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Cornhusker Economics

Internships in Nebraska Agricultural Cooperatives

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	1-24-20
Livestock and Products.			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	122.18	No report	124.00
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	178.48	No report	176.98
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	149.12	No report	150.40
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	216.71	No report	214.78
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated	50.91	No report	*
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	66.98	No report	77.21
Slaughter Lambs, wooled and shorn, 135-165 lb. National.	NA	No report	NA
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	389.33	No report	421.58
Crops.			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	4.59	No report	4.37
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Columbus, bu.	3.52	No report	3.68
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Columbus, bu.	8.17	No report	8.27
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	5.71	No report	5.91
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	3.25	No report	3.32
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	166.00	No report	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	105.00	No report	107.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	87.50	No report	95.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	147.00	No report	149.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	56.00	No report	50.00
* No Market			

Agricultural cooperatives are prominent employers across Nebraska. Several have developed internship programs. Cooperatives recruit interns to attract full-time position applicants, to expose interns to various aspects of the cooperative business model as well as addressing short term labor needs. Students participate in internships to develop skills for career planning.

Nebraska agricultural cooperatives offered approximately one 100 internships in 2019. The number of cooperatives offering internships is increasing; at least two offered internships for the first time last year. Others are looking to strengthen their existing programs.

Internship program design varies across cooperatives. Relatively small agricultural cooperatives provide an overall work education experience, participating in duties in agronomy-related tasks and assisting customers. The larger cooperatives may offer a job shadow experience. Interns observe someone completing their job duties and get a sense of what the job is really like. Relatively large cooperatives may offer a more structured internship experience. For example, accounting interns learn how to complete general ledgers and merchandising interns learn how to trade commodities. Other internships include completing a project and describing the findings to employees. Engaged management teams have employees who oversee internship program development and improvement; an ongoing conversation between staff and senior management develops the program.

Educational requirements for internships depend upon tasks assigned. Internships are most commonly offered in agronomy divisions of participating co-

operatives. Typical educational expectations range between completing high school and working towards a 4-year degree. Professional positions, such as accounting, engineering or marketing, require more than a high school diploma.

Agronomy internship experiences involve sales or supporting crop management. Sales interns develop knowledge pertaining to crop production and operating chemical application equipment. An operations internship develops machinery and equipment maintenance skills, assists with product preparation, product delivery, and attention to safety in commercial settings. Interns might collect tissue samples or offer advice on disease control. Interns build personal relationships with employees and customers based on common goals. In many instances the interns will be part of the customer decision-making process. In other cases the interns learn from suppliers, or others with technical expertise, about how to improve crop practices.

Students from a variety of majors can be successful candidates for internships in agricultural cooperatives. Nebraska agricultural cooperatives hired students majoring in Agribusiness, Agricultural Communication, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Production Operations, Agronomy, Agricultural Technology, Animal Science, Engineering, Plant Science, Sales, Soil Science and related majors. Agronomy was the most frequently mentioned major. Relevant employment experience outside of college is also considered and education requirements are flexible across cooperatives.

Agricultural cooperatives recruit internship candidates from local high schools, community colleges and four-year schools. Cooperatives participate in professional development programs, classroom visits, and job fairs to inform potential applicants about internships. Relatively large cooperatives interact with students from schools in Nebraska and surrounding states. Smaller cooperatives interact with students from schools in or near their trade territory but are willing to consider candidates who attend any school.

Internships in agricultural cooperatives offer financial benefits. All internships offered currently are paid positions. Wages range between \$10 and \$20 per hour depending on the cooperative. The most common wage in 2019 was around \$14 per hour. A few cooperatives provide additional compensation such as a uniform or use of a tablet computer. Wages may change depending on the number of years the intern has worked with the cooperative.

Many agricultural cooperative business locations are rural. If the intern is not from the local area then housing is a consideration. Cooperatives tend not to provide housing during the internship. A few cooperatives provide a housing stipend, assist the intern in finding suitable housing, and regularly interact with interns to verify interns are satisfied with their living conditions. Relatively small cooperatives tend to hire local students as interns and rely on parents to provide housing.

Internship programs help attract applicants for full-time positions. Internships can result in full-time employment with the cooperative. About one-fifth of interns working at cooperatives in 2019 accepted full-time employment offers at the cooperative. Typically the number of interns exceeds the number of full-time positions available.

Practical work experience during internships enhances other educational opportunities agricultural cooperatives provide. The Nebraska Cooperative Council hosts a statewide event to inform interns about cooperatives. The Council also provides scholarships and supports college-level education about cooperatives, including the Cooperatives (AECN 474) course at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and shorter educational presentations at other campuses.

Internships are an important way for students to learn about future career opportunities. Corporate mission, vision and values really make a difference in job dynamics and the working culture in cooperatives. In cooperatives, it is in the best interest of employees to serve their customers well since the customers own the company. Internship programs in cooperatives offer a chance to experience employment in firms designed for serving others first, instead of a profitability focus. Students have a rewarding experience when they ask questions and change their perspective about their work. Ideally, a student can learn to say, "I can picture myself doing this!"

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