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2004

# Connect

August

## School enrichment: hands-on, heads-on

One 4 1/2-pound bag of clean trash, 30 plastic jars. Two dishpans, one bathroom scale. Not a garage sale ad, but a list of supplies used in Garbology, one of several University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H school enrichment programs included in the Lincoln Public Schools' core curriculum.

Teachers in LPS, as well as teachers in home, private and other public schools, receive 1 1/2 hours of training to teach each of these science- and technology-based programs: Garbology (second grade), Embryology (third grade), Blue Sky Below My Feet (fourth grade) and Water Riches (fifth grade).

Statewide in 2003, more than 67,000 children had hands-on learning experiences as school enrichment participants.

Arlene Hanna, extension associate and coordinator of extension's school enrichment program in Lancaster County for 14 years, said the projects are self-contained and easy for teachers to use.

In Garbology, students learn the value of recycling. They sort through clean trash for items that can be recycled or reused and weigh them, watch items decay in plastic jars and use dishpans to hold pulp and water in making paper.

In Embryology, children follow the hatching of chicks over 21 days. They learn to explain a life cycle, describe cell parts, and compare and contrast animal and plant cells. In Lancaster County for the 2002-03 school year, Embryology involved 3,725 children and 149 teachers.

"The children just loved the Embryology unit," said Linda Splichal, science liaison for Humann Elementary School in Lincoln. "It's one of the units where the students learn the most because their interest is high."

Students also enjoyed the Blue Sky Below My Feet space technology project developed by 4-H and NASA, Splichal added.

"Arlene had resources we didn't have at school," Splichal said. "There were fabrics, food like the astronauts would eat, videos to help youngsters see what it was like in space. Also included were posters, books and model rockets."

Gary Bergman, extension educator based in Lincoln, said school enrichment has yielded many accolades, increasing program demand.

"Our challenge is meeting that demand," Bergman said. "It's a positive program for the well-being of the community."

Hanna, who retired in June, said she is satisfied students have gained a great



*Arlene Hanna, longtime Cooperative Extension school enrichment program coordinator, demonstrates a science project to a group of Prescott Elementary schoolchildren in Lincoln.*

deal of knowledge from the school enrichment projects.

"Our projects encourage students to think for themselves by using hands-on, heads-on activities and exploring exciting new avenues," Hanna said. "They learn life skills like measuring and observing. The courses also help bridge rural and urban environments, and encourage interesting, current issue discussions in the classroom or with friends and family."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

*Bergman can be contacted at (402) 441-7180.*

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## Dean's comments

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension faculty and staff have a responsibility to provide educational opportunities for both youth and adults, and have had a great deal of success in doing so.

It's no surprise, then, that extension, with its well-earned reputation as an unbiased source of knowledge, and a statewide network that offers research-based education to each of Nebraska's 93 counties, provides Nebraskans with information on attaining higher education, as well.

The future of Nebraska and our nation lies with our young people, so it is in everyone's best interest that our future leaders receive the best education possible to prepare them to make sound decisions for the greatest good.

We who teach in extension encourage young people to think through problems and explore solutions. As an example, extension education for youth has long helped young people develop life skills through such opportunities as 4-H clubs, fairs and school enrichment (see cover story). Extension also brings junior high and high school students to campus for camps and other educational activities.

Since extension is part of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am always delighted when young people

visit here. I feel an added sense of pride when they earn their degrees here, because I know the university provides excellent education for Nebraska students.

Everyone in extension has the responsibility to help youth and their parents connect with university officials who can answer questions about the degrees offered by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This includes educators who have appointments specific to this area.

While these educators best answer questions about UNL, they try to help young people and their families asking for help

to find that place of higher education best for them — whether that be at UNL, elsewhere in the university system or outside it. To do so continues the trust extension has built in the past 90 years in Nebraska.

It's part of what we do.  
Our future depends on it.

*Elbert Dickey*  
*Dean and Director*  
*University of Nebraska*  
*Cooperative Extension*



*Elbert Dickey*

## 2004 Connect

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# Biosecurity plan puts livestock county ‘ahead of curve’

Cuming County’s status as one of the top livestock counties in Nebraska and in the nation prompted local leaders to make preparations to respond to potential biosecurity threats.

Larry Howard, extension educator based in West Point, said he recognizes Cuming County could be a target because it is the top feedlot county in the state and one of the top beef counties in the country.

Howard organized meetings with county leaders and local emergency management, producer groups and veterinarians to discuss biosecurity preparedness.

“We talked through issues that would be key and important for awareness,” Howard said. Extension divided the county into territories and identified every livestock operation in the county. Now, if a highly contagious animal disease hits Cuming County, local officials will better know how to respond, Howard said.

If a disease such as foot-and-mouth were to occur, “we feel very confident we would be able to secure the premises and be ready to react responsibly,” he said.

A secure premises could be anything from one pen of livestock to an area of several square miles, he said. In the event of an outbreak on a farm, anyone on that farm at the time — even neighbors or feed truck drivers — could spread it.

“With something of that magnitude, it wouldn’t take long before you have an explosion on your hands,” Howard said.

Considering that livestock represents more than 88 percent of the agricultural income in the county, a disease outbreak would be economically

devastating.

“I feel confident we’re ahead of the curve if something unfortunate like this were to happen,” Howard said.

The response plan attracted the attention of Lt. Gov. Dave Heineman, who serves as director of homeland security in Nebraska.

“The thing I was most impressed with was the coordination and cooperative effort they had toward biosecurity,” Heineman said. “Cooperative Extension was a key element of that.”

While Cuming County has a good start on its plan, State Veterinarian Larry Williams said the Nebraska Department of Agriculture is providing up to 60 daylong emergency response presentations statewide. The sessions have oversight from extension and local emergency managers and will help local responders develop plans for agricultural emergencies.

“Heightening awareness for biosecurity is important not only for preventing and preparing for unnatural events but also in preventing spread of common diseases,” Williams said.

Extension contributes to biosecurity and safety in other ways as well. Larry Schulze, pesticide education specialist, has taught the importance of securing and limiting access to pesticides and application equipment for 25,000 farmers and 8,400 commercial applicators. David Smith, extension veterinarian, researches biosecurity methods to prevent the spread of livestock diseases. Extension also has developed a publication on storing an emergency supply of water in the event of a disaster.

—Lori McGinnis

Howard can be contacted at (402) 372-6006.



Cooperative Extension Educator Larry Howard (left), discusses Cuming County’s biosecurity response plan with Steve Meister, an agricultural producer and county supervisor from West Point, at Meister’s family feedlot.

Andrew Meister



# Teens learn legislative process, write bill

Ten Butler County teenagers learned a lesson in government when they researched, wrote and testified on a legislative bill pertaining to school driving permits.

The teens are members of the Butler County Youth Council, one of four groups formed through University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. The National 4-H Council awarded a Youth in Governance grant to develop the groups, which support youth-adult partnerships and involve teens in government.

Grant funding also was provided to five Sandhills counties, Scotts Bluff County and Little Priest Tribal College/Winnebago tribe in northeast Nebraska.

Involving teens in government gives them a voice, said Jeff Hart, extension educator for special projects, adding, "it recognizes and grooms youth who have the capacity for leadership."

Ann Dobesh, who advised the Butler County group as an extension educator, said the 10 teens representing schools throughout the county decided to tackle

the school permit law because it has had varying interpretations.

The students want state law to clearly reflect that teenagers with a school driving permit legally can drive to extracurricular activities. They researched the subject, drafted a bill, then discussed it with their state senator, Curt Bromm of Wahoo, who sponsored it in the Nebraska Legislature. Group members also testified in support of the bill before the Legislature's Transportation Committee. Although the bill remained in committee, the teens felt they helped raise awareness, Dobesh said.

"It's been amazing what they have accomplished," she said.

Audra Duren, 16, of Rising City, is a member of the youth council, which meets monthly. She said it has been a good learning experience and has helped her realize she can make a difference in her community.

"It's made me realize government is a



Ann Dobesh

*Stacey Coufal of Dwight, a member of the Butler County Youth Council led by Cooperative Extension, studies Real Colors Matrixx, a program about personality types.*

lot more interesting than I thought it was," Duren said. "I might want to go into it."

Some of the 17 students from area high schools participating in the Sandhills Leadership program now are working with the Mullen Community Foundation to survey residents about buying habits to learn what new businesses are needed in the area. They also hope to serve on advisory committees for school boards and community development groups, said Susan Pearman, extension assistant based in Thedford.

In Winnebago, three teen members of a leadership group attended a Unicameral youth conference in Lincoln last year and one planned to return this year. Participants learn about the legislative process and participate in mock floor debate.

Cathy Johnston, extension educator based in Scottsbluff, said she planned to begin youth-in-governance programs in late summer.

The youth-in-governance project benefits teens by increasing their skills in leadership and communication, Hart said, and communities benefit through the involvement of other demographic groups.

"This opens the door to youth," he said.

— Lori McGinnis

## Tech Team members take skills home

One weekend last spring, a group of high school students from across the state gathered in Lincoln to learn how to set up computer networks for home and small business.

The students are members of the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H Tech Team. The workshop was sponsored by NU's Rural Initiative, which promotes rural economic and community development.

The weekend workshop encourages students to use the knowledge learned to help individuals and businesses in their communities, said Glen Cox, a system administrator and federal issues analyst for the initiative and adviser for the students. One Tech Team member from Ponca even plans to start a computer consulting business with his father.

"They're already pretty comfortable with the inside of a computer, which is a

good thing to take back to their communities," Cox said.

For the 20-member Tech Team, which started in 1999, skills learned can be personally beneficial, added Kathleen Lodl, 4-H youth development specialist.

"Some have been able to take leadership positions within their schools and counties as they have skills that are marketable to others," she said.

Team members plan to host a technology contest and demonstrations at this year's Nebraska State Fair.

Another advantage to the weekend workshop is the opportunity for Tech Team members to become acquainted with the university, where several former team members currently are enrolled, Cox added.

— Lori McGinnis

*Cox can be contacted at (402) 472-2940; Lodl at (402) 472-9012.*

*Hart can be contacted at (402) 472-4743; Fearman at (308) 645-2267; Johnston at (308) 632-1230.*



# Community needs being met with after-school, GED, ELL programs

In Columbus, “Communities Together Can” meets a need for quality after-school child care that is both educational and fun for elementary schoolchildren.

In Madison, the program supports General Educational Development (GED) and English Language Learner (ELL) classes and other programs.

Funded through a five-year, federal Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) grant and coordinated by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, these activities meet specific needs in the two communities, said Vickie Greve, 4-H youth specialist and the grant’s principal investigator.

The programs and the extension staff working with them “have opened doors in the community that wouldn’t have happened as easily without the resources provided by this grant,” Greve said. She added the work done at both sites will serve as models for other counties in Nebraska and the nation to replicate and build upon.

In Columbus the after-school program provides elementary schoolchildren with educational recreation time, healthy snacks and time to complete homework.

Lisa Kaslon, extension educator based in Columbus, said the program piloted with 40 children at two schools, and will be in at least five Columbus schools by the time the grant ends in 2008.

Through the grant, extension hired program coordinator Marla Kurtenbach and provides supplies, paperwork and equipment. Lessons, sometimes presented by extension and community organizations, cover topics such as nutrition, bullying and firefighting. Families pay a fee that will help the program become self-

sufficient when the grant ends.

The after-school program is intended to be “fun — but also educational,” Kaslon said, adding, “Kids now are getting homework done who never had it done before.”

Tammy Bichlmeier is executive director of the Columbus Collaborative Team that identified the after-school programming need.

“Extension brings so many resources to it,” Bichlmeier noted, adding the after-school program keeps children safe and involved in constructive, enriching activities.

In Madison, the CYFAR grant funds extension education to increase citizenship and community productivity for Latinos and Caucasians. One way to do that is to better identify the strengths of both groups and improve their communication with each other, said Lee Sherry, extension educator based in Madison.

Focus groups there identified GED and ELL classes as community needs, Sherry said, in part because of a diverse

Latino population working in area meat processing plants.

In the first classes, 12 students enrolled in GED and 22 in ELL. Sherry said one student has already earned his GED and is enrolled in classes at Northeast Community College in Norfolk. Interest is so high that classes frequently exceed the scheduled two hours, she said, noting the educational offerings also contribute to a sense of community.

Four weeklong science camps for at-risk children in grades 1-6, and 4-H project days for sewing, bread-making and baby-sitting were held. Nutrition and soccer programs for both adults and children also were part of “Communities Together Can” in Madison this past summer, Sherry said.

Nebraska is one of 46 states to receive the federal CYFAR grant.

— Cheryl Alberts

Kaslon can be contacted at (402) 563-4901; Sherry at (402) 370-4041; Greve at (402) 370-4004.



Columbus Centennial Elementary schoolchildren listen to David Burritt of the Columbus Fire Department talk about safety during National Fire Prevention Week last October. Presentations, snacks and study time are part of the “Communities Together Can” after-school program coordinated by Cooperative Extension.

Marla Kurtenbach



## Student interns explore careers

Around two dozen University of Nebraska-Lincoln students spent the summer interning at University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension offices — gaining valuable work experience and opportunities to work with a variety of audiences, and exploring potential careers, said Keith Niemann, director of extension human resources and intern coordinator.

Extension interns help teach local residents skills related to tractor operator training to 4-H fair preparation to performing arts at 4-H camps and more.

The paid internships, often for college credit, are arranged with entities such as the university's Rural Initiative/J.D. Edwards honors program, the College of Fine and Performing Arts, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and the Department of Psychology.

Niemann said the internships give young people the option of having a fulfilling career in Nebraska, as several now are employed by extension.

Maggie Miller, now an extension assistant in Seward County, said her internship provided an "in-the-trenches view of how things really work. I was able to see the level of responsibility, the activity levels and programming changes."

Gary Zoubek, extension educator based in York, said students learn a great deal about real life during their internships, and may find new aspects about potential careers, such as in agriculture.

"Internships are another way of exposing all our young people to the various job possibilities through extension and agriculture in general," Zoubek said. "Agriculture is so many things. Water issues, production issues, GMOs, marketing and more. ... It's an exciting time in agriculture."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Niemann can be contacted at (402) 472-2966; Zoubek at (402) 362-5508.

## Classes increase lead management awareness

Child care providers and real estate agents will be able to learn more about minimizing small children's exposure to lead, thanks to University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

Lead can be present in older house paints and in some soils. Children are at risk when they inhale lead-laden dust or ingest lead, often by putting items into their mouths that came in contact with dust or soils containing lead, said Sharon Skipton, one of four extension educators based in Omaha offering the lead awareness program.

Children under age 6 are particularly at risk for lead poisoning, Skipton said, because high levels of lead can lower their IQ and can contribute to hyperactivity.

In addition to providing classes to homeowners on living safely with lead, in April extension provided educational information to six child care providers responsible for 60 children. More classes

are planned.

Lead-risk management training also is scheduled this fall for Omaha real estate agents, enabling them to better work with potential clients who may like a home but are cautious about potential risks from lead that may be present.

Also this fall, parents of newborns will find out more about how to minimize lead risks through an interactive CD-ROM developed by extension. A follow-up survey from a 2003 session, on which the CD is based, indicated parents planned to damp-clean to manage lead-contaminated dust, landscape to cover lead-contaminated soil, and provide foods that can lower lead absorption.

"We know that not all lead can be removed," Skipton said. "Our focus is on teaching people how to manage the risk."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

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

## Healthy nutrition can curb childhood obesity

Increasing levels of childhood obesity means University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs on choosing healthy foods, planning nutritious meals and increasing physical activity are more important than ever.

The Nebraska Health and Human Services System reports that obesity in both children and adults is becoming an epidemic, with one of six children being overweight. HHSS reports that Type II diabetes, formerly considered a disease of middle age, is increasing in children and young adults. High blood lipids, hypertension, early maturation and orthopedic problems also are occurring more often in overweight youth.

To address this need, extension is developing a curriculum specific to childhood obesity, said Carrie Schneider-Miller, extension educator based in Omaha.

Schneider-Miller is among several extension staff members statewide who have long taught classes addressing

nutrition and weight control.

"The basis of our nutrition program is teaching people how to make healthy food choices and watch their portion sizes," Schneider-Miller said.

One example is the Nutrition Education Program, which has had participation from more than 79,000 limited-resource Nebraska families since it began in 1969. Besides teaching how to make positive food choices, the classes also teach food resource management and food safety.

"We also have started teaching our participants about the importance of being physically active," Schneider-Miller said.

"Now that there's such a push for addressing childhood obesity, we hope that people will pay more attention," she added.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Schneider-Miller can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.



# Alternative crops expand to thousands of Panhandle acres

Those garbanzo beans on any given salad bar may have had their beginnings in the Nebraska Panhandle.

High-protein garbanzo beans, or chickpeas, are among the crops grown in the Panhandle, as are great northern beans, pinto beans, birdseed and grass seed, said David Baltensperger, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension crop breeding specialist.

Most of these multimillion dollar Panhandle crops are rooted in NU research and extension education, delivered through publications, field days and one-on-one advice.

"Panhandle producers are very open to exploring economic opportunities," Baltensperger said, and extension's work helps them do that. "Almost all our producers are involved with growing at least three crops."

Mark Watson of Alliance first experimented with chickpeas about eight years ago and now grows up to 1,000 acres of them. The legume can yield 1,500 pounds per acre, he said, and has the potential to increase income.

Chickpeas now are grown on about 10,000 Nebraska acres. More commonly they're grown in the northern states, Canada and India, Watson said; 80 percent of the chickpeas used in the United States are imported. Chickpeas are grown more than any other bean worldwide, he added, and are common in Middle Eastern and Indian dishes such as hummus and curries.

Watson said extension has helped Panhandle growers meet the challenges of growing the crop in Nebraska, by providing information on such things as herbicides, fungicides and crop insurance.

Ivan Rush, beef specialist, has found field peas, which are similar to chickpeas, have a respectable feeding value as a protein substitute for corn in cattle diets. They have almost zero oil and so may not be quite as palatable for cattle, but they do have 90 percent of corn's feeding value, Rush said.

Birdseed — proso millet, foxtail millet and sunflowers — now is the third largest Panhandle crop, Baltensperger said, grown on about 250,000 Panhandle acres and a \$20 million industry.

The birdseed is processed at several regional facilities, including Pennington Seed Co. at Sidney, which extension helped bring to the Panhandle a decade ago.

"We worked hard to show processors we are worthy of processing facilities in this region because of our high quality and consistent production," Baltensperger said.

Kentucky bluegrass, forage and reclamation grasses are more Panhandle alternative crops, grown on about 1,500 acres. One producer netted more profit on 15 acres of forage grass seed than on the rest of his 2,000-acre farm, Baltensperger said. The grass seed industry contributes about \$1 million to the region's economy, he said. Helping each producer find a niche within this is the goal, as everyone can't grow the same variety,

Baltensperger added.

Baltensperger coordinates a grant-funded program that annually pairs mentors with five producers growing new crops. An estimated 25-30 new producers are in the program each year.

"We work as a team to walk them through what they're going to do to improve the success of first-year production," Baltensperger said.

— Cheryl Alberts

Baltensperger can be contacted at (308) 632-1261.



Jim Margheim

David Baltensperger (right), Cooperative Extension crop breeding specialist, works with producers such as Mark Watson of Alliance to grow chickpeas and other alternative crops in the Nebraska Panhandle. They are holding chickpeas that are roasted, treated for planting and freshly harvested.

## Would you like to treat a friend?

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# FarmLink: one-to-one conservation

Members of the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group in northeast Nebraska long wanted to reduce area flooding and improve surface water quality.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's FarmLink program is helping provide ways to do it.

FarmLink promotes conservation practices by one landowner mentoring another to reduce flooding and erosion through practices such as buffers, or vegetative strips planted along the edges of rivers and streams.

Rod Wilke, FarmLink buffer project coordinator based in Norfolk, said buffer plants trap sediment, pesticides and herbicides, to keep them from flowing into surface water. Typically buffer strips are 30- to 50-feet wide and include stiff-stemmed plants such as switchgrass that can stand up to water flow.

Landowner Ralph Pieke of Newman Grove participates in the FarmLink program and promotes buffer advantages to other landowners along Shell Creek.

"The concept is good and it's working," Pieke said. "I have great faith in it. You don't see the erosion and you don't have the runoff." Since buffers attract wildlife, FarmLink is supported by organizations such as Pheasants Forever, he added.

Extension Agricultural Engineer Dave Shelton said producers appreciate the individual contact FarmLink provides.

"People like the personal touch of someone coming out to talk directly to them," Shelton said. Doing so promotes dialogue about where buffer strips would best fit on a particular farm, federal compensation for taking land out of production and challenges of working

around buffers with large farm machinery.

So far mentors have contacted 42 producers, resulting in 11 contracts for more than 60 acres of buffer strips in the Shell Creek Watershed, Wilke said.

"We look for that number to just keep growing," he said.

— Cheryl Alberts

Wilke can be contacted at (402) 370-4074; Shelton at (402) 584-2849.

*Cooperative Extension's FarmLink program promotes farmer-to-farmer conservation practices such as buffer strips to reduce flooding and improve water quality. FarmLink mentor Ralph Pieke (left), and program coordinator Rod Wilke check out a grassed buffer strip between a cornfield and Shell Creek near Newman Grove earlier this summer.*



Al Mittan

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