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## University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Connect, August

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## Holistic decision-making skills help producers enhance profitability

Even highly experienced, lifelong ranchers can learn new practices to increase profitability.

Just ask those among the 261 participants of University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension's Ranch Practicum.

Take, for example, Rusty and Rachael Kemp of Tryon. Following their participation in the 2002 practicum they implemented their version of the Sandhills calving program, which prevents scours and other disease in newborn calves by separating them by age and/or rotating calving pastures.

"It saves thousands of dollars," Rusty Kemp said.

The eight-session, hands-on practicum uses a systems approach to range management. Developed and taught by extension specialists and educators, it emphasizes livestock and natural resources management while integrating animals, forages and economics, said Brent Plugge, UNL extension educator based in Kearney.

Practicum participants collectively manage more than 2.5 million acres of land and 192,099 head of cattle. They report having saved an average of \$22.80 per head since 1999 when the program began, for a cumulative impact of at least \$2.3 million, Plugge said.

Why is the ranch practicum so successful?

"We teach monitoring and decision-making skills at a systems level," Plugge explained.



Bethany Johnston

*Ranch Practicum instructors Jerry Volesky, left, and Don Adams are among the UNL extension faculty helping beef producers save thousands of dollars annually. Part of the practicum involves studying forages and their nutritional value for the herd.*

The systems research is conducted by an interdisciplinary team of UNL researchers at UNL's Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory near Whitman, which has 13,800 acres of meadows and rangeland, a 500+ cow herd, barn, and facilities for lodging and educational sessions.

"Having participants properly monitor their production system and having them understand the impacts of a management decision on their entire operation is critical to helping producers manage more effectively," Plugge said.

"We're actually using current research for the lab experience," said Don Adams, director of UNL's West Central Research and Extension Center at North Platte and former beef range systems specialist. "It takes the full produc-

tion cycle of the grasses and the cow to see the changes in the grasses and the cow and how they interact together."

Since no two operations are exactly the same, practicum instructors emphasize critical thinking about how the topics affect participant operations.

"What we really try to do is identify the kinds of questions to ask to make decisions. 'If I change this, then this will occur,'" Adams said.

That's one reason the Rex Ranch of Ashby sends its ranch hands to the practicum.

"The practicum is aptly named," manager Chip Ramsay said. "We use principles of the practicum to manage the ranch our own way,"

*(continued on page 6)*

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## Dean's comments

The spirit of entrepreneurship is alive and growing in Nebraska, and University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is helping Nebraskans strengthen their entrepreneurial skills. Extension's goal is to help Nebraskans develop the skills to take their creative ideas and examine the opportunities — and challenges — they face in pursuing those ideas. That might be through adding value to a product, food processing, technology or tourism.

Some of these new businesses and profitable undertakings have been launched with assistance from UNL's Food Processing Center and NebraskaEDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs). Soon I expect you'll hear about youth successfully involved with 4-H's EntrepreneurShip Investigation (ESI). There were 31 pilots of this new 4-H curriculum in the past year, including 12 schools. It was met with a great deal of enthusiasm and had excellent response. Other states also are interested, with some seeking to get the curriculum into their middle schools. Nebraska youth and young adults are creative as you'll find in reading the story in this issue about three young entrepreneurs.

Two additional pieces of our entrepreneurship program are NebraskaEDGE, helping people transfer an idea into a business plan to determine the feasibility of turning that idea into a successful business; and classes to teach businesses to use technology to extend their Web-based presence.

Over the past several months, extension's Beth Birnstihl, Rolando Flores, Connie Reimers-Hild and Marilyn Schlake; Rural Initiative's Sandy Scofield and Mark Gustafson; and Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture's Weldon Sleight have served on an NU committee to develop outcomes for how the entire university system can be involved in entrepreneurship efforts and best support the long-term growth of Nebraska's economy. They have presented their work to the NU Board of Regents and will have ongoing dialogue regarding this effort. Long-term goals being discussed include:



*Elbert Dickey*

- investment of dollars in new businesses;
- new jobs created;
- retention of youth;
- startup of entrepreneurial businesses;
- students who compete favorably in a competitive workforce.

Extension has a strong role to play in helping Nebraska meet these goals. It is part of helping individuals and communities develop the "Know How" to be successful, and is yet another way UNL extension is at work for Nebraska.

*Elbert Dickey*  
*Dean and Director*  
*University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension*

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# Biosecurity awareness a safety factor for food-service providers

**B**eware: The person coming through your delivery door could be someone other than your friendly delivery person.

That's a thought even small Midwestern food-related businesses must face regarding potential risks to food safety, whether accidental or intentional, said Julie Albrecht, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension food safety specialist.

"There's often easy access to the back door. It's just inviting something to happen," Albrecht said. "We can't be so complacent anymore."

Food safety and biosecurity awareness need to be heightened, whether they relate to livestock in a pasture, a food processing plant or a local café, Albrecht said.

Often individuals from smaller communities say they know everyone in their communities. They may be hesitant to follow food safety biosecurity recommendations to limit customer access, conduct background checks on potential employees, install working security cameras and require identification of delivery personnel, Albrecht said.

But it's really in their best interests to be more alert overall, she added.

"Think about it with regard to the customers," Albrecht said, adding most delivery personnel have received training and are aware of the protocol for proper identification.

Even a self-analysis can help, Albrecht said. For example, if you always use one entrance for your business, go through another entrance to see what others see.

Albrecht is a member of the Nebraska Food Safety Task Force, an organization of educational, regulatory and industrial interests focusing on food safety. The task force in 2007 received additional federal biosecurity funding to generate greater food safety awareness.

Through the grant, Albrecht obtained educational materials distributed in 2007 at three Nebraska food trade shows. Nearly 400 show visitors completed a survey about food safety awareness.

Of them, 60 percent were "very concerned" about food safety but only 35 percent felt intentional food contamination could occur in their establishment. About 65 percent of people at the show said they had increased security in their facility through deliveries,



Information from UNL extension food safety specialist Julie Albrecht helps heighten food safety and biosecurity awareness.

storage, handling, employee access and inspections.

George Hanssen, food division manager for the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, said the education and measures taken to prevent intentional food contamination also help prevent accidental food contamination.

"As time goes on, Nebraskans are becoming more aware of what goes on around them," Hanssen said.

Albrecht also coordinates the Nebraska Restaurant Association's (NRA) ServSafe education, which recently added biosecurity awareness as part of the curriculum. Each year UNL extension educators teach safe food handling practices to 700 to 800 food handlers

employed by restaurants, schools, hospitals, institutions and caterers.

"Consumers have the right to safe food," said Beth Haas, NRA hospitality education coordinator, adding people are more aware of their food origins and what to do if food safety is compromised.

Albrecht said in today's world playing practical jokes regarding food is totally unacceptable, and people should call the police — not the health department — if intentional food contamination is suspected.

— Cheryl Alberts

Albrecht can be contacted at (402) 472-7919.

## Would you like to treat a friend?

Do you know someone who would like to receive *UNL Extension Connect* who isn't currently receiving a copy? Please send the name and address to: Editor, *UNL Extension Connect*, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918. We'll do the rest. Thanks.

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## Leadership training builds 'collective strengths' for community betterment

Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan saw a need for a neighborhood association on her block in south Omaha.

So she started one herself.

What Barrientos-Patlan thought would become an association of neighbors in a one-block area instead became an association of a 10-block area. The Burlington Road Neighborhood Association now has 140 residential members and 40 business members.

"The first meeting, all these people showed up," she said. "There hadn't been an association in 70 years."

The success of the association prompted Barrientos-Patlan to attend neighborhood leadership training sponsored in part by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. Getting involved in a neighborhood association is

prompting people in the Omaha metropolitan area to want to learn more about leadership, said Mark Simmons, extension educator based in Omaha.

Neighborhood Builders provides leadership training for people involved in their local neighborhood associations in Douglas and Sarpy counties in Nebraska and Pottawattamie County in Iowa.

The training has been undertaken for 11 years by the Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the Omaha Weed and Seed Program. Four years ago, extension joined the team of partners heading the program. In that time 250 people have attended.

The training gives confidence to people who otherwise may feel unequipped to be

leaders, Simmons said.

"This shows them the prerequisite for improving their community is wanting to help the community," he said. "Just by caring about your community you can make it a better place."

The training, held for four hours every Saturday morning in February, addresses such topics as neighborhood assets and resources, becoming an advocate and determining individual leadership style.

Barrientos-Patlan, now a candidate for the state Legislature, said she wanted to learn more about grants, neighborhood growth and working with governmental agencies. She has attended the training three times.

"I learned so much," she said. "There was mega information (presented) that I keep going back to."

Ron Abdouch, executive director of the Neighborhood Center, took the training before assuming that role.

"I wanted to learn more about my community," Abdouch said. "I learned about collaborating strengths of people willing to work together. I learned about the cooperation needed between people and policymakers to really affect change in the community."

The purpose of the training, Abdouch said, is to work with neighborhoods to strengthen their role in the community through technology, research and advocacy.

"People who have gone through this certainly know a lot more about their communities than when they came in," he said.

"We see those who care about their communities get confidence to step forward and play a lot of roles," Simmons said.

—Lori McGinnis



UNL extension's Mark Simmons helps teach training that enables neighborhood association presidents such as Rebecca Barrientos-Patlan of Omaha to build community strengths through effective leadership.

Simmons can be contacted at (402) 444-4237.



# Entrepreneurship at a young age stimulates creativity and the economy

**K**elsey Quandt of Stromsburg loves history and loves to sew. She combined both passions into a home-based business called the Venetian Costume Shoppe.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln sophomore, who is majoring in history with an emphasis in historical clothing, designs and creates historical costumes. She sells them through her business and through the Stuhr Museum in Grand Island, which stocks her little girl pioneer dresses.

Quandt is a successful example of UNL extension's emphasis on youth entrepreneurship in Nebraska. That emphasis culminated in the completion of a curriculum called EntrepreneurShip Investigation (ESI), which is designed to teach youth how to be entrepreneurs, said Patricia Fairchild, 4-H curriculum designer and youth entrepreneurship specialist.

"There's a huge emphasis on economic development and a big desire to keep youth in Nebraska, specifically in rural Nebraska," Fairchild said.

The ESI curriculum is based on three years of planning and work, including research and focus groups. ESI has been presented to nearly 500 middle school students statewide, Fairchild said. Extension also plans to add ESI curriculum for high school students.

Studies done by Gallup for UNL have indicated that 69 percent of high school students

are interested in starting their own business but 94 percent of them feel unprepared to do so. ESI teaches students what they need to know to become an entrepreneur, how they can determine businesses that might be right for them and how to complete a business plan.

ESI wasn't in existence when Quandt started her business, but she said 4-H gave her the skills she needed to begin. Her business, in fact, was spurred by a 4-H project. Her mother suggested she make a Civil War dress for a 4-H project and after she did so realized she had found her niche.

4-H, she said, "taught me persistence and creativity" and also gave her a spirit of competition to improve upon historical dresses she was finding already made in stores and on Web sites.

"The competitive side of 4-H helped me realize that I could do a lot better," she said.

While brother and sister Brett and Ashley Nunnenkamp started their own businesses for FFA projects, each agree 4-H taught them skills important in their operations.

Brett owns The Country Pumpkin, which sells pumpkins and gourds from his home in Sutton. He also sells wholesale to some retail establishments. A UNL horticultural graduate, the 24-year-old has operated the business since he was 13. His experience with 4-H helped him learn more about recordkeeping, which he uses in his business, he said.



Clare Quandt

*Stromsburg's Kelsey Quandt creates historical clothing for her Venetian Costume Shoppe.*

Ashley, 17, is in her fifth year of running The Blossom Barn, which sells freshly cut flowers to florists in Hastings, Grand Island, Aurora and York. She starts the flowers from seed in a greenhouse she established this year and grows them in a three-fourths acre garden.

The incoming UNL food science and technology freshman said the lessons she learned from 4-H "taught me responsibility. When you start something you need to finish it and work hard to achieve what you want to achieve."

— Lori McGinnis

Fairchild can be contacted at (402) 472-4067.



Deb Nunnenkamp

*Brett Nunnenkamp's The Country Pumpkin in Sutton features pumpkins and gourds.*



Kim Peterson

*Ashley Nunnenkamp of Sutton is in her fifth year of running her flower shop business, The Blossom Barn.*



# Climate predictions help make ag decisions

Steve Hu knows the extensive federal resources that have gone into developing various observational data, computer models and space technology for weather forecasting.

So it only makes sense to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension climatologist that more people use the forecasts effectively to help them make money-saving decisions.

Hu and his UNL team developed a Web education and training tool they named Think About It (<http://driftwood.unl.edu/farmsmart/>). This tool helps agricultural producers learn how to use scientific weather predictions for precipitation, temperature, humidity, wind, evapotranspiration rates and more in their crop management. When and how much to irrigate is an example of what Think About It might help a producer decide to do.

“This system becomes very useful” when producers face doubled energy costs and water allocations in many places, Hu said.

Rex Kirchhoff of Hardy is a south central Nebraska producer who participated in the 2008 Think About It workshops. Kirchhoff said he began working with the Little Blue Natural Resources District last year to use tools such as moisture blocks and evapotranspiration gauges. These tools help make decisions for irrigation scheduling, as well as the first and last irrigations for his diversified crop operation.

Now, climate predictions are “one more tool in the tool chest,” Kirchhoff said, adding, “it’s not just one thing that goes into the decision-making process.”

Kirchhoff said so far he has used knowledge from Think About It to check weather maps for wind velocity and direction, which he said is beneficial for spraying.

Hu said weather predictions aren’t 100 percent accurate, but learning to compensate through critical thinking is part of the process, and helps “cope with uncertainty.”

Hu expects to offer Think About It education through online workshops within the year.

— Cheryl Alberts

Hu can be contacted at (402) 472-6642.



Jerry Volesky

# Forage knowledge comes in surprisingly handy

Little did Jack Smith know competing in the Nebraska Area and State Range Judging contests would someday help him in his job as a Lower Loup Natural Resources District (NRD) range specialist.

More than 1,000 high school students annually compete in the contests, coordinated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRDs, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension and others.

Troy Walz, extension educator based in Broken Bow, said contestants learn forage identification, soil properties, plant longevity, nutrient value to livestock and wildlife, plant origin and more. In all, participants are quizzed on two dozen grasses or forbs.

“Students also develop skills in decision-making, logic, organization, problem-solving, written communication, self-confidence and teamwork,” Walz added.

The contests are important, Walz said, because rangeland comprises 24 million Nebraska acres, more than any other land category in the state. Rangeland and pasture account for 52 percent of Nebraska’s land, and knowing how best to care for it is important.

Smith competed in the range judging contests as a Sargent High School student from 1999-2002. Although he lived on a ranch he said he knew “a small fraction of grasses and even fewer forbs. The contests introduced me to the more scientific aspect of range and range management.”

Jerry Volesky, range specialist based in North Platte, said the knowledge students gain from contest participation helps them better understand the range conditions for stocking rates and nutrient value. That knowledge can be taken back to the ranch and used, but also can be beneficial for future range ecologists, conservation officers, real estate agents and loan officers.

“I was surprised to know how useful it could be to know the different grasses,” said Smith, who works with producers to inventory their grazing systems and offers suggestions for fenceline and tank improvements. “Seventy percent of what I do day-to-day stems right off the judging.”

— Cheryl Alberts

Walz can be contacted at (308) 872-6831.

## Practicum (continued from page 1)

such as to modify calving dates and reformulate protein sources.

Chris and Sherry Vinton of Whitman took the practicum in 1999. Course instructors, to ensure they are keeping current, asked the Vintons to audit the program this year.

This is the first year the Vintons are feeding distillers grains, an ethanol coproduct and a now-popular and cost-effective cattle feed.

“Technology and methods change. We’ve seen a drastic shift in production agriculture and especially feed costs,” Sherry Vinton said. They learned from instructors at the first practicum to mix their own mineral supplement, easily a one-third cost savings over buying it ready made, she added.

Rotational grazing is another significant change the Vintons made, based in large part on the practicum.

Jerry Volesky, West Central range specialist, teaches participants what to look for in healthy pastures and to avoid grazing the same pastures at the same time every year.

“Those ideas have really stood the test of time through bountiful and lean years,” Sherry Vinton said. “Our pastures have improved tremendously — it’s one of the things that got us through the drought.”

“Ranching is comprised of so many specialties — the practicum provides access to all the experts,” she said, adding, “It’s one of the most beneficial programs we have taken through the university.”

— Cheryl Alberts

Plugge can be contacted at (308) 236-1235.

# Big Red camp points students toward careers

Yes, it's true: the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has a top-notch, competitive department for students wanting to learn how to make movies.

Three students in UNL's film and new media program degree were admitted after learning more about it through a Big Red Summer Academic Camp hosted by UNL Extension 4-H Youth Development.

Erin Carr, Joe Giganti and Elizabeth Baquet say participation in the Big Red camp contributed to them entering the program.

Film-making is one area of focus at the camp and the knowledge students gain from it gives them a head start on the degree program, said Kathleen Lodl, assistant dean of extension.

"We have a good film-making program and getting in is competitive," Lodl said.

Big Red camps are open to any high school student who wants to come to UNL to focus for one week on a potential career interest, Lodl said. Camp offerings in 2008 besides film-making included child development, the Unicameral, culinary arts, food molecular biology, quilt design, spiders, and Web design and animation.

Students in the film-making camp learn to write a script, film a movie then edit it. The camp ends with them showing the movies they have made to families and friends at the Mary Riepma Ross Theater.

"It's a condensed version of the film program and what it takes to make movies," said Carr, a sophomore from Lincoln who is interested in possibly becoming a movie director.

Giganti said participating in the camp enabled him to have one-on-one time with faculty in the film department and helped build his resume.

"It was excellent. I really enjoyed it," said the sophomore from Yankton, S.D.

Baquet, an incoming freshman from Lincoln, attended the camp twice to make sure she was entering the right program.

"I got to meet professors and learned the names of people in the program," she said.

The camps show prospective students what living on the UNL campus is like, Lodl said. The data show they like what they see, as over 60 percent of Big Red camp participants enroll at UNL.

—Lori McGinnis

Lodl can be contacted at (402) 472-9012.



Faith A. Colburn

Since 1999, 261 producers estimate having saved at least \$2.3 million using techniques taught through UNL extension's Ranch Practicum. The practicum includes hands-on management principles producers can adapt to their own operations.

## Radon concerns eased

The presence of radon is a growing concern among home buyers, but many real estate professionals lack the knowledge to answer questions about this naturally occurring, potentially cancer-causing gas.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension is equipping real estate professionals with knowledge about radon through a course providing information and continuing education credit.

Extension partners with community colleges and health departments to offer the course. Since 2000, about 375 real estate professionals have completed it, said Rebecca Versch, extension educator based in Blair.

"We want real estate professionals to have knowledge about this as they deal with clients," Versch said, adding that knowledge helps determine if corrective action is needed.

The course is approved by the Nebraska Real Estate Commission and counts toward mandatory continuing education.

Radon is a byproduct of uranium in the soil that naturally converts to radon. The gas, which enters homes through cracks in the foundation or walls, has been identified as a Class A carcinogen and has been linked with increased risk of lung cancer.

The Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that nationally on average, 21,000 deaths per year may be attributed to radon. In Nebraska, 56 percent of single-family homes are thought to have radon levels above the level at which EPA recommends corrective action, which is why the education is so important, Versch said.

Real estate professional Juli Austin of Home Real Estate in Lincoln took the course in 2007 because clients were questioning how radon enters homes and what types of homes have radon.

"I wanted to learn more about radon. It's definitely an issue," Austin said. "I'm glad I took it."

The course gave Austin the information she needed, particularly about radon mitigation so she is now better able to look out for the health and financial interests of her clients.

Participant evaluations provided after the courses showed statistically significant increased knowledge about radon, Versch said.

—Lori McGinnis

Versch can be contacted at (402) 426-9455.



# Electronic sleuths rid rooms of 'roaches'

Children playing computerized detective for common pests really are learning the concepts of Integrated Pest Management.

Pest Private Eye was created by University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension to provide a fun way for fourth- through sixth-graders to learn safe ways of pest control, said extension assistant Erin Bauer based in Lincoln.

"Pest PI is a first-person educational video game that teaches children and the adults who work with them about pests and how to manage them through IPM to improve human health and safety, protect the environment and save energy," Bauer said.

The game, which can be played through the Internet or through a CD, uses animation to guide players through 10 different rooms in a school. Players become detectives, entering each room and selecting tools from a toolbar to rid the room of pests.

For example, when entering the kitchen players find a cockroach scurrying across the floor. It is the job of the players to find the right pest management tool to rid the room of the roach.

The role-playing game provides educa-

tional information about common pests and effective ways to control them, such as better sanitation, moisture control, sticky traps, vacuum cleaners and low-toxic pesticides.

Extension has long taught IPM in schools in an effort to protect children from potential hazards stemming from pesticide overuse.

So far, the game has been presented to children participating in reading programs at libraries in eastern Nebraska, at a 4-H camp and at after-school programs, Bauer said. Surveys have shown that most players reported learning important IPM concepts.

About 75 children played the game while attending camp at the Eastern Nebraska 4-H Center in Gretna, said camp director Buzz Wheeler.

"They had a blast with it," Wheeler said. "They talked about it later during other activities."



*Pest Private Eye teaches children the concepts of integrated pest management while playing detective.*

Extension has received a grant to expand the game to other audiences.

— Lori McGinnis

Bauer can be contacted at (402) 472-9548.

## Check out Extension's

### Web site at:

<http://extension.unl.edu>

Through a network of 83 offices serving all 93 Nebraska counties, extension is your front door to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln — no matter where you live or what you do. Your local extension educator, extension specialists and university researchers work together to bring unbiased, relevant and empowering information to families, farmers and ranchers, business and industry, communities, homeowners and young people across the entire state. Discoveries and findings rapidly make their way into the hands and minds of the people who need them — so you can apply this knowledge to answer your questions, make better decisions, achieve your objectives or improve your life in some way.

Extension is committed to helping Nebraskans know how — and know **now**.

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