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2005

Connect

February

Familiarity of 4-H is reassuring to children in military families

Children of military parents find themselves frequently moving, making it difficult for them to establish continuity in their lives.

For two years University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H has helped children with parents stationed at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha learn life skills and foster friendships to deal successfully with their unique challenges.

In addition, 4-H has launched a new national initiative, Operation Military Kids, which supports children whose parents are in the National Guard and Reserves and called to active duty.

Maria De Guzman, 4-H extension assistant based in Omaha, teaches 30 to 40 children ages 9 to 12 three times a week at Offutt. The children learn about science, rocketry, arts, crafts, food preparation and more.

The program at Offutt is part of a 10-year-old national project funded by a USDA grant that teams 4-H with U.S. Army and Air Force bases to bring educational 4-H programs to children in military families, said Mark Simmons, extension educator based in Omaha. When families are transferred to another base, children still have 4-H in their new

locations to help them adapt.

"When kids are transferred they have something familiar they can grab hold of," Simmons said.

"Military kids are very mobile, so it's important for them to have some sort of continuity," De Guzman said, adding that 4-H projects provide children with a sense of accomplishment. "They

seem to have a whole lot of fun."

Children have told De Guzman that 4-H is "training for when you get older" and that it has "required a lot of patience and time and effort, but we have fun when we work."

Michele Derks, Offutt child and family coordinator, said the hands-on nature of De Guzman's lessons give children a different way of learning.

In the new initiative, Operation Military Kids, extension helps children facing many life changes that result from the deployment of their parents as guard



Mary Loftis

Burt County 4-H'ers assemble Hero Packs, given to children with a parent deployed in the National Guard or Reserves. The packs, a part of Operation Military Kids, include a hand-written letter from a 4-H member thanking the children for their sacrifice in having a parent deployed.

and reserve units are called up, Simmons said. Families in at least 64 of Nebraska's 93 counties have been affected, he said.

The initiative creates participatory events for these children. In one major upcoming activity, six Nebraska youth will travel to Washington, D.C., to learn about the history and significance of the U.S. military. The six then will be assigned the task of informing others how to support military families across the state.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Simmons can be contacted at (402) 561-7575.

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Dean's comments

So much to learn, and so many ways to learn it!

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension uses a wide range of new technologies to deliver education. As that technology becomes more refined, of better quality and more common, it heralds a new way of learning.

Nebraskans have learned to expect extension education and information will be available at their convenience, through Web-based publications and curricula, Internet streaming and videoconferencing, and by satellite.

Here are just a few examples of the ways extension harnesses technology to benefit our learners:

Since 1997 we've used satellite delivery that allows audiences at statewide extension sites to see and hear extension experts as they present educational programs. Extension educators host the sites and serve as moderators for audience discussion. Courses frequently offered by satellite include horse and livestock management, carcass evaluation, marketing, food safety, human nutrition and diabetes management.

The Internet offers fast and vast learning opportunities. Check us out and find curricula, television and radio programs that can be streamed over your computer. The bulk of Nebraska's extension publications, including NebGuides and NebFacts, are available on our Web site at extension.unl.edu.

Our faculty have done tremendous work in developing Web sites that are easy to navigate, yet information-dense and highly respected. A few include "Food

Reflections" by Alice Henneman, extension educator in Lancaster County, which draws nearly a million hits per year and has been ranked "Among the Best" in the top 10 by Tufts University. The beef.unl.edu site has great interface with clientele through frequently asked questions, several learning

modules, timely topics and educational programs. Plant geneticist Don Lee provides extension training on transgenic crop development and plant breeding, which

croptech.unl.edu supports. Sarah Browning's hortparadise.unl.edu includes an online newsletter and centralizes links to various other horticultural Web sites.

On the national level, a project known as eXtension is expected to launch this year to take advantage of the learning opportunities available from all the nation's 107 land-grant universities all the time, every day. Dan Cotton, who has served as head of Communications and Information Technology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for eight years, is on loan from UNL at present to direct this important initiative.

Even if you think you know about extension education, take time to check us out again, on the Web or at any of our 83 offices serving the entire state. You're bound to learn something new — and learning is what University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is all about.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension



Elbert Dickey

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Field day demonstrates agricultural, natural resources career opportunities

Today's educational and career opportunities in agriculture and natural resources are many and varied.

That was the message for 46 high school sophomores and 12 teachers who explored University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and research activities at a summer tour of the Haskell Agricultural Laboratory near Concord. They learned that studying agriculture and natural resources is a springboard to diverse and rewarding careers.

Through tours focusing on the importance of soil science, entomology, measuring stress in feedlot cattle, conservation tillage, swine production and more, Haskell Ag Lab researchers and campus faculty worked to generate student interest in a wide variety of agriculture-related careers. Teachers, meanwhile, earned continuing education credits from the tour and a weeklong workshop on incorporating the importance of agriculture in their classes.

"You can bring in agriculture in a million ways" in classroom learning through science, agricultural science,

social science and business, said Vicky Jones, extension extended education coordinator based in Norfolk.

More than 90 percent of Nebraska's land is agricultural-based, Jones said. She added that while only 7 percent of Nebraska's population is actually involved in production agriculture, nearly one in four Nebraska jobs is agriculture-related.

Students need to understand the tremendous opportunities available in food and environmental careers because they may want to pursue these careers, and because today's students are tomorrow's agricultural policy-makers, Jones said.

Betty Shambley, a biology and earth science teacher at Battle Creek High School, agreed.

"There are the beginnings of a career in something like this," Shambley said. "It has been a really rewarding day."

Students came from as far away as Franklin, near Kansas, to attend the day.

Following the tour, 88 percent of students responding to a survey said they probably or definitely would investigate a



Cheryl Alberts

Dave Keith, Cooperative Extension entomologist, talks over career possibilities with Ben Mueller of Crofton, one of 46 high school sophomores attending a 2004 field day at Haskell Agricultural Laboratory near Concord.

major within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Jones said.

A federal grant helped fund the workshop and tour.

— Cheryl Alberts

Jones can be contacted at (402) 370-4003.

Economic perks at end of road to rural development

Rural development is getting a boost from a team of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educators working to help communities increase economic activity in rural areas of the state.

In examples at Kimball and Broken Bow, extension helps area leaders prepare for economic advantages expected from a major highway project and a visitors' center, respectively.

Within the next decade, the Heartland Expressway, a federally designated corridor, will intersect Interstate 80 at Kimball and link to other routes from Canada to Mexico.

Connie Hancock, extension educator based in Sidney, is helping local city and business leaders prepare for the expressway's impact. She is part of a project that extension and the university's

Rural Initiative call Communities of the Future.

Deb Crago, Kimball economic development director, said she anticipates the city's population of 2,600 will quadruple in the 10 years after the expressway is completed. Extension has brought to the forefront some of the issues that volume of growth will encompass, she said.

"We would not be able to capitalize on some of these opportunities without Cooperative Extension," Crago said.

Seven extension educators are working on various projects with Communities of the Future, a multiyear project. The team is led by Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, extension specialist based in Scottsbluff.

"The Rural Initiative effort is a new way to package and use resources for community development," Burkhart-Kriesel said.

Another Communities of the Future project is in Custer County, where Connie Francis, extension educator based in North Platte, works with leaders and businesses to identify tourist needs in conjunction with the development of a Sandhills interpretive center at Broken Bow. Extension will train frontline employees to promote tourism in their region, learn the assets of the community, and gain enthusiasm, confidence and commitment to meet travelers' needs.

— Lori McGinnis

Hancock can be contacted at (308) 254-4455.

Sandhills ranchers learn resource-saving tips from extension

Dale Spencer's ranch near Brewster has been in his family for a century. When nutrients in the ranch's sandy soil that nurtures corn and alfalfa to feed his registered Hereford cows grew depleted, he turned to University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension for help.

Spencer did his homework, then planted some of his irrigated crop ground into cool-season grasses. Now he grazes his cows in early May, saving on feed costs.

He looked to extension for advice on planting cool-season forages that include wheat, brome grass, orchard grass and legumes, and for knowledge on seedbed preparation, planting rates, depths and weed control.

Extension has "a tremendous wealth of knowledge," Spencer said. "They have a wide range of resources available to you."

In this case, extension offered more than expertise; it loaned out the drills for planting.

Two no-till drills, purchased with grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust fund, are available for Sandhills producers to plant cool-season forages, said Dennis Bauer, extension educator based in Ainsworth.

The soil-saving drills otherwise would be cost-prohibitive for ranchers to purchase for just a few days use, Bauer said. So far the drills have seeded 18,000 Sandhills acres, he added.

Throughout the Sandhills and throughout Nebraska, extension's team approach in education for enhancing land and cattle management has resulted in greater efficiency and far-reaching results.

Extension specialists and educators with expertise in animal science, range management and economics teach nutrient management, ultrasound use, communications and much more. Always important, the knowledge they bring to the area becomes even more so when a multiyear drought crimps cattle feed sources.

Ranching in the Nebraska Sandhills is a multimillion dollar business, said Bud Stolzenburg, extension educator based in Valentine. Because purchasing land and cattle can be beyond the means of many, people lease land and/or cattle and need to work through business ventures carefully and clearly, he said.

"Misunderstandings can result in everything from missed opportunities to ruined relationships to lawsuits," said

Stolzenburg, whose four workshops on land and cattle leasing last year drew about 50 landlords and tenants.

Extension offers additional workshops on many other topics important to Nebraskans. Stolzenburg, for example, also organizes estate planning seminars, attended by 110 people in 2004. He helps families explore their goals, wishes, and options for fairness for multiple

siblings.

Extension's beef nutrient management workshops help producers fine-tune rations and protein sources for cows of different ages. Troy Walz, extension educator based in Broken Bow, said 500 participants in 69 extension workshops held over a four-year period said they saved an estimated \$1 million after learning new National Research Council ration guidelines.

The workshops, also taught by Brent Plugge, extension educator now based in Kearney, provide information on the value of feeding co-products from the production of ethanol or corn syrup. The co-products' energy and protein has feed value that can save an average \$30 per ton compared to the more traditional alfalfa or cotton cake, Walz said.

With extension's ultrasound technology workshop taught by beef specialist Rick Funston, Dr. Rolland Kramer of the Logan County Veterinary Clinic at Stapleton got extra practice in determining cow pregnancy and calf sex. Kramer was one of 15 veterinarians from six states and Canada who attended the 2004 workshop.

The workshop size allowed each participant to practice ultrasound on at least 20 cows. That's important, Kramer said, because "it's a technology that has quite a learning curve."

Using ultrasound to determine pregnancy early is an economic decision many producers are willing to pay more for, Kramer said. "You have to have a pregnant animal to make money in a cow-calf operation," and knowing the sex of a calf can help seal sales, he added.

Beef home study classes, a ranch practicum, and workshops on grasshopper control, employee management, computerized record keeping and marketing cull cows are among other extension programs helping Nebraska's cattle producers.

— Cheryl Alberts

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



Dennis Bauer (right), Cooperative Extension educator based in Ainsworth, and Brad Daniels of Ainsworth and feed specialist with the Farmers Ranchers Co-op, collaborated on developing protein supplement cubes for beef cows. The cubes are made from 60 percent distiller grain, a co-product from ethanol production.

In Nebraska, as elsewhere, solving meth problem 'will take us all'

The fight to safely clean up, halt or prevent the manufacture of methamphetamine has a new ally: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

Extension has partnered with U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne's office to develop educational materials for community awareness of the drug's dangers, prevention and cleanup.

"We felt extension has a network that touches everyone in our district," said John Hanson, Osborne's Kearney-based district director. "We also value its work with Nebraska families."

Marilyn Fox and Susan Brown, extension educators based in Grand Island and Hastings, respectively, are putting together about 10,000 informational toolkits for schools, civic organizations, chambers of commerce, trash collectors and roadside cleanup crews. The kit includes a community lesson with leader and participant guides, a DVD or videotape of "Meth Waste/Litter Safety Awareness," a NebFact on strategies to fight meth use, materials from Adopt-a-Highway and Keep Nebraska Beautiful, and other items.

Brown reports some chilling statistics on the meth problem in Nebraska. The 2003 Nebraska Health and Human Services Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed in 2003, 6 percent of Nebraska high school students reported having tried meth. An Office of National Drug Control Policy report also said meth was the major drug of concern for Nebraska law enforcement, and that it is available in almost every city and town in the state.

Fox said meth's side effects make it particularly dangerous, because users who smoke, inject or ingest it may become paranoid, exhibit violent behavior, and contract hepatitis B and C, along with HIV. Prolonged use may lead to brain damage or death, she added.

Brown and Fox say they started working on the topic as part of extension's focus on rural economics and quality of life.

"Drug use in a town impedes eco-



Examining methamphetamine lab components are (from left) Jeff Shelton, Nebraska State Patrol investigator; Marilyn Fox, Cooperative Extension educator based in Grand Island; John Hanson, Kearney-based district director for U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne; and Susan Brown, extension educator based in Hastings. Fox and Brown are helping educate people on the dangers of the illegal drug.

nomic development," Brown said. "Meth labs in communities create law enforcement issues, limit job pools and can lead to child abuse and other problems."

Availability of meth lab components is common, Hanson said, adding, "Everything you need to make meth is available in small-town, rural Nebraska."

A key meth ingredient is anhydrous ammonia fertilizer, which is applied to crop ground in spring and fall. Keeping anhydrous out of the wrong hands is an added cost and time burden to law enforcement, businesses and farmers.

Meth lab leftovers pose another danger and expense. Safe cleanup of a

meth lab requires hiring specially trained personnel and can cost \$4,000 or more, Fox said. In addition, when meth dealers dispose of illegal labs, they often contaminate roadways with meth-tainted coffee filters, plastic bottles, jars, propane bottles and sealed containers of toxic wastes — which can be lethal.

"Our hope is to train community 'lesson leaders' who will, in turn, train others" on these dangers, Fox said. "Solving this problem will take us all."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Fox can be contacted at (308) 385-5088; Brown at (402) 461-7209.

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

Rural Advantage a diversified boon

Producers trying to increase profits through crop diversification are discovering that questions about alternative crops often need alternative answers. Finding those answers requires additional education, often from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

"Alternative agriculture crops such as small fruits, grapes, range- or pasture-raised poultry or woody ornamentals may require less land than conventional farm crops," said Jim Peterson, extension educator based in Blair.

"On the other hand, they do require making changes in marketing, supply lines, labor needs and other elements," Peterson added. "We think our Rural Advantage conference helps match up producers with the information they need to be successful."

About 150 participants were expected for the third Rural Advantage conference in February in Grand Island. Jointly sponsored by extension and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, the event was to offer sessions covering alternative enterprises, value-added production, vegetable production, agro-tourism, grant programs, organic farming, government inspection, labeling, marketing and other topics.

Two earlier Rural Advantage conferences together attracted over 200 participants, most of whom said they operated a rural enterprise and 60 percent of whom described their operation as "small scale agriculture." Post-conference surveys show a majority of participants said the sessions were of direct value and their new knowledge would help them expand their markets, increase profitability and diversify their operations.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

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

Safety ingredient for Metro culinary program

Preparing food that looks good and tastes good — and is safe to eat — isn't always a piece of cake.

That's why University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension collaborates with Metropolitan Community College in Omaha in teaching Metro's Culinary Arts and Management program. Extension teaches the commercial food safety aspect while Metro focuses on options such as baking, aromatics, chemistry, international cuisine and quantity food production.

All Metro culinary arts students must take an 11-week food safety course taught by extension's Cindy Brison and Nancy Urbanec, based in Omaha. The course is based on the two-day ServSafe course for restaurant managers taught by extension statewide, Brison said, but is more intensive.

The food safety course for Metro students teaches industry standards in

restaurant sanitation, personal hygiene, food storage, and cooking and cooling temperatures. In addition, Brison said she requires each student to do a restaurant inspection, a task that she said often brings many surprises.

"They're new to this," Brison said. "Food safety issues are a real eye-opening experience for them."

Culinary arts graduates may become chefs, restaurant or kitchen managers, or work in food production or product development.

"Students say they like the class and will recommend it to others," Brison added. "More important, many of them say they'll change their food service practices based on what they learned. Even experienced food service workers say they learn new things."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Brison can be contacted at (402) 444-7872.

Four-state effort taps cleaner water

Working together can produce better results than working separately, particularly when it comes to water quality in Kansas, Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska.

The Heartland Regional Water Quality Coordination Initiative works to improve surface water and groundwater quality in the four states by coordinating educational and technical expertise.

"It's more efficient if we do it as one, as the issues and technology needs often are similar in two or more partner states," said Charles Wortmann, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension nutrient management specialist. Wortmann is Nebraska's coordinator of the initiative's Nutrient and Pesticide Management Issue Team focusing on field and watershed management to reduce movement of nonpoint source pollutants to ground and surface waters.

Team members compile and disseminate the most recent research and technical information regarding 1) leaching, runoff and erosion control, and 2) nutrient and pesticide management, to

better protect surface water and groundwater quality.

They host research roundtables and training workshops, and evaluate and summarize state-of-the-art information on various tools and practices. The team then recommends best management practices to state and local agency personnel involved with natural resources or environmental management, as well as to extension specialists and educators.

These experts, in turn, work with producers to further improve their agricultural practices for reduced nonpoint source pollution, Wortmann said.

The Heartland initiative is funded through the Cooperative Research, Extension and Educational Service of USDA. Wortmann said the collaborative nature of the initiative could become a model for other extension programming.

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Wortmann can be contacted at (402) 472-2909.

Less water means irrigation, land management more critical

The results of a legal wrangling over water use will mean less water to irrigate crops in the Republican River basin. Less water means producers will need to make new management decisions, something University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is prepared to help them do.

The water restrictions stem from a settlement approved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003 of a lawsuit Kansas filed against Nebraska. Extension's work in water management education will help producers determine the best water usage for the water they will be allowed, said DeLynn Hay, extension program leader.

"The university has been developing educational programs to help producers make the decisions they need to make," Hay said.

Jim Goeke, hydrogeologist based in North Platte, is participating in several educational meetings for producers, informing them on the status of groundwater availability in their areas, what practices are available to them and other issues.

"I think extension has a crucial role to play in this," Goeke said. It is extension's role to help producers adapt to the changes, he said, which include installing water meters on their wells, and working with natural resources districts and U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne's office.

"It's a difficult sell for people who have had unlimited access to as much water as they wanted, to suddenly have meters on their wells," Goeke added.

Extension will explain cropping options for water-restricted producers, which could include planting fewer acres and land-retirement programs.

"Our goal is to help the growers maximize the value of the irrigation water they have," said Derrel Martin, irrigation and water resources engineer with the Department of Biological Systems Engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

NU research since the 1970s has prepared extension to help producers now, Martin said.



Steve Melvin, Cooperative Extension educator based in Curtis, installs equipment to monitor and record the amount of soil water throughout the growing season. The information is important for accurate irrigation scheduling and management.

"Extension is taking that research and packaging it so irrigators can react to the limitations," Martin said.

Steve Melvin, extension educator based in Curtis, has been teaching water-saving strategies in the basin for four years. He said the Supreme Court settlement now makes these strategies more imperative. Producers who attended Melvin's irrigation management demonstrations in 2004 reported the information learned would help them save 2.2 inches of water an acre.

The new water restrictions, slated to go into effect this year, are a result of the lawsuit filed by Kansas against Nebraska and Colorado alleging violations in a 1943 compact between the states that allocates Republican River water usage. Kansas

alleged that Nebraska violated the compact by allowing the use of thousands of wells hydraulically connected to the river and its tributaries.

The settlement approved by the Supreme Court ruled that groundwater from those wells falls under the compact agreement. Natural resources districts in the area now must implement programs to reduce the number of irrigated acres or the water used on those acres.

The settlement will affect about 1.7 million acres of irrigated land and more than 10,000 irrigated wells in southern and southwest Nebraska.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Goeke can be contacted at
(308) 696-6704.

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Soybean day knowledge is profitable

Soybean producers have found potential big payoffs from an educational field day offered by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and the Nebraska Soybean Board.

Since 1999, Soybean Management Field Days have drawn nearly 3,000 producers and others wanting to learn more about soybeans.

Last year's 445 participants who completed surveys reported the knowledge gained at the field days would add \$6.65 per acre to their pockets for a total potential value of \$4.5 million.

Keith Glewen, extension educator based at NU's Agricultural Research and Development Center near Mead, said the Soybean Management Field Days are a "traveling road show. There's a lot of thought and planning that goes into this. It doesn't just happen."

Last August's daylong sessions at Fairmont, Stella, Hooper and Lindsay included topics on the economics of soybean growing, disease and pest problems, and no-till. The 2004 sessions were attended by 534 producers and agribusiness representatives from 55 Nebraska counties, as well as Iowa, Kansas and Missouri.

"The biggest challenge is to keep producers informed on all the new things happening in the business," said Victor Bohuslavsky, director of the soybean board, which invests \$90,000 to \$100,000 per year from check-off funds to sponsor the field days.

While other states have similar producer programs, Nebraska's is the only one in which a soybean board joins with a university, he said.

"I have a very positive feeling about it," Bohuslavsky said. "I think it's one of the best unbiased learning programs out there."

Glewen works with other educators to seek sites in March, contacting producers willing to be compensated for having three acres of their land reserved for soybean plots. Once the sites are found, Glewen and research technician Bryon Chvatal plant and maintain the crops,

which the host producers keep.

Randy Sueper, who offered demonstration acres on his farm near Lindsay, called the field day "very educational" and said he particularly appreciated the session on pest control. He said he likely would attend again in the future.

Vernon Brandert of Hooper hosted about 180 people and said their response was very positive.

"It's well done by the presenters and went off really well," he said, adding he learned "quite a bit of new information."

Participants said information gained included making better use of herbicides and insecticides; staying abreast of new diseases and insects; and selecting varieties based on their protein/oil



Deloris Pittman

Loren Giesler, Cooperative Extension plant pathologist, presents educational information on managing new and emerging diseases and insect pests at a 2004 soybean management field day in Fairmont.

content.

"This is not the program to attend if you want a bag of popcorn and a yardstick," Glewen said. "This is not a trade show. This is an educational experience."

— **Lori McGinnis**

Glewen can be contacted at (402) 624-8030.

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