Kimball, Banner and Cheyenne counties, taught the program to children last year, and notes this year 4-H leaders will be trained to teach the program to club members.

"When we started, people thought 'Oh, another requirement.' But when I got into the class I got a lot of comments that this is something we should have done years ago," Snyder said.

— Lori McGinnis

Nold can be contacted at (402) 472-6479; Snyder at (308) 254-4455.

Dean's comments

Times change, and we change with them.

That always has been true in University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, where continued success depends on identifying current and future concerns and providing education people can use to meet those concerns and enhance their lives.

One particularly exciting change occurring in extension today is our educators' move to respond to Nebraskans' 21st century priority needs by focusing their educational programs within specific priority areas.

Issues facing individuals, entrepreneurs, agricultural producers and communities increase in complexity. We're told the amount of new information in the world doubles almost every two years. Focusing our educators' expertise in one or two priority areas means educators can delve more deeply into specific issues, rather than trying to stay current on all subjects of local importance.

Plus, the reality of budget constraints facing Nebraska today — constraints beyond our control — make it likely we will have fewer extension educators in the future. We must seek ways for extension to continue to meet Nebraska's needs, and this is one way we believe we can continue to be highly effective for the state.

Focused educators will work regionally or even statewide to provide educational programs in their focus area. Nebraskans who seek educational expertise not held by the extension educator in their county will find that educator can connect them to the

expertise they need wherever it is located — in another county office, at a research and extension center, or on campus. Extension educator focus areas will be based more on the issue and educational program, rather than the county line.

Extension actually has been moving toward focused education for some time. One-third to one-half of Nebraska extension educators already have focus areas, including all grant-funded educators.

Focused educators need not be committed to a focus area forever. As priorities change, educational focuses also will change. While we intend to have family, crop, livestock, community development and other focused educators strategically located across Nebraska, we also intend to keep 4-H and school enrichment programs as local as possible.

We expect our focused educators will be subject-matter competent, successful teachers, skilled communicators, leaders and strong collaborators, entrepreneurial, able to manage change and inclusive of all members of their community.

I am very proud of our extension faculty and staff who have provided great public value with extension education programs down through the years, and I know that will continue as we all focus on what is important for Nebraska.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension



Elbert Dickey

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Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.



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Head lice video, kits net results

Barb Ogg knows how to control head lice because it's part of her job.

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator from Lancaster County knows the parasites infest children's hair, usually causing intense itching when infestations are severe. She knows they spread by both direct and indirect contact with an infested person's hairbrush, comb or close-fitting hat. Although not considered contagious, Ogg said head lice are a nuisance medical condition and can be difficult to control.

"The only way to really get rid of lice and nits is to thoroughly comb the child's hair with the lice comb," Ogg said, noting much misinformation exists on how to control lice. "We want parents, school nurses and teachers to have the correct information."

Ogg and Soni Cochran, extension associate, developed fact sheets, a teaching kit and a video that school nurses and others can use to teach parents how to control lice. They also make presentations at conferences and training sessions.

The *Removing Head Lice Safely* video is available in English, Spanish and Arabic from the Lancaster County extension office and on the Lancaster County Citizen Information Center Web site. It also has aired on cable access channels in Lincoln and Omaha, Ogg said.

The teaching kit includes medications, metal combs and other supplies for treating a child's hair.

Ogg said after discussions in 1999 with Lincoln Public Schools and the

Lincoln/Lancaster Health Department, LPS changed its lice-checking policy.

Instead of waiting for cases to accumulate, which means lice already are present, LPS staff check all children for head lice just after school begins as an early intervention.

Based on this change and after recommending combing as an important tool to break the lice life cycle, LPS reported a 70 percent drop in head lice cases in 2002, and the Lincoln/Lancaster Health Department reported a 60 percent decrease in reported cases and home visits by public health nurses, Ogg said.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Ogg can be contacted at (402) 441-6744.



Barbara Rixstine

Educational kits, fact sheets and a video on head lice co-developed by Barb Ogg, NU Cooperative Extension educator in Lancaster County, helped reduce head lice in Lincoln Public Schools by 70 percent in 2002.

Tribal youth explore culture, leadership

Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska youth will have greater leadership, cultural awareness and character development opportunities through a partnership between University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and Little Priest Tribal College at Winnebago.

Be Strong and Educate My Children emphasizes character development and leadership through science, technology and governance programs. Activities include youth-adult partnerships, career exploration, healthy lifestyles and citizenship, said Jeff Hart, extension educator, special projects. Hart co-directs the program with Little Priest President Ann Downes.

"This is an innovative youth development partnership," Hart said. "We are integrating 4-H youth development programs with culturally appropriate tribal youth programs."

The program aims to reach the approximately 150 Winnebago youth in grades 7-12. Rhonda Pitt, tribal extension assistant at Little Priest, will carry out activities such as studying the impact of bison on the environment, using remote satellite sensing to study amphibians and studying Native American artifacts. Such activities are expected to bring students closer to their culture while being educational, Pitt said.

Hart said the partnership between extension and Little Priest will foster the exchange of ideas between Nebraska's oldest and newest land-grant institutions. NU was founded as Nebraska's land-grant university in 1862; Little Priest joined the land-grant system in 1996 after the federal government awarded land-grant status to tribal colleges in 1994, Hart said.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Hart can be contacted at (402) 472-4743; Pitt at (402) 878-2380.

Classes on living safely with lead reduce young children's health risks

Some Omaha residents living in homes affected by lead contamination are learning that changing the way they keep house, cook and landscape can protect children from lead poisoning.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension this year began two classes on living safely with lead: Reducing the Risk and Maintenance of Older Homes.

Extension collaborates with the city of Omaha and the Douglas County Health Department to inform people about the classes.

"It's nearly impossible to remove all the lead from the home environment," said Sharon Skipton, program leader and one of three extension educators from Douglas/Sarpy counties teaching the classes. "It's important people understand what they can do to minimize the risk of lead and learn to live with it."

Lead that is ingested or inhaled has been shown to negatively affect mental development, Skipton said, with children under age 6 having the highest risk.

Attention to the issue of lead contamination rose after Environmental Protection Agency soil tests east of 42nd Street found levels of lead higher than acceptable, Skipton said. The lead, believed to be from former industry

emissions, resulted in the EPA targeting the area as a potential Superfund site for federal cleanup, she said. In addition, homes in the area were built before lead paint was banned in 1978, Skipton said.

The monthly Reducing the Risk class includes three 40-minute sessions on safe housekeeping, nutrition and landscaping.

John Fech teaches that covering exposed soil with grass, plants or mulch prevents children from having direct contact with it. Carrie Schneider-Miller teaches that children receiving proper nutrition can reduce the amount of lead absorbed into their bodies. Skipton teaches that damp dusting and other cleaning methods can prevent lead particles from becoming airborne.

In her bimonthly Maintenance of Older Homes class, Skipton explains that homes with lead paint in good condition usually pose minimal risk, but even simple remodeling projects such as replacing a door knob or ceiling fan can create lead dust and greatly increase the danger.

Gabrielle Staben, who lives in the potential Superfund site area, said she renovated her nearly 100-year-old home and didn't realize the hazards until her 2-year-old son, David, tested high for lead last year. She took both extension classes, changed her housekeeping methods and paid more attention to the food she gave her children. David's lead level has since declined.

"I never really worried about dust before," Staben said. "Now, I'm so much more aware of the possibilities of contaminated dust."

"People want to know what to do and what their options are," Fech said. "It's a classic role of Cooperative Extension ... advising people of their options and ultimately letting them decide."

— **Lori McGinnis**

Skipton can be contacted at (402) 472-3662; Fech and Schneider-Miller at (402) 444-7804.

On-farm research project

Producers working the Nebraska Soybean and Feed Grain Profitability Project (NSFGPP) are discovering ways to increase profits.

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension program for producers and private industry cooperators assesses real-cost techniques from on-farm research such as tillage techniques, row widths, fertilizer placement and other profit-related cultural practices. Extension Educators Keith Glewen in Saunders County and Dave Varner in Dodge County coordinate the program.

Glewen said producers make a commitment of at least three years so variations in growing conditions can be factored into reliable results.

Producers start with an idea for their soybean, corn, grain sorghum or wheat enterprises, incorporating at least two variables and at least five replications, Glewen said. Consultants, agronomists and NSFGPP members monitor the fields and record relevant data. Extension faculty document and analyze the results.

Glewen, Varner and the participants then review these results with specially developed software to provide a financial baseline.

"We look at per-bushel costs using not only the direct costs the producer sees — seed and fertilizer, for example — but also the indirect costs such as time, labor and depreciation on equipment," Varner said.

Glewen said producers also need to explore multiple angles during the process.

"We want the growers to evaluate questions that make a difference in their operation," Glewen said. "It may not always be a tangible cost. Their profit per corn bushel may be related to the corn saved by a technique they learned through NSFGPP."



Brett Hampton

Sharon Skipton, NU Cooperative Extension educator for Douglas/Sarpy counties, demonstrates a method of damp dusting she teaches during classes on living safely with lead. Damp dusting helps prevent the spread of lead dust.

provides profitable cost-sharing ideas

For example, improved residue management has led to increased yields of four bushels per acre, one producer said.

Bob Bartek of Ithaca, one of 70 producers involved with the NSFGPP program since it began in 1990, pays serious attention to the data returned each year.

"I look at it hard to see if I'm going to use it in my operation," he said.

Over the years, Bartek has tried a variety of projects including reduced tillage, plant populations in dryland corn, and interrow ripping to promote aeration and root growth in irrigated and dryland corn.

"Lots of times it's not what we can earn, but what we can reduce," Bartek said. "It may be reducing a cost or an input or reducing time in the field."

Besides production techniques, NSFGPP participants use farm records

and an optional marketing program to potentially further enhance grain profits.

On average, participating producers farm an average of 1,500 acres each and estimate their average profitability has increased by \$7,216 annually because of the program, Glewen said.

Sixty percent of NSFGPP members surveyed said they would rank NSFGPP as above-average for available agricultural educational opportunities.

"It's a great program and I'm glad to be in it," Bartek said.

– **Barbara Rixstine**

Glewen can be contacted at (402) 624-8030; Varnier at (402) 727-2775.



Barbara Rixstine
Keith Glewen (right), NU Cooperative Extension educator in Saunders County, discusses some data from the Nebraska Soybean and Feed Grain Profitability Project with Ithaca producer Bob Bartek, who has been involved with the project since 1990.

Winning the Game taps marketing skills for grain producers

Grain producers can practice risk management strategies to improve their incomes in University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Winning the Game workshops.

The interactive workshops include a computerized marketing simulation plan, said Terry Hejny, NU extension educator in Fillmore County and a workshop presenter.

Workshop presenters explain how forward contracting and federal crop insurance, which most producers purchase today, can be implemented in a pre-harvest grain marketing plan, Hejny said.

"Basically we look at using crop insurance as a simple tool," Hejny said, adding the workshop "gives producers

the chance to gain marketing experience without costing them any money."

Roger Selley, NU farm management specialist who developed Winning the Game along with Doug Jose, also an NU farm management specialist, and Roy Smith, a Plattsmouth producer, said it gets producers involved without a lot of confusing details.

"They're not just sitting back and listening," Selley said. "They're in there having to make decisions."

Workshop presenters also review more than 20 years of seasonal grain marketing trends to help producers determine the best times to sell their grain, Hejny said.

In January and February 2003, about 500 people participated in 27 statewide

Winning the Game workshops, sponsored by extension, the Nebraska Soybean Board, local lending institutions, grain elevators and insurance agencies. Hejny said the programs were "wonderfully accepted," as many participants say they need to enhance their marketing skills.

The monetary benefits of the program can be measured in subsequent years, Selley said, noting the majority of participants said they expected to do more forward pricing and would consider changes to their crop insurance coverage.

– **Cheryl Alberts**

Hejny can be contacted at (402) 759-3712; Selley at (402) 762-4442.

Wonderwise raises interest in science

Children around the world are learning about women scientists based on a partnership between University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H, the NU State Museum and Nebraska Educational Telecommunications.

The partnership began in 2000 to expand the museum's Wonderwise, Women in Science Learning Series, said Judy Diamond, associate director of public programs at the museum. Funded by a National Science Foundation (NFS) grant, the museum and 4-H developed new Wonderwise kits to distribute to 4-H groups and schools, Diamond said. Since 1992, more than 9 million children have used Wonderwise, each lesson of which introduces a woman scientist through a video-tape, CD-ROM and an activity booklet.

"For example, in the Rain Forest kit, you take a virtual field trip to the Amazon Rain Forest to study frogs," Diamond said. "Kids love to learn science through role models."

Diamond said Wonderwise projects, distributed by NET's Great Plains National, promote inquiry, diversity, data collection, collaboration and modeling behavior of the work of real scientists.

Beth Birnstihl, extension associate dean and state 4-H program administrator, called the partnership "an opportunity to increase science- and technology-based education opportunities for young people."

— **Lori McGinnis**

Birnstihl can be contacted at (402) 472-2966. Or visit wonderwise.unl.edu.

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

Rural Initiative aims to collaborate efforts

Working with individuals, communities, agencies and organizations to stabilize and enhance the economy and quality of life in rural Nebraska is the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative's mission, and NU Cooperative Extension educators are key participants.

Sandy Scofield, Rural Initiative director and community development specialist, said extension educators have the front-line community connections, information coordination and expertise to help achieve community and initiative goals.

Together, she said, the Rural Initiative and extension can help communities connect with existing programs and resources. For example, Scofield envisions giving young people greater opportunities to put technology skills learned in 4-H to work in the community.

The Rural Initiative, launched by NU President L. Dennis Smith, focuses the knowledge, skills and creativity of personnel on NU's four campuses on issues confronting rural Nebraska. A searchable Web site now under construction will help people find a wide range of

programs and expertise available on the campuses and beyond, Scofield said.

"We're emphasizing making more efficient use of everyone's time and existing resources over starting new programs," Scofield said. "We've spent a lot of time identifying who is doing what now, who has resources, and how we can all work together to impact a state that is over 500 miles wide."

The initiative's earliest efforts include projects helping small businesses increase profits through technology; providing training to assist northwest Nebraska businesses expand hunting and outdoor recreation tourism markets; and coordinating and supporting a statewide training team for entrepreneurship and small business development. Besides extension, the team includes representatives from the Nebraska Business Development Center, the Nebraska Community Foundation, the Rural Development Commission and others.

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Scofield can be contacted at (402) 472-7091.

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Extension expertise takes technology throughout Nebraska

Individuals — even entire communities — are generating more business, getting faster Internet service and gaining the potential to access more public information because of communications technology expertise and coordination from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

Many residents in southeast and northwest Nebraska, for example, better understand how Internet service can benefit them because of work by Extension Educators Randy Pryor in Saline County and Don Huls in Dawes County.

Pryor coordinated discussions that led to high-speed broadband wireless Internet service to most of the county, plus money savings for Wilber, Dorchester and Saline County government.

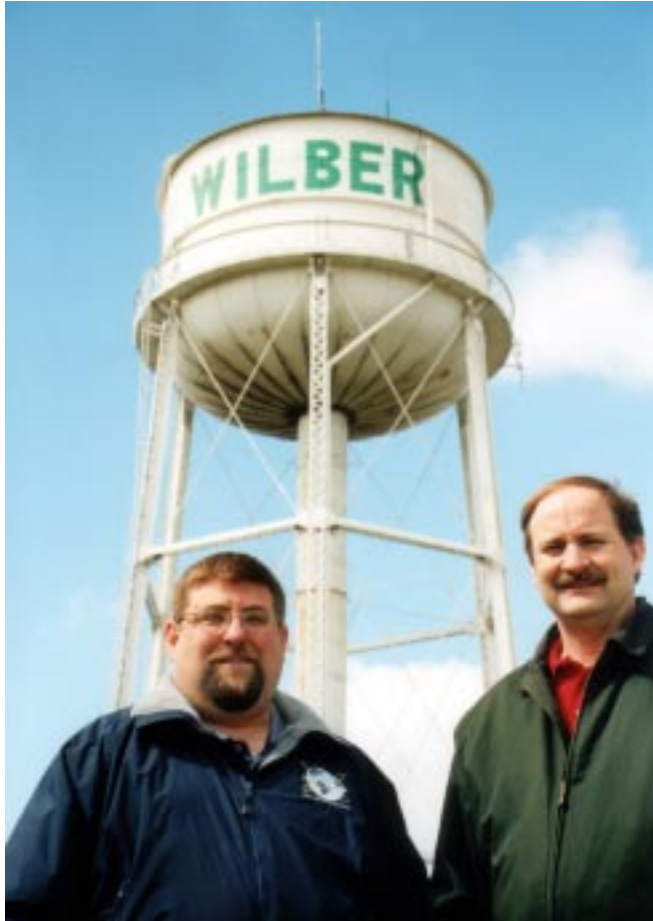
As a result of the discussions, Pryor said Wilber allowed Internet service provider Diode Communications of Diller to put antennas on top of the town water tower, saving Diode the expense of constructing separate towers. In exchange, Pryor said Diode is providing some Wilber and Saline County offices free broadband Internet service. In addition, the courthouse now is networked for greater efficiency among offices, he said.

Pryor also used broadband's convenience to individually assist more than 400 southeast Nebraska landlords and tenants on determining their best options for the 2002 Farm Bill.

Huls said the public long has been impressed with the Dawes County extension office's technology capabilities, and recently the extension office became

a training hub for people wishing to develop or enhance Web sites. Huls provides knowledge on the business aspects of a Web presence and of linking to area businesses.

For example, Huls said, the scenic Pine Ridge region attracts game and fossil hunters, horseback riders, hikers and others, who want to stay at local bed and



Randy Pryor (right), NU Cooperative Extension educator in Saline County, coordinated discussions between Wilber officials and Randy Sandman (left), chief operations officer for Diode Communications of Diller, to bring high-speed broadband wireless Internet to the region.

breakfasts and eat at local eateries. People seeking such places often find them through Web sites.

"These businesses can be both competitive and complementary," Huls said.

Extension's technology expertise and statewide geographic locations also could be advantageous to the Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO), said

Larry Dix, the organization's executive director. He added it's only a matter of time before online government services become common.

Dix and Connie Hancock, extension educator in Kimball/Cheyenne counties, are discussing how extension might help NACO bring local government services online. Hancock is one of nine extension educators focusing on technology in Nebraska who can demonstrate examples of state and federal government Web sites to local Nebraska governments. She also can help identify needs, skills and equipment required to standardize and attain goals, and provide knowledge on security and privacy concerns.

Hancock said government Web sites can allow fast and easy access to public documents such as real estate records, marriage licenses and more.

"E-government is just around the corner," Dix added. "As technology evolves and our kids become taxpayers, they'll expect it."

Jim Emal, NU director of strategic technologies, said NU expects to provide a statewide education network, including 28 extension offices, with the same fast Internet service available to the university campuses and networking them to NU troubleshooting services and resources. Faster Internet connections at extension offices mean greater availability and exchange of knowledge, pictures and videos,

Emal said, so clientele can watch and participate in videoconferences, and get fast diagnoses of plant diseases and other needed information.

— Cheryl Alberts

Pryor can be contacted at (402) 821-2151; Huls at (308) 432-3373; Hancock at (308) 254-4455.

Garden center staff, customers benefit from extension horticulture education

Commercial garden center employees are asked multitudes of questions, from the type of flowers to plant in full sun to dandelion control techniques.

Horticulture information from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension helps employees answer customer questions.

John Fech, extension educator in Douglas/Sarpy counties, said garden center and lawn care owners and managers often need help in personally training new staff members. Extension's research-based videos, informational fliers, topical training clinics and on-call diagnosis assistance all help managers provide "better help for their customers in a way that's flexible to how they do business," Fech said, while customers get quick, accurate answers to their questions.

Scott Farrington, owner of Indian Creek Nursery in Omaha, said he and his staff rely on extension expertise as a resource for information.

"Extension is very responsive," Farrington said. "If we have a need, they are there to help us and the training is always good. Employees ... say it's valuable."

Extension's 30-minute videos include interviews with industry experts and practical how-tos on topics such as rose care, efficient irrigation and container gardening. Since 1997, about 140 lawn and garden centers in Nebraska, California, Pennsylvania and Virginia have purchased the videos, as have some individual customers.

Fech estimates four to 10 employees at each business view the videos. Surveys indicate 80 percent of employee viewers use information from the videos to make recommendations to customers, Fech said. In addition, about 73 percent of those viewing the tape tell co-workers, relatives or friends about their experience with extension, which increases the number of people who benefit from the information.

Fech also writes a one-page monthly "Yard and Garden News and Tips" flier that many lawn and garden centers and lawn service owners use as professional handouts.

Mary Quist, assistant manager at the Earl May Nursery and Garden Center in Omaha's Millard Plaza Shopping Center, said her staff finds the fliers "very helpful."

"There's so much to learn about lawns, trees, vegetables, flowers," she said. "We use the fliers with our staff as sort of a reminder of timely events. They're wonderful training tools for the new staff members."

Lawn and garden centers also get assistance from Fech and other extension faculty offering topical clinics and on-call diagnostic help. Fech also writes a monthly column for the Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association newsletter and is host of the public television series *Backyard Farmer*.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

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



Brett Hampton

John Fech, NU Cooperative Extension educator in Douglas/Sarpy counties, provides lawn and garden care materials to Mary Quist, assistant manager of the Earl May Nursery and Garden Center in Omaha's Millard Plaza.

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