



AMY HAUSMAN/SCI

The Seward Farmer's Market, open on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the fairgrounds, has coupons available for low income seniors to be able to purchase fresh food.

## Farmers market nutrition program sprouts satisfying savings for seniors

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN  
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program is set to give dozens of local low-income seniors coupons to purchase delicious and nutritious foods from Nebraska farmers.

Alison Rook, program manager for Seward County Aging Services, said coupon recipients can purchase fresh, unprepared fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey at any Nebraska farmers market, roadside produce stand or community-supported agriculture programs with the coupons.

About three or four vendors at the Seward Farmers Market typically participate in the SFMNP, Rook said. The program is federally funded through the United States Department of Agriculture and the coupons are distributed through the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Aging Partners in Lincoln.

To qualify for the program, people must be 60 or older with a total household income of \$2,322 or less per month for a one-person household or \$3,151 or less per month for a two-person household.

Seward County secured more than \$2,000 to put toward the grants this year. This means it can distribute the coupons to 43 local households. Each household is allotted one set of coupons worth \$48 for the season.

Rook said she will distribute the coupons this month so recipients have as much time to use them as possible.

When a participating farmer accepts a coupon, they will scan its QR code. The NDA will track the scans and reimburse the farmer for the amount the coupon was worth.

In addition to supporting the healthy diets of low-income seniors, the USDA said it hopes the SFMNP increases the consumption of agricultural commodities by helping to expand domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands and CSA programs.

"It supports the local agricultural programs in our state and it keeps that money here too," Rook said.

Rook said she loves the way the program inspires connection in the community and supports healthy diets for seniors.

"It invites seniors to get out in their community while they're visiting the farmers markets, so there's socialization opportunities for them as well as getting delicious fruits and vegetables in their diet," she said. "And, I like that it connects with the local farmers as well."

According to the USDA, more than 757,000 people across the United States received SFMNP benefits in Fiscal Year 2022.

"We really encourage folks that, if they get (the benefits), to definitely use them because it's a wonderful way to support our local farmers that participate in the program, as well as get access to the locally grown fruits and vegetables, herbs and honey," Rook said.

Interested seniors can stop by the Seward County Aging Services office or email Rook at arook@sewardcountyne.gov to see if they qualify for the program. Rook suggests applying as soon as possible to avoid being waitlisted.

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Jayden Capek is interning at Tuttle Inc. this summer.



Chase Paulsen is learning transferable skills by running a lawn mowing business.



Abbie Milton sells the sweet corn she grows for her SAE project every summer.

# EMF FFA students tackle real-world projects

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN  
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Exeter-Milligan-Friend FFA students are getting real-world experience building their skills through their Supervised Agriculture Experience projects.

Students have a great deal of creative freedom when picking their SAE project. Projects should build their skills in agriculture or experience working in a rural community.

FFA co-advisor Miranda Hornoung said it is rewarding to see students take information they learned in class and use it in the real world. Typically, they come back with even more knowledge in the subject and can expand upon what they learned in school.

“When they do the actual experience themselves, it’s not just them being told knowledge or trying a skill. They’re actually gaining and nurturing those skills,” she said. “The progress they make in identifying those possible careers in the future is awesome.”

Around 40 students are working on SAE projects this summer, and completing them marks getting a step closer to the next-highest FFA degree. The summer is the most common time for students to complete their projects because they are less busy with school.

FFA co-advisor Amy Tomlinson said the projects help students get career-ready. They teach them skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication and help them get more comfortable in their chosen field.

**Chase Paulsen**  
Incoming senior Chase Paulsen, who plans to



Will Vyhnaelek is raising swine and working on his family's farm for his SAE projects.

go into the precision agriculture field, has been running a lawn mowing business since the summer of seventh grade. He mows seven or eight yards each week, or whenever the customer requests it. He uses his dad’s mower and just needs to pay for gas.

His business has grown via word of mouth and happy customers.

“A lot of the people that I do it for are older, and I enjoy helping them out so they don’t have to go out there when they probably shouldn’t be,” he said. “And, just making the community look nice.”

This SAE has helped him learn about different aspects of running a business such as building relationships with his customers, managing his time and keeping track of his profits on spreadsheets.

“I’ve learned lots of responsibilities, like using

my time management,” he said. “I’ve got baseball and summer sports activities for schools and another job on top of it.”

**Abbie Milton**  
For her SAE project, incoming senior Abbie Milton and her brother, Bob, cultivate a patch of sweet corn. They sell it locally at the end of the summer and have been doing so for the past couple of years.

“The whole community loves it and looks forward to it and kind of knows that she does it,” Hornoung said. “That’s one I personally use and benefit from in the community.”

Tomlinson said Milton wants to go into agribusiness. Through her SAE project, she is learning transferable skills by keeping track of how many dozens of ears of corn they sell, depositing the money they make, lining up her siblings to

said.

**Will Vyhnaelek**  
Incoming senior Will Vyhnaelek is working on two SAE projects. He has a year-round project helping his father on their family farm and a project raising swine for 4-H. He gets the swine when they are young, raises them, shows them and then either sells or eats them.

He said he has shown pigs since he was young and could see himself possibly working with them in the future. He definitely sees himself going into farming.

“I’ve always loved to farm,” he said. “I’ve always loved being on the farm and spending time outside.”

Vyhnaelek has learned about farm chores, feeding livestock, cleaning livestock pens and more through his SAEs. He said this has helped build up his work ethic and taught him skills he will use in his future career.

He earned a silver award for his farming project at districts this year.

**Jayden Capek**  
Jayden Capek is interning at Tuttle Inc. for the summer. He is helping with some of their projects and learning about welding and fabrication for his SAE project. He said he has enjoyed getting to know the others who work there.

“They build just about anything and everything out there. The way Jeff put it is, ‘If you can buy it online or in a store, they don’t build it,’” he said.

Capek, who will be a senior next fall, said he is interested in working with welding and fabrication in the future and will then come back to the family farm and bring that knowledge with him. Fittingly, he is also working on a year-round SAE project helping out on his family’s farm.

He became interested in welding after taking a class on it in school.

“It’s just fun to see some of the stuff come together. You can see it on the blueprint, but it’s just kind of neat when it all comes to life,” he said.

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COURTESY PHOTO

Ann Dobesh, (right), an Extension educator for the University of Nebraska and 4-H educator, presents a program along with Ericka Murray at the Ignite by 4-H teen summit in Washington, D.C.

## Ignite by 4-H teen summit sparks ideas

*Ann Dobesh shares experiences of Washington, D.C., trip*

BY ANDRES LOPEZ  
reporter1@sewardindependent.com

One 4-H representative from Seward County made her trip to Washington, D.C., last March to expand her skills in educating youth leadership.

Ann Dobesh, an Extension educator for the University of Nebraska and 4-H educator, traveled alongside several others from Nebraska to the Ignite by 4-H teen summit March 13 – 17. This was the first time Dobesh had attended the event.

Ignite by 4-H is a teen summit held in Washington, D.C. The event spans four days filled with workshops, career preparation and times to connect with those involved and had more than 1,200 participants.

While Dobesh was the sole representative from Seward County, she still was able to go with several others, including 12 kids from Nebraska. “We did spend a lot

of time with the youth from Nebraska,” Dobesh said. “I would love to be able to take youth from Seward County in the future.”

Dobesh was selected alongside Ericka Murray, a co-chair with Dobesh working on a financial literacy project in Nebraska, to present on financial well-being and decision-making.

Dobesh said she had nerves before speaking, but the group of kids that participated in her event made it much easier.

“We presented the same session twice, and I was so impressed with how engaged they were,” Dobesh said. “We do several different activities and everybody got really into it.”

During the presentation, Dobesh held several activities for the kids.

One of the activities focused on aspects of financial decision-making. In this activity, the kids picked a money personality most aligned with themselves and then

learned about how this impacts their financial decision-making.

The other event had kids sorting items into wants and needs, leading to a debate over what qualified as a need, Dobesh said.

The same workshop presented to the kids at Ignite by 4-H is also a program conducted with Seward County School, Dobesh said.

“That was very rewarding. You never know how an activity is gonna go, and I was just really impressed with the youth that attended our session,” Dobesh said.

Dobesh was not only able to present to eager kids, she also had the opportunity to explore Washington, D.C., for a second time in her life. On this go-around, Dobesh took a tour of the monuments at night to see each monument lit up and a trip to a botanical garden to learn about different methods of planting.

Over this summer,

Dobesh said she plans on continuing her dedication to 4-H, helping kids do their summer projects. Dobesh said this year's projects cover a variety of topics, including rocketry, making bread, bee workshops and even creating taffy.

“Our goal is really to help kids explore their interests and find what we call a spark,” Dobesh said. “We will offer a lot of different educational workshops throughout this summer to help them figure out those things and what they're most interested in.”

Dobesh said that she is taking many of the skills she learned regarding youth leadership into consideration with local groups.

“We have a group that's called Seward County Junior Leaders, and it's our youth leadership group,” Dobesh said. “I definitely think there are things that I've learned that I think we can implement into our program.”



AMY HAUSMAN/SCI

### Tractor restoration

Lyle and Amy Hayak's 1936 Oliver 70 cruises in the June Jubilee parade on June 9 in Milligan. The tractor was bought new by Henry Hayak from his father John F. Hayak. It was restored eight years ago.

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# Local delegates set to “Lead Your Legacy” at NAYI 2024

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN  
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Several local students were selected to be delegates at the Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute event this summer.

The event helps prepare students for careers in agriculture, and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture said it received a record number of applications this year.

Local delegates will include Mikey Bartu of Milligan, Baylor Behrens of Dorchester, Will Vyhnaelek of Friend, Jacob Weber of Friend, Carter Milton of Milligan and Owen Vyhnaelek of Dorchester.

“These students are the future leaders and innovators of Nebraska’s ag industry. They will be the ones working together in the future to strengthen our state’s number one industry,” NDA Director Sherry Vinton said in a press release.

At 53 years old, the program is the country’s longest-running ag youth program of its kind, and this year’s theme is “Leading Your Legacy.” It will be July 8-12 on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s East Campus.

Incoming senior Mikey Bartu plans to major in ag business and minor in agronomy after graduation. He said he loves agriculture because he can see it everywhere around him. He is looking forward to meeting new people, learning about the ag industry and visiting the college he is interested in attending during NAYI.

At the event, hundreds of high school upperclassmen gather to learn more about Nebraska agriculture, network with ag leaders and explore career opportunities. NAYI features motivational speakers, discussions on agricultural issues, career development, networking opportunities,

leadership activities, a farm management game, a formal banquet and a dance.

To apply, students fill out an application that gauges their interests, leadership skills and involvement in agriculture. Accepted students attend the event; which is sponsored by NDA, agri-businesses, commodity groups and industry organizations; free of charge.

Will Vyhnaelek, an incoming senior, said he is looking forward to learning about aspects of agriculture in different parts of Nebraska and talking to students from the opposite ends of the state.

“I have heard good things from a lot of people who have done NAYI, and I’m on a farm and am interested in agriculture, so it’s always something that’s sounded fun,” he said. “I’ve had a lot of friends do it, and they’ve always come back with good experiences.”

Vyhnaelek said oftentimes career fairs do not feature agriculture-related booths, so he is excited to learn about agriculture-specific options and speak with colleges about the field.

Incoming senior Carter Milton said he is excited to meet new people at the event and listen to speakers, including Gov. Jim Pillen.

Milton, who has been in FFA since seventh grade, plans to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln after graduation and then return to work on his family farm. He said he enjoys finding a takeaway from every speech he attends.

“I’m going to go into something in agriculture, and in that industry, it’s really important to know people,” he said. “When you can talk to people about marketing and stuff like that and just meet people, that’s kind of why I want to go to NAYI.”

# Butterflies and moths are beneficial insects

BY NICOLE STONER  
ISA Certified Arborist

Summer is really here, not quite by calendar, but definitely with the temperatures – and the bugs.

As an entomologist, I love when insects become active, but I know not everyone feels the same about bugs. I do not like mosquitoes and other annoying bugs that bother me outside and I especially dislike those that do damage to my plants.

However, most of our insects are beneficial and therefore do not need to be killed.

## Beneficial insects

Many of our insects are a benefit to us. Insects provide us with useful products such as honey and silk, eat or kill other insects, decompose things like dung and carcasses, and pollinate our plants. Without insects, we wouldn’t have many of our foods, including apples and cucumbers and we wouldn’t have more flowers and trees.

Pollination services are important to provide us with flowers and fruits that we enjoy every day. About 75% of all plants need pollination from animals, including insects, the remaining plants can be self-pollinated or wind-pollinated. It is estimated that 1 out of every 3 bites you take is provided by bees.

However, there are many other great pollinators including many beautiful butterflies and moths.

## Butterflies

Butterflies are so interesting and they are beautiful on both the top and bottom of their wings. Each butter-



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fly has a unique pattern and coloration to separate the different species. The Monarch butterfly is one of our most widely known pollinators and it has a copy-cat.

There is another species called a viceroy that looks exactly like the monarch except that the viceroy has a line through both hindwings. It does this so predators leave it alone.

Another group of my favorite butterflies is the swallowtail butterflies. In Nebraska, we can find the Eastern tiger swallowtail, the black swallowtail and the zebra swallowtail commonly. The Eastern tiger swallowtail is a yellow swallowtail compared to the black and zebra striped species.

These all have a point that projects from the uniform rounded corner of the hindwings, as do all swallowtail butterflies.

And we can’t forget the painted ladies, who migrate through Nebraska annually. The painted lady butterfly is a pinkish-orange butterfly with black blotches on the wings. Painted ladies are a butterfly that migrates through Nebraska every year from the south, they do not overwinter here.

Some years, they come through in large populations.

## Moths

Moths can be great pollinators as well. I was outside last weekend and a white-lined sphinx moth, also called a hummingbird hawk moth, came to pollinate my petunias. It is called that because it flies around plants with fast moving wings, similar to a hummingbird.

I also really enjoy Luna moths, which are less common in Nebraska but can be found on occasion. They are quite large, bright green colored moths with a few black spots that look like eyes on the wings. This is a unique moth with amazing color, they are always a treat to find.

And who can forget the cecropia moth, which is the largest moth native to North America. The wingspan can be up to six inches across. They are fuzzy and the wings are mostly gray/brown with spots of red and tan with a tan edge around both the front and hind wings.

These are also so much fun to find. And if you get the opportunity to find a caterpillar, they are so interesting. The caterpillars are pale green with blue, red, and yellow knobs along the body.

Pollinators come in many forms but are always an important part of the ecosystem. Take time to look for and enjoy the butterflies and moths you find in your landscape, I know I always do!

If you have any further questions please contact Nicole Stoner at (402) 223-1384, nstoner2@unl.edu or visit the Gage County Extension website at www.gage.unl.edu.

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# AI can be a creative helper

BY JASON TULLER

Extension Educator, Community Vitality Initiative

At the beginning of May, I traveled to Sidney to attend the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference.

One of the sessions I attended was about Artificial Intelligence (AI). What does Artificial Intelligence have to do with communities in Rural Nebraska? Let's find out.

Artificial Intelligence is simply a very advanced computer program that can answer questions. They are what is called a large language models program, which means that they can understand plain language and respond with language that we can understand.

You no longer have to know how to use different computer code to get a computer to do something specific and new. You just ask it questions in plain language and it will answer you. Sometimes it gives you answers right away and sometimes it answers with clarification questions.

There are some versions of AI that can make images. For example, you could ask it, "Make an image of a tree in the style of Picasso" and it would. Sometimes it is very good and sometimes it isn't. It took all of three seconds.

If you didn't like it, you could just tell it to try again, and it would. But again, what does this have to do with rural communities?

In my visits with rural community members, I ask what I can help with. Sometimes the answer to that question is that they could use help with finding someone to update our Facebook page. We don't have time to



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create a fancy poster. There's no one in town who is good at photoshop.

Artificial intelligence is the answer to many of those issues...although, you'll have to find someone in your community to work with AI.

The presentation at CEC that I attended introduced us to something that I hadn't thought about yet. It was an AI program that was limited in focus to helping small businesses. The creator of the program was showing us how this could be more useful than the large AI programs.

In the large AI programs such as Bard or ChatGPT, the AI doesn't really learn about the user, but in this smaller focused AI program, it was more tailored to your business. For example, if you owned a small deli-style restaurant, when you logged into this small focused AI, it would know about your restaurant and your style of marketing.

You ask it for 10 Facebook posts, and it would give them to you for your restaurant. In a large AI, you would have to explain to it about your restaurant and your marketing style each time you asked it a question.

Is there an AI focused on rural communities? I don't know, but if there isn't ... and you know how to create a small focused AI ... I believe there is a market. Imagine working in a city office and just asking your computer for 10 Facebook posts and having them instantaneously available.

No thinking required. Of course, you would have to edit them and make sure that they were appropriate, but no more than you would with an employee's work.

That's the power of AI for a rural community. It can be your creative helper. It can make social media posts, posters, word documents, and pretty much anything that can be done on a computer. It still takes a human to look at it and make sure it is correct.

Learning about AI and how it works, and how it can help will enable some rural communities to begin to thrive, even without many people available to do the work.

Perhaps next month, my entire work for the article will be copying and pasting the following into an AI program to see what it comes up with...

"AI please read all my previous articles about my work in RPN and write me a new article for this month. Approximately 750 words including and ending with the following paragraph."

If your community could benefit from any of the Rural Prosperity Nebraska ideas that I've discussed in this column, please reach out to me. I'd love to speak to your community about these topics. You can reach me at jason.tuller@unl.edu or at the Thayer County office at (402) 768-7212.

## NEBRASKA POULTRY AND EGG DEVELOPMENT, UTILIZATION AND MARKETING COMMITTEE NOTICE OF MEETING

The Nebraska Poultry and Egg Development, Utilization, and Marketing Committee has planned a meeting for Monday, June 24, at 10 a.m. at Advanced Association Management in Milford, NE.

Schedule  
PED - 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Lunch  
NPI - 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.  
Committee Meetings - 3 p.m. - 4 p.m.

The current agenda of subjects to be discussed at this meeting is available for public inspection at the offices of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Poultry and Egg Division, 521 First Street, Milford.

Please send any funding requests or additions to the PED agenda to Alyssa no later than June 14, 2024.

Please contact the PED office at (402) 761-2216 or alyssa@nepoultry.org if you have any questions.



## New contact information offered for water and cropping systems questions

BY NATHAN MUELLER  
Water & Cropping Systems  
Extension Educator



**UNL Extension**  
Nathan Mueller  
nathan.mueller@unl.edu

It has been a joy to write 137 columns over the past 4.5 years for farmers, agronomists, and landowners in southeast Nebraska.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as a local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator. My last day with Nebraska Extension will be June 21. Many have emailed, called, and texted me wondering what my next endeavor will be.

Starting in July, I will be the State Soil Health Specialist with the U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture Natural Resources Conservation Service located in Lincoln. I have served as a Water & Cropping Systems Extension Educator for 10 years (5.5 years previously in Fremont) where I have gained valuable experience and built networks that I will carry with me

into my next job.

So, this isn't goodbye, but see you later with a different hat on.

The Southeast Nebraska Water and Cropping Systems Extension Educator Team reviewed local programming to determine what would be the best path forward for interim/transition plans in the short-term (next six months).

Following is the short-term plan to assist clients in Gage, Jefferson, and Saline counties related to water and cropping systems. The Nebraska Extension Engagement Zone Coordinators and WCS Program Leaders will be involved in plans for longer-term interim responsibilities should it

be necessary to.

You should call the Extension Office in your county to be put in touch with the interim educator:

Gage County (402-223-1384) – Ritika Lamichhane – WCS educator, office in Nemaha County

Jefferson County (402-729-3487) – Matheus Ribeiro – WCS educator, office in Clay County

Saline County (402-821-2151) – John Nelson – WCS educator, office in Lancaster County

Please try and contact them with your question several days before you need your question answered (if possible) given their extra workload. These interim educator roles receive no extra resources or financial

compensation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

For extra workload context, for Gage, Jefferson, and Saline counties, this is about 500 client support requests per year taking several minutes to several hours each.

The local email list through MailChimp will switch ownership to two southeast Nebraska educators in the interim. The croptechcafe.org website that I started 10 years ago will continue to be maintained and used as a regional website as it is now.

Newspaper columns will be covered by several educators through ones they already write for their accountability

regions.

The 2024 Southeast Nebraska Alfalfa & Wheat Expo on Aug. 22 has been cancelled. USDA Weekly Crop Reports for Gage, Jefferson, and Saline counties from Nebraska Extension will not be completed until the position is refilled.

For inquiries regarding water and cropping systems resources from Nebraska Extension, please contact your local Extension Office. I created the following phrase 10 years ago to capture my future Extension programming and have used it ever since, so one last time... know your crop, know your tech, know your bottom line.

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# Local farmers' markets hum with business



COURTESY PHOTO

The Crete Farmers' Market offers many opportunities for purchases as well as conversation. The Crete Farmers' Market takes place Thursdays from 2-6 p.m. at ACE Hardware.

AMY HAUSMAN/SCI  
Raegan Skelton of the The Prairie Pastures Pantry, LLC spends the afternoon at the Seward Farmer's Market on June 8. The farmer's market is now located on the fairgrounds on Wednesdays and Saturdays.



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