

The Wayne Herald — March 21, 2024

CELEBRATING NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK



Celebrating Nebraska agriculture, a powerhouse of an industry

By **Sherry Vinton, Director,**
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Agriculture is Nebraska's number one industry and the heart and soul of our state. Agriculture deserves recognition and celebration every day, especially during National Ag Week, March 17- 23. As the Director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA), it's an honor and a privilege to serve the dedicated people of Nebraska's agricultural community.

Being Nebraska born and raised, my roots run deep within the agricultural community. My family and I ranch south of Whitman in the scenic Sandhills, giving me a firsthand understanding of the role agriculture plays in shaping Nebraska. I'm proud to be part of the extensive network of 45,000 farmers and ranchers who consistently deliver high-quality agricultural products year after year.

I always like to talk with people about Nebraska agriculture because



Sherry Vinton

it's interesting and exciting. Nebraska is the best place in the world to grow agriculture. Nebraska has abundant resources, the best land for growing crops and for grazing, plenty of water, wide open spaces, and ample feed for livestock.

Out of Nebraska's perfect resources for growing agriculture, one tops them all – our people. Nebraska farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses are true innovators, embracing precision agriculture, genetic advances, and modern equipment to produce more while using fewer resources. Their innovations ripple across the entire state, impacting all of us and emphasizing the interconnectedness of agriculture with our daily lives.

Farmers and ranchers are also dedicated and resilient. They face challenges and come back stronger. January proved to be a challenging start to this year when severe winter weather created significant challenges for

everyone, including those who work in Nebraska's agriculture industry.

During these severe winter weather emergencies, Nebraska livestock producers did what they do best. They fed, cared for, and kept close watch on their livestock.

For those producers unable to tend to their livestock and needing immediate assistance during the storms, NDA worked with local, state, and federal partners to prioritize their critical needs. We send our heartfelt thanks to Nebraskans for supporting Nebraska farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses during winter emergencies and always.

Building on past challenges makes us stronger as we continue to look toward the future of Nebraska agriculture. Nebraska agriculture provides us with ample reasons to be grateful and to celebrate.

See **CELEBRATING**, page 2

Celebrating

(continued from page 1)

Notably, Nebraska is a powerhouse when it comes to agriculture, leading the nation in many important categories. In beef production, Nebraska's quality products are unmatched. We are:

- #1 in beef and veal exports (2023);
- #1 in commercial cattle slaughter (2023);
- #2 in all cattle on feed (Jan. 1, 2024); and
- #2 in all cattle and calves (Jan. 1, 2024).

While beef takes the spotlight, the Nebraska swine industry, with 3.8 million head and a sixth- ranking of all hogs and pigs on farms (Dec. 1, 2023), makes its mark.

Our state's poultry production has significantly increased in recent years, as well, with recent hatcheries and a

world-class chicken processing operation in Fremont. Chicken eggs are on Nebraska's list of 10 leading commodities for 2022.

Nebraska's varied climate, elevation and soil help farmers grow a plentiful supply and variety of crops. In 2023, we ranked:

- #2 in the nation for proso millet production;
- #3 in the nation for corn for grain production;
- #4 for dry edible pea production;
- #5 in grain sorghum production; and
- #6 in soybean production.

Nebraska has a unique advantage, known as the "Golden Triangle," where the combination of corn, livestock and ethanol production provides significant opportunity to add value at every step along the production chain.

In 2023, Nebraska ranked number two in ethanol production with 24 operating facilities having the capacity to create more than 2.3 billion gallons of clean, reliable, renewable fuel. Approximately 35 percent of Nebraska's 2023

corn crop was used in ethanol production putting Nebraska corn and value-added agriculture in action.

Clearly our agriculture industry is worthy of celebration. Anything worthy of celebration is also worthy of preservation and education.

Youth outreach in agriculture education is an important part of the work we do at NDA. With that in mind, I'd like to mention NDA's annual Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute. NAYI is a good way for Nebraska high school juniors and seniors to learn more about Nebraska agriculture and the many careers available in the ag industry. Those who attend NAYI do so for free thanks to many generous sponsors.

Applications are available online

at nda.nebraska.gov/NAYI. Students need to apply by the April 15 deadline to secure a place at this year's NAYI.

As we celebrate National Ag Week, let us express our gratitude to the farmers, ranchers, and all the people working in the ag industry to provide us with the food, feed, and fuel we depend on every day.

By recognizing the challenges, celebrating the successes, and advocating for the future of agriculture, we help make our agriculture sector even stronger.

Thank you for allowing me to shine a spotlight on Nebraska agriculture during this special week and always.

Corn Board celebrates National Ag Day

Farmers are known to be some of the most pioneering, innovative and driven individuals in the world.

This National Ag Day, the Nebraska Corn Board is celebrating those who work day in and day out to feed, clothe and fuel the world.

Agriculture plays a vital role in our state. With over 90% of Nebraska dedicated to agriculture, the Nebraska Corn Board is proud to have national rankings.


From white corn to irrigated acres to livestock and ethanol production, Nebraska ranks at the top. In 2023, Nebraska farmers produced over 1.7 billion bushels of corn, ranking third in the nation, a testament to their time, efforts and determination in the midst of adversity in weather and climate.

"At the Nebraska Corn Board, we understand the vitality of farmers and ranchers and know the impacts they make for the world each day," said Kelly Brunkhorst, executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board. "Programs

funded and partnered by the Nebraska Corn Board ensure the future is in good hands whether that be research to help farmers expand their knowledge for innovation, finding new markets globally or promoting the industry."

National Ag Day is celebrated on Tuesday, March 19 celebrating all aspects of the agriculture industry. Whether it be an agronomist, engineer, salesman, scientist, economist or anyone in-between, the Nebraska Corn Board is appreciative of their efforts today to be ready for tomorrow's future.

The Nebraska Corn Board is funded through a producer checkoff investment of 1/2-cent-per-bushel checkoff on all corn marketed in the state and is managed by nine farmer directors. The mission of the Nebraska Corn Board is to increase the value and sustainability of Nebraska corn through promotion, market development and research.



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Nebraska Secretary of State promotes Nebraska businesses in trade mission to Kenya, Africa

Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen led a trade and investment mission to Kenya recently.

As a part of the trade mission, Secretary Evnen and Deputy Secretary Cindi Allen connected Nebraska-based businesses with trade opportunities in Kenya. The trade mission included meetings between business leaders, researchers and government officials across Kenya. The trade mission focused on connecting Kenya importers with corn growers and researchers in Nebraska.

“The country of Kenya provides immense opportunities for Nebraska businesses,” Secretary of State Bob Evnen said. “Nebraska is known around the globe for its agriculture and its contributions to feeding a growing world. I’m honored to help build new connections that will benefit the people of Nebraska and Kenya.”

The February 2024 Trade and Investment Mission to Kenya was Secretary Evnen’s sixth international trade mission since taking office in 2019 and second trade mission to Kenya.

As a part of the Secretary of State’s statutory responsibility to promote

international exchanges of commerce and culture, Secretary Evnen has led prior trade missions with Nebraska businesses to Bulgaria, Tanzania, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

Nebraska Secretary of State Deputy for International Trade Cindi Allen organized the trade mission along with Grand Island coffee distributor Laban Njuguna. The delega-

tion included representatives from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Nebraska Corn Board, Cantera Partners, Home Health Care, Pioneer Crop Science, GLASS (Geo-Location Addressing System Service), and Grand Island Express, Inc., among others.

“Kenya is the fastest growing mar-

ket in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Deputy Secretary Allen said. “If we have learned anything, we have learned that single-sourcing your supply chain is not good. We are helping Nebraska seize this opportunity in trade and investments in Kenya. Kenya is a large emerging market much like the opportunities we saw in Southeast Asia 20 years ago.”



The Nebraska Secretary of State Delegation visits McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm in Nairobi.



The Nebraska Secretary of State Delegation visits a coffee cooperative in Nyeri.



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Gov. Pillen, UNL leaders announce Food Animal Veterinary Scholarship Program

Governor Jim Pillen has announced a new scholarship program for Nebraska students aimed at growing the number of veterinarians serving livestock producers across the state.

The Nebraska Elite 11 Veterinarian Program provides financial support to Nebraska students pursuing degrees in animal science or veterinary science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's (UNL) College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR). Today, is the first day that applications are being accepted for the first cohort of students.

"The need for production animal veterinarians is undeniable. It's an issue for Nebraska and other state's as well," said Gov. Pillen. "Through this collaboration with UNL, Nebraska will be a leader in boosting the number of graduates in this field."

UNL Chancellor Rodney Bennett voiced strong support for the program, which he said will help the university meet two key goals.

"The Nebraska Elite 11 Veterinarian Program aligns with two key aims of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln -- first, to attract, retain, and graduate Nebraska's best and brightest students; and second, to contribute to resolving pressing issues within the state of Nebraska," said Bennett. "The

University appreciates Gov. Pillen's leadership and the state's support of this program that will impact not only UNL but all Nebraskans who benefit from veterinary services."

Nebraska's livestock industry contributes more than \$6 billion annually to the state's economy – an impact that is especially significant in rural counties and communities. Veterinarians play a critical role in keeping livestock healthy, improving herd health, and responding to disease and public health issues, among many other services, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Access to high-quality veterinary care improves profitability for livestock producers and contributes to peace of mind for producers when their animals need care.

But Nebraska and other states across the country are facing a steep shortage of food animal veterinarians. One reason for this is the cost of veterinary training, according to the USDA. The Elite 11 Program removes the barrier of cost for Nebraska students interested in food animal veterinary medicine.

Dr. Larry Marshall has been a vet in Bertrand for nearly 40 years. He says students tend to return to their home communities to practice, which is both

a benefit and a hindrance when it comes to recruiting food animal veterinarians, especially if that hometown is in another state.

"The point is that my plight in trying to find an associate is shared up and down areas of rural Nebraska with other veterinarians. This is a plan that I think is going to get to the root of the problem and it's going to help solve that problem," shared Marshall. "Our goal is to find, cultivate, educate, mentor and lead these students down a path that will let them be successful food animal veterinarians in rural Nebraska."

Up to 25 first-time freshmen will receive the Nebraska Aspiring Animal Production Veterinarians Program Scholarship, which covers 50% of their tuition for the first two years of their study in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

After the second year, up to 13 of the original 25 scholarship recipients will be awarded a continuation scholarship, which covers 100% of tuition for their third and fourth years of study

at UNL. Ultimately, 11 students will be selected as part of the Elite 11. Those students will receive 100% of tuition and fees for UNL's professional program in veterinary medicine, in which students complete the first two years of veterinary school at UNL, followed by two more years of schooling at the Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine. Students selected into the program will also receive mentoring and professional development throughout their studies.

"This program presents an incredible opportunity for Nebraska high school students who are passionate about agriculture and animal care to pursue careers in veterinary medicine without the burden of student loan debt," said Tiffany Heng-Moss, dean of UNL's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. "This is an important program that will have a big impact on our state, our agriculture industry, and on the students who take part in it. I'm grateful to Gov. Pillen and the state of Nebraska

See SCHOLARSHIP, page 7



Involved in the announcement of the veterinary scholarship program were (left) NU Interim President Chris Kabourek; Dean Tiffany Heng-Moss of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources; Dr. Larry Marshall, DVM; Gov. Jim Pillen; State Senator Teresa Ibach; Department of Labor Director John Albin and IANR VP/Vice Chancellor Mike Boehm.

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USDA announces Conservation Reserve Program General Signup for 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can now sign up for the general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through March 29, 2024. This conservation opportunity gives producers tools to conserve wildlife habitat while achieving other conservation benefits, including sequestering carbon and improving water quality and soil health.

“The USDA has a long track record of fostering and supporting the vital relationship between agriculture and conservation, and the Conservation Reserve Program helps our producers be good stewards of their lands and boost wildlife populations at the same time,” said Tim Divis, FSA Acting State Executive Director in Nebraska. “These efforts demonstrate the power of USDA’s Farm Bill conservation programs to conserve wildlife habitat, protect clean water and address climate change in partnership with farmers, ranchers, forest owners and conservation organizations across the country.”

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

As one of the largest private lands conservation programs in the United States, CRP offers a range of conservation options to farmers, ranchers, and landowners. It has been an especially strong opportunity for farmers with less productive or marginal cropland, helping them re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and support wildlife habitat.

Producers and landowners enrolled about 926,000 acres in General CRP in 2023, bringing the total of enrolled acres in General CRP to 7.78 million. This, combined with all other acres in CRP through other enrollment

opportunities, such as Grassland and Continuous CRP, bring the current total of enrolled acres to 24.8 million.

General CRP

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

General CRP is one of several ways agricultural producers and private landowners can participate in the program.

Other CRP Options

This past January FSA began accepting applications for the Continuous CRP signup. Under this enrollment, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are


automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

The USDA also offers financial assistance to producers and landowners enrolled in CRP to improve the health of their forests through the Forest Management Incentive (FMI), which can help participants with forest management practices, such as brush management and prescribed burning. FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the near future.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

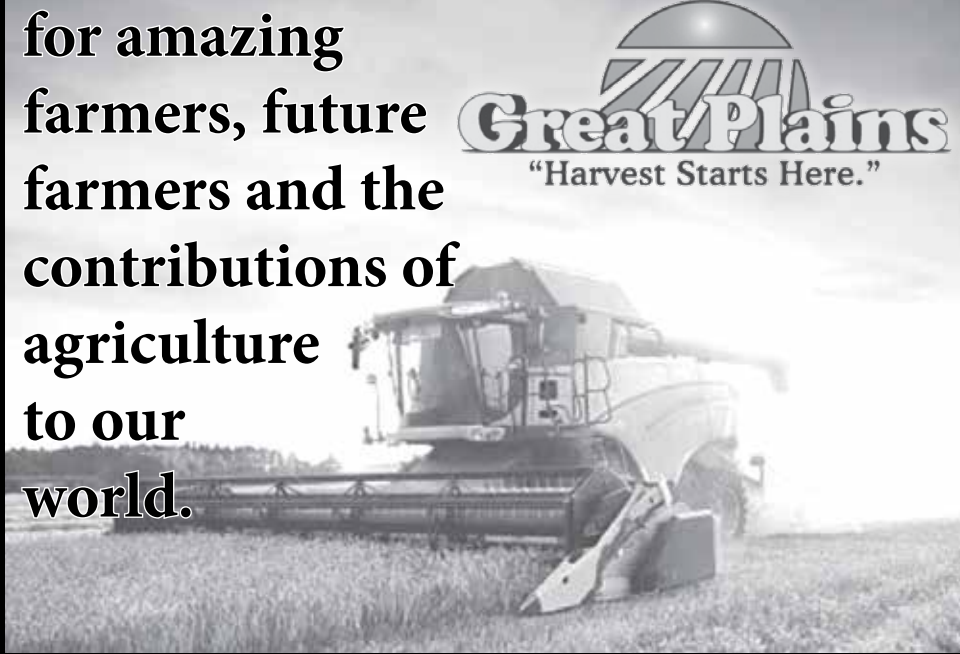
How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program before applicable deadlines.




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Dairy producers can enroll for 2024 Margin Coverage

Dairy producers are now able to enroll for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC), an important safety net program offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides producers with price support to help offset milk and feed price differences.

This year's DMC signup began Feb. 28, 2024, and ends April 29, 2024.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has revised the regulations for DMC to allow eligible dairy operations to make a one-time adjustment to established production history. This adjustment will be accomplished by combining previously established supplemental production history with DMC production history for those dairy operations that participated in Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage during a prior coverage year.

DMC has also been authorized through calendar year 2024. Congress passed a 2018 Farm Bill extension requiring these regulatory changes to the program.

"FSA is announcing the sign up for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage. We encourage producers to enroll in this important safety net program. In reviewing 2023 margins and the more than \$1.2 billion in Dairy Margin Coverage payments issued to produc-

ers, Dairy Margin Coverage is proven to be a program to reduce risk for our dairy producers," said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. "If 2023 taught us anything, it's that we honestly have no idea what will happen in the market in any given year. Producers who took advantage of this affordable risk management tool for the 2023 program year were able to mitigate some financial impacts on their operations. At \$0.15 per hundredweight for \$9.50 coverage, risk protection through Dairy Margin Coverage is a relatively inexpensive investment in a true sense of security and peace of mind."

DMC is a voluntary risk management program that offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer.

In 2023, Dairy Margin Coverage payments triggered in 11 months including two months, June and July, where the margin fell below the catastrophic level of \$4.00 per hundredweight, a first for Dairy Margin Coverage or its predecessor Margin Protection Program.

2024 DMC Coverage and Premium Fees

FSA has revised DMC regulations

to extend coverage for calendar year 2024, which is retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024, and to provide an adjustment to the production history for dairy operations with less than 5 million pounds of production. In previous years, smaller dairy operations could establish a supplemental production history and receive Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage. For 2024, dairy producers can establish one adjusted base production history through DMC for each participating dairy operation to better reflect the operation's current production.

For 2024 DMC enrollment, dairy operations that established supplemental production history through Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage for coverage years 2021 through 2023, will combine the supplemental production history with established production history for one adjusted base production history.

For dairy operations enrolled in 2023 DMC under a multi-year lock-in contract, lock-in eligibility will be extended until Dec. 31, 2024. In addition, dairy operations enrolled in multi-year lock-in contracts are eligible for the discounted DMC premium rate during the 2024 coverage year.

To confirm 2024 DMC lock-in coverage or opt out in favor of an annual contract for 2024, dairy operations having lock-in contracts must enroll during the 2024 DMC enrollment period.

DMC offers different levels of coverage, even an option that is free to producers, minus a \$100 administrative fee.

The administrative fee is waived for dairy producers who are considered limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged or a military veteran. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online dairy decision tool.

DMC Payments

DMC payments are calculated using updated feed and premium hay costs, making the program more reflective of actual dairy producer expenses. These updated feed calculations use 100% premium alfalfa hay.

More Information

USDA also offers other risk management tools for dairy producers, including the Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP) plan that protects against a decline in milk revenue (yield and price) and the Livestock Gross Margin (LGM) plan, which provides protection against the loss of the market value of milk minus the feed costs. Both DRP and LGM livestock insurance policies are offered through the Risk Management Agency. Producers should contact their local crop insurance agent for more information.

For more information on DMC, visit the DMC webpage or contact your local USDA Service Center.

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Soybeans set to be newest Nebraska Taps Competition in 2024

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is adding soybean to the lineup of Testing Ag Performance Solutions (TAPS) farm management competitions for 2024.

TAPS is an innovative program fostering interactive real-life farm management competitions, uniting UNL researchers, extension professionals, producers, industry leaders, and agriculture students in a dynamic network aimed at advancing profitability and input-use efficiency. The inaugural soybean competition will take place at UNL's Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center (ENREEC) near Mead, Nebraska, and will be supported by the Nebraska Soybean Board.

"We are excited to add soybeans to the TAPS farm management competitions we offer in Nebraska," said Chuck Burr, UNL Extension Educator

and TAPS team member. "Previous TAPS participants have indicated that they are adopting new technology and management strategies on their farms, and the soybean industry has made great strides in these areas over the past 15 to 20 years. We are excited to help take that to the next level with the new TAPS competition."

Participants in the soybean competition will make critical farm management decisions, including crop insurance, variety selection, seed treatment, seeding rate, planting date, fungicide, insecticide, micronutrient application, herbicide decisions and marketing. These decisions will be implemented on randomized plots within the field at ENREEC. Due to limitations of the irrigation equipment in 2024, the competition will not include irrigation decisions for participants, but will be fully irrigated at the discretion of the

UNL team.

"I see this as a valuable opportunity to integrate new strategies into my soybean operation," said Blake Johnson, NSB District 8 director and farmer interested in participating in the TAPS soybean program. "TAPS has a proven track record of driving innovation, and this kind of competition is a great way to get involved."

Participants will be given the opportunity to test a wide range of ag management technologies and utilize a plethora of data throughout the growing season. Similar to other TAPS competitions, the soybean competitors will compete for three awards, which include greatest grain yield, highest input-use efficiency and most profitable.

"We look forward to highlighting information learned by the TAPS soybean competition participants as part of the Soybean Management Field Days, which will be a new aspect to

the field days that have been around for 25 years," said Aaron Nygren, UNL Extension Educator and TAPS team member.

The TAPS team is looking for people interested in participating in the inaugural year of the soybean competition. They are also looking for participants from each of the eight Nebraska Soybean Board districts.

If you, or someone you may know, is interested, please contact Krystle Rhoades, TAPS Program Manager at krystle.rhoades@unl.edu.

The nine-member Nebraska Soybean Board collects and disburses the Nebraska share of funds generated by the one-half of one percent times the net sales price per bushel of soybeans sold. Nebraska soybean checkoff funds are invested in research, education, domestic and foreign markets, including new uses for soybeans and soybean products.

Scholarship

(continued from page 4)

for making this possible."

"Based on my own experience, I know how academically demanding it is to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine. It's becoming even harder to find students who are interested in large animal care," said Gov. Pillen. "This program aims to close that gap and produce experts in the field who can ably work with farmers and ranchers and continue to ensure Nebraska's place in providing quality food products across the globe."

Graduates of the Elite 11 Program are required to stay in Nebraska and practice as a production-animal veterinarian for eight years. Application instructions for the first cohort of the program are now available at casnr.unl.edu/elite11. Applications will be accepted through April 12. Scholarship recipients will be notified in late May.

"The Elite 11 Program brings together two of the things we are most passionate about at UNL - supporting Nebraska students and fulfilling

our land-grant mission," said Mike Boehm, NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor for UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. "It's truly a win-win."

"As a rural senator representing District 44, as well as a cattle producer, I introduced LB1062 to address and support the demand for more rural veterinarians," said State Senator Teresa Ibach. "Iowa, Kansas and Missouri all offer incentive programs that work to attract students, and their practicing veterinarian numbers well exceed ours. I am pleased that the Governor, the university and the legislature recognize the urgency to meet the needs of our ever-growing agriculture industry. This venture champions and supports students across our state who will serve this vital industry into the future."

"This is a great example of collaboration between the state and university that will benefit agriculture and all Nebraskans," said NU Interim

President Chris Kabourek. "With the Elite 11 program, we will address important workforce needs while creating more opportunities for our young people to pursue their dreams right here in Nebraska. I'm grateful to Dean

Tiffany Heng-Moss for her vision and leadership on this effort, and we thank Governor Pillen for his strong partnership on our shared goals for Nebraska's growth and competitiveness."

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NFarms research will bring precision ag innovations to producers

by Geitner Simmons

Husker scientists and staff are formalizing existing research and outreach in precision agriculture into a strategic initiative called NFarms. The effort, in collaboration with producers and industry, will refine and expand precision ag capabilities crucial to boosting farm efficiency and environmental sustainability.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln faculty pursue a range of precision ag work on 3,000 acres of the university’s Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center near Mead. Those efforts will be channeled into NFarms to facilitate strategic coordination and maximize the outreach and benefits.

NFarms will be a test bed for new technologies, as well as platforms to help farmers better harness data. The initiative also will develop innovative decision-making tools producers can use for efficient field management.

Think drone- and sensor-enabled operations that lift productivity and resilience to new heights. Plus software solutions that provide cloud-based ag data storage and data analytics. Plus nitrogen management innovations and ag robotic breakthroughs.

“NFarms provides a real opportunity

as a technology hub integrating the farm system,” said Joe Luck, professor of biological systems engineering and associate director of ENREEC. “We have a real-world environment to test these technologies and show producers how they’re going to impact their operation.”

To buttress that work, the university in 2024 will break ground on an NFarms facility that will house precision ag technologies. Construction is expected to be complete in the summer.

The university’s precision ag work at the Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center operates under real-world conditions, on a scale similar to that of actual working farms. The cutting-edge research involves both irrigated and dryland fields.

NFarms will provide private-sector opportunities. As the initiative advances, companies and entrepreneurs will be able to use the precision ag resources to test innovative ideas for new methods, products and services.

NFarms is unique from other university research facilities in the United States because the site far exceeds in size what any other university has for precision ag research, said Doug Zalesky, ENREEC director. Another plus is the similar commercial scale

of the university’s Klosterman Feedlot Innovation Center, also to be built at ENREEC. In all, the center has a total of nearly 10,000 acres for ag research.

“I don’t think you would ever find another single research center in the United States of this size, with both crops and livestock,” Zalesky said.

The breadth and sophistication of the center’s research produce a range of findings with practical importance for Nebraska ag producers. “We have a lot of research here we need to integrate into production operation systems to really see the benefit,” Luck said.

Ag technologist Nate Thorson, research manager for NFarms, points to pesticide application as a key example of how NFarms can enable significant efficiency improvements. At present, checking when it’s safe to re-enter a field can be a cumbersome, inefficient process involving paper records and

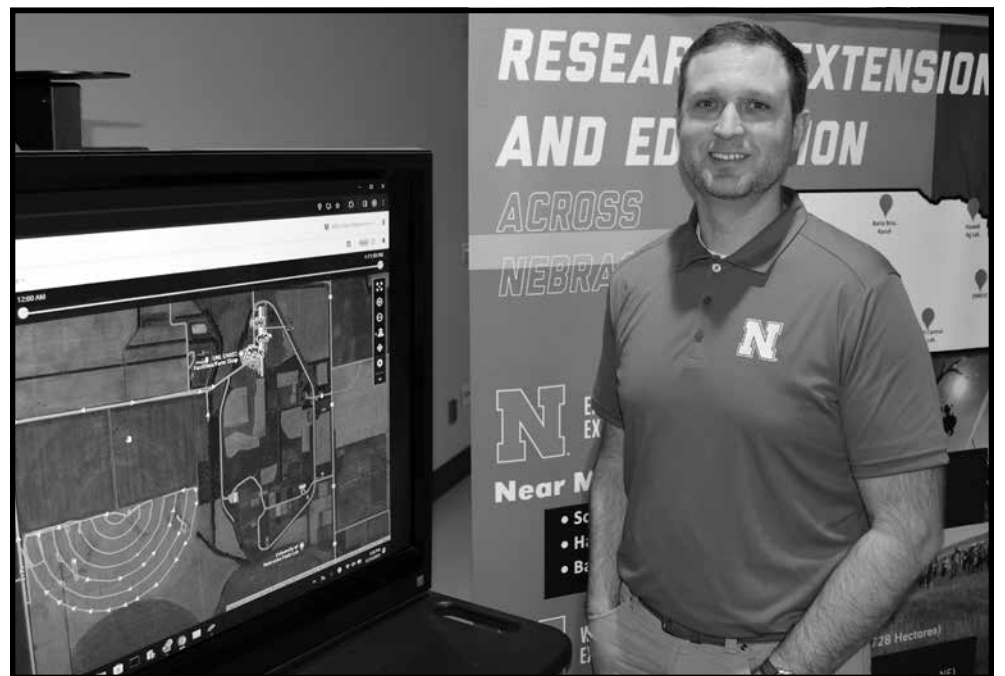
phone calls to coordinate with colleagues.

But through the high-speed wireless system that NFarms will create, a producer can log into a browser within 10 or 15 minutes after the field was sprayed and obtain re-entry information without any human-error risk, Thorson said.

“This is practically real-time data sharing of facts,” Luck said. “Think about all the inefficiencies you’re cutting out.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s plans to build a regional ag research facility at Nebraska Innovation Campus will provide opportunities for ongoing collaboration with NFarms. That federal facility will greatly increase the number of USDA Agricultural Research Service scien-

See NFARMS, page 9



The NFarms initiative at the Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center will be a test bed for new technologies, as well as platforms to help farmers better harness data. The initiative also will develop innovative decision-making tools that producers can use for efficient field management. Nate Thorson, the program’s research manager, brings experience with both agricultural production systems and software design to the platform.

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Nebraska Corn leadership takes part in discussions during Commodity Classic

Nebraska farmers were well represented at Commodity Classic in Houston, Texas the week of Feb. 26. Corn farmers from across Nebraska served as delegates for the Corn Congress sessions during the event from both the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) and Nebraska Corn Growers Association (NeCGA). Nationwide there were 126 delegates representing the corn industry. Nebraska is also represented on the National Corn Board by two Nebraskans.

Commodity Classic and Corn Congress allows corn-producing states to meet to debate proposed resolutions that may then be accepted into the

National Corn Growers Association's (NCGA) Policy and Position Papers. During the two Corn Congress sessions, topics that passed included a proposal by Nebraska Corn regarding retail central bank digital currency, supported pathways that provide monetary value for growers supplying lower carbon feedstocks and opposed electric vehicle mandates.

In addition to Corn Congress sessions, Nebraska corn farmers interviewed with state and national media on topics including policy and planting predictions. Learning sessions were also available for attendees and Commodity Classic attendees heard from USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack,

Under Secretary, Robert Bonnie and EPA Administrator Michael Regan.

"Commodity Classic is one time per year that farmers from across the nation are all together to meet to discuss potential resolution changes and important issues for the betterment of the industry," said Jay Reiners, chairman of NCB.

"This year, Brandon Hunnicutt, a farmer from Giltner and vice chair of NCB who served as the Commodity Classic co-chair, a position which has required years of hard work for a seamless event. We thank him for his passion and energy to make this event a success."

The 2024 Commodity Classic was

a record-breaking year with 11,537 attendees, 4,609 farmer attendees, 436 companies and 3,321 exhibitor booths.

"Nebraska Corn continues to be a leader in the industry, with the goal of ensuring the future has a reliable and distinct path for success," said Chris Grams, NeCGA president. "This week, we connected with agribusinesses regarding some of the newest technology and innovation, held meetings with state and national partners on key issues and ensured farmer voices were heard federally on key issues that may arise in 2024."

The 2025 Commodity Classic will be held in Denver, Colorado from March 2 - 4, 2025.

NFarms

(continued from page 8)

tists in Nebraska, and they will be focusing on precision ag technologies. The Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center can provide a major venue for their field research.

ARS scientists "will want somewhere to work on those topics, and ENREEC can be the prime real estate for them," Luck said. "That's a huge opportunity for us."

Such high-level collaboration

between the university and USDA offers the possibility that Lincoln could ultimately become the nation's ag data hub.

To communicate its findings as a research proving ground, NFarms can draw on its partnerships with the university's On-Farm Research Network and Nebraska Extension, plus its work with commodity associations and private-sector companies. An external advisory board will advise NFarms on producers' real-world needs and serve as a conduit for sharing information

about NFarms' work.

A key aim for NFarms is ag-focused software development, with the ultimate goal of data standardization and efficient cloud-based data storage. Thorson brings valuable expertise in that regard, given his knowledge of agricultural production and software design — a rare combination.

At present, each ag equipment manufacturer uses its own software format. As a result, a producer's field data is stored in disjointed, disconnected fashion.

Over time, NFarms' software work

will aim to bridge that divide, achieving much-needed standardization and opening important new opportunities for managing and analyzing field data.

"We've got the expertise to understand the different techniques that can be applied to create innovative solutions" on ag data standardization and management, Luck said. "That's where our strength is. The impact of that is going to be pretty important as more and more equipment becomes semi-autonomous or autonomous, and you start to look at how much data can come from a field."



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2024 will break ground on an NFarms facility that will house a variety of precision ag technologies. Construction is expected to be complete by late summer.

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Husker faculty, NASA pursue partnerships on Midwest climate resilience

By Geitner Simmons

A Husker conference co-sponsored with NASA has kickstarted the effort to create multi-institution partnerships to help the Midwest address climate-related concerns such as drought, extreme wind events and floods.

Scientists from multiple states and NASA met at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for the Harnessing the Heartland conference Feb. 26-28 to hear from a range of Midwest stakeholders about their climate-related concerns. Attendees then brainstormed

ways that universities, NASA and the private sector can work together to promote climate sustainability in the region.

Conferees followed up with sessions at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to develop ideas to address climate-related environmental health needs.

The initiative aims to “bring together the best and brightest from across all sectors to help gather around the topic of climate resilience research, to produce actionable information and inform decision-making at all

levels,” said Robert Swap, associate division director for mission planning for NASA’s Earth Science Division. “Improving people’s livelihoods and the understanding of the weather” is another key focus.

“It’s incredibly important to work across the region on areas that are of critical importance,” said Jeanette Thurston, executive director of the North Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experimental Station Directors. “By working across institutions, this effort can leverage their different expertise and resources to produce products and solutions to the problems we’re facing in the heartland due to climate change.”

The initiative isn’t a top-down approach, Swap said, but instead develops its strategies from input from Midwest residents, communities and institutions.

Eric Hunt, a Nebraska Extension educator focusing on agricultural meteorology and climate resilience, was co-originator of the conference with Swap. Presentations and networking at the conference created encouraging possibilities for innovative partnerships, Hunt said, as conferees learned about each other’s climate research and data collection projects.

Larkin Powell, head of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s School of Natural Resources, also pointed to the collaborative opportunities.

“There is an increasingly keen need to make better decisions to manage soil, water and biodiversity resources in our working landscapes in the face of climate shifts and extreme weather events,” he said. “The potential to collaboratively harness the diversity of amazing platforms for data collection from ground-based, drone-based, aircraft-based and satellite-based systems is driving the conversations for this project.”

The School of Natural Resources was one of the institutional sponsors for the conference, along with the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute and

NASA.

Craig Allen, director of the university’s Center for Resilience in Agricultural Working Landscapes, spoke on a conference panel that discussed collaborative possibilities to integrate data collection and bolster climate modeling.

The Nebraska Mesonet network of weather-data stations has promising opportunities to partner with NASA on data validation and climate modeling, said Ruben Behnke, a Husker climatologist and manager of the Mesonet.

“When NASA satellites are measuring temperature or how much water vapor is in the air, or wind speed, we can validate that data with our stations,” he said.

The initiative should include attention to climate-related concerns for vulnerable communities, said Husker climatologist Michael Hayes.

“That’s where I’m really interested in making those connections and trying to get access to some of these communities and how they might use all this data,” he said.

Hayes is among the Husker faculty participating in a federally funded Midwest collaboration to promote climate resilience through outreach to native tribes and women owning farmland.

The university shows foresight in supporting climate science resilience listening sessions and stakeholder engagement, Swap said. The university’s Office of Research and Economic Development is providing an \$80,000 planning grant, for example, that a multi-disciplinary faculty group will use to develop the Great Plains Community Climate Resilience Institute.

Although NASA is best known for its space missions, the agency’s Earth Science Division pursues a wide range of major projects, said Hunt, who has partnered with NASA on projects during his climatology career. Nebraska “has a very strong history of working with earth scientists at NASA,” he said.



Robert Swap, an official with NASA's Earth Science Division, addresses the Harnessing the Heartland conference. The new regional initiative will develop collaborative strategies drawing on input from Midwest residents, communities and institutions.

University leaders thank federal delegation for USDA ag research facility investment

By Melissa Lee,
University of Nebraska System

University of Nebraska Interim President Chris Kabourek was joined March 11 by NU leaders in issuing statements on the bipartisan federal spending bill approved by the House and Senate and signed by the President.

The budget package includes \$25 million for construction of a USDA Agricultural Research Service facility located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Innovation Campus, part of a broad vision at the university to advance agricultural research and development for the future.

The federal funding was championed by Sen. Deb Fischer in the Senate and Rep. Mike Flood in the House. All members of Nebraska's federal delegation have supported the facility being located in Nebraska.

"This is a remarkable investment that will further Nebraska's status as a world leader in agriculture," Kabourek said. "Sen. Fischer has been a true champion and partner in this effort from the start, and all of us at the University of Nebraska are grateful for her leadership. Nor would this be possible without the leadership and advocacy of Congressman Flood. We're eager to continue working closely with our federal delegation to make the USDA ARS facility a reality and are excited to break ground this spring.

"Agriculture has always been, and will always be, foundational to the University of Nebraska's work. I could not be more pleased that all of Team Nebraska — from our Board of Regents, to our federal partners, the Governor and Legislature, donors, farmers and ranchers across the state, and our incredible faculty, staff and students — is working together to keep us on the forefront in meeting the needs of our state and feeding the world for generations to come."

UNL Chancellor Rodney Bennett said: "UNL is so grateful for the leadership of Sen. Fischer and Congressman Flood, pushing us one step closer to hosting the ARS National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture, the only federal center in the United States focused on climate-smart, sustainable, digital and precision agriculture. The research conducted at the center will benefit Nebraskans and many, many others across the country."

Mike Boehm, NU vice president and

Harlan Vice Chancellor for UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, said: "This project is an amazing example of Nebraskans working together to strengthen and grow the heart and soul of our state — agriculture. The USDA could have placed this National Center anywhere in the United States, but they chose Nebraska, where we are driving innovation in regenerative, resilient and precision agriculture."

The \$160 million National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture envisioned at Innovation Campus will be home to world-leading research and development in ag tech, precision agriculture, and other areas crucial to the future of agricultural innovation.

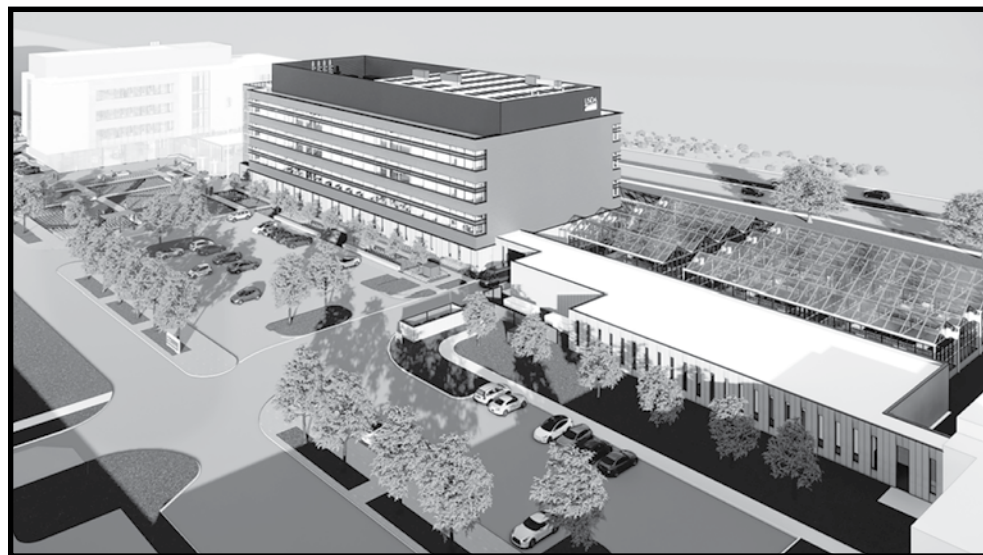
It is expected to house four USDA ARS research units, including two new teams focused on precision production and water, climate and resilience — growing the number of high-wage, high-skill and high-demand jobs in Nebraska's most important industry.

A companion to the USDA ARS facility, the Ag Tech Incubator and

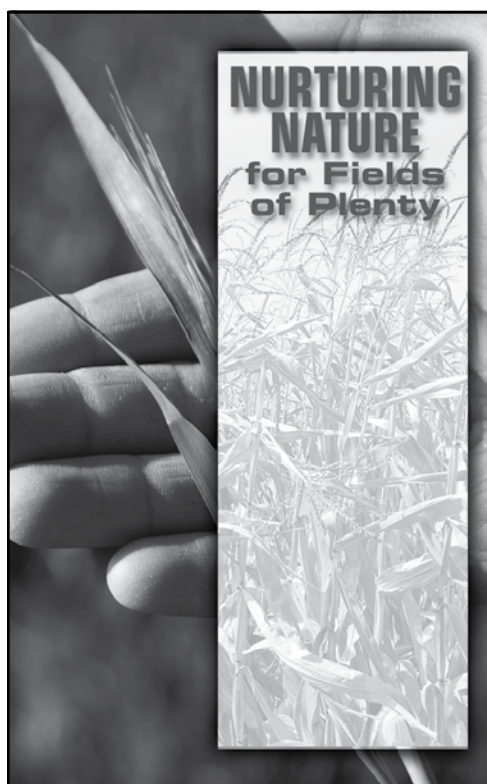
Accelerator, will serve as a business incubator and accelerator and ensure that the research and discovery taking place at the national center moves quickly from discovery to real-world solutions for farmers, ranchers and food manufacturers.

The Legislature and Governor in

2022 approved \$25 million in state funding for that facility, contingent upon the university raising \$25 million in private funding. Kabourek said fundraising is moving forward in earnest and is one of the key priorities of the ongoing Only in Nebraska campaign.



Aerial rendering of the \$160 million USDA laboratory building and greenhouse facility that will be built at Nebraska Innovation Campus.



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Soil Health Gap project setting up baselines and schools for ag producers

By Chabella Guzman

Agriculturists, from growers to live-stock producers, rely heavily on the soil and its health to make their oper-

ations thrive. In a collaborative effort, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) is supporting Nebraska Extension, specifi-

cally Bijesh Maharjan, soil nutrient and management specialist's Soil Health Gap project and Soil Health School outreach.

"We are creating an interactive map for the state (Nebraska), where any grower can put in coordinates of cropland, and the map will show them where they belong in terms of agro-ecological zone," Maharjan said. The map will be based on benchmarks Maharjan and his team created by gathering data from native lands with no cultivation. So, producers will be able to compare their land with native land. In managed land, the sod has been cultivated, losing topsoil and carbon over time, resulting in a lower health score than undisturbed land.

"In obtaining baselines, the idea is to know where the ceiling is and how far can we go," he said. "And looking at native land and other variables like climate and time." In Scotts Bluff County, they found native land with four percent organic matter, which is a staggering amount, as most decent cropland has two percent organic matter.

Native land has a natural equilibrium. By giving farmers benchmark data, they can determine the gap in soil health in their lands compared to native land and plan practices to manage and reduce that soil health gap. The project aims to cover two

extensive land mass areas, one each in the state's east and west, with support from NRCS. Maharjan and his group use the NRCS land classification system, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA), to identify the native land and get data for the map. Over time, the entire state will have reference data a grower can use.

Another aspect of the program has been the Nebraska Soil Health School. "We have organically stepped into the outreach portion of soil health activities with growers, feedlots, and other agriculture outfits," Maharjan said.

The Soil Health School will hit western Nebraska this year with classes addressing healthy soils from different angles, like dryland, irrigated, rangeland, integration, and economics. This year, classes will be held in Crawford, Sidney, and North Platte.

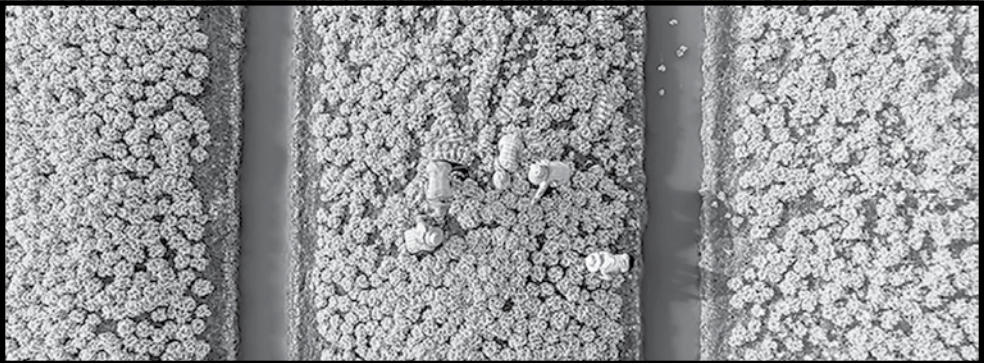
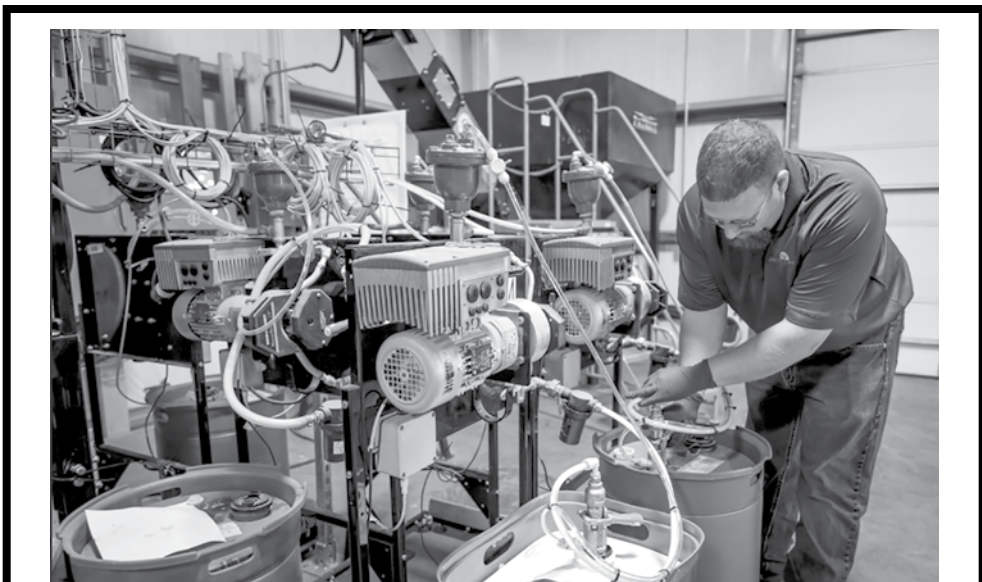
In February, USDA NRCS and the University of Nebraska had a joint meeting to foster and expand collaboration, and out of many collaborators working on projects, NRCS invited Maharjan to present on his Soil Health efforts.

Assisting Maharjan with the Soil Health Gap project is Saurav Das, research assistant professor in soil health & biogeochemistry, and with the Soil Health School Nicole Heldt, research project coordinator.



Photo by Nicole Heldt

Bijesh Maharjan, right, Nebraska Extension soil nutrient and management specialist, speaks to an attendee at the second Soil Health School at the West Central Research Extension and Education Center in North Platte.

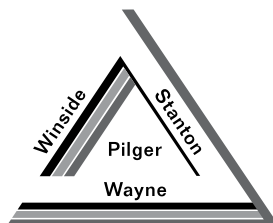


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Climate Center's online tool strengthens understanding of varying wind trends

By Geitner Simmons,
ANR Media

Nebraskans know wind. The Plains region is known for the fierce spirit of its winds, from ceaseless high-plains howlers to rampaging tornadoes to dangerous snow-blown whiteouts.

Now, a new wind climatology tool available online from the High Plains Regional Climate Center provides detailed wind data for any location in Nebraska, as well as the center's six-state region. The center, affiliated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is operated by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Natural Resources.

The web application is the latest addition to the center's wide-ranging set of online climate-data services and enables users to access monthly wind data from 1985 through 2022. The resulting information — monthly wind direction and wind gust hours depicted graphically, plus the location's number of low- or high-wind months for each year — has practical value for firefighting, agriculture and the energy sector.

The wind data can help firefighters during fire season when they want to know which direction the wind most commonly blows over certain summer months, said Jamie Lahowetz, who manages the center's Automated Weather Data Network, which collects and processes climate data across the six-state region.

Using the wind-data tool, firefighters "can prepare themselves and keep a watchful eye on which direction they should be looking for when there's a fire."

Similarly, wind data is important for managing pesticide application and installing wind turbines at the most wind-productive sites.

Long-term analysis shows that a

location's wind patterns do not necessarily remain constant over time — hence the importance of the center's new online tool.

"It's a large swath of data over many decades, which lets us see how that wind actually changes over time," Lahowetz said, "and then you can better understand what to expect."

Lincoln provides an example, he said, as its number of low-wind months almost doubled during 2015-20 compared with the 1990s and early 2000s. "That tells us that the wind slowed down over that period," he said, "and that we didn't have as many of these really screaming wind days."

Lahowetz's fascination with weather began during his childhood in Grand Island, when he developed a keen interest in the whys and hows of lightning.

During his undergraduate and graduate studies in meteorology at Nebraska, he had extensive experience studying extreme wind conditions. In collaboration with Adam Houston, professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Lahowetz worked in the field with drones and related technologies to anticipate and monitor thunderstorms and tornadic activity.

Through that work, he gained expertise in developing weather-focused software. "That's where I got into developing systems for climate use," he said, "and that kind of led me to the (High Plains) center," whose work focuses on six states: Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota and Kansas.

"It's interesting to see how the wind evolves as it goes across the state," Lahowetz said. "Nebraska is a place where you have wide-open areas, and then you have wind-swept Sandhills and also the metro areas toward the Missouri River."

The climate center's wind-data tools explain that "not everywhere in the state has the same speed of wind and the same direction of wind. This even changes over seasons. In Nebraska, we tend to have the highest winds in wintertime."

In coming years, the wind-data tool will help Nebraskans detect any significant changes in wind-speed trends for specific locations.

"When I've thought about how the wind moves," Lahowetz said, "it's like a sea, like an ocean above us, and these things affect it and push it around. You get swirls and whirlpools — it's kind of chaotic. And the closer you get down to Earth, the more chaotic it gets, with all the stuff it interacts with."

The center will update the wind-data tool over time, with the long-term goal of covering seasons, multiple years and multiple months to enable comparisons.

"(The wind tool) will get better and better, and we'll start to understand the evolution of wind over the whole United States over 30, 40, 50 years, as it goes on," Lahowetz said. "That will help us understand how our climate

is changing and how we can change the things we do that are important to wind."



Jamie Lahowetz manages the High Plains Regional Climate Center's Automated Weather Data Network, which collects and processes a range of climate data across a six-state region. The center, affiliated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is operated by the School of Natural Resources at Nebraska.

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"There Is A Difference"

Engaging agriculture: Ideas for estate and transition planning: Monetary compensation

By Jessica Groskopf,
Nebraska Extension Agricultural Economist

For many farm and ranch families, bringing children or grandchildren into the operation is the ultimate goal. Successfully bringing additional family members into the operation may require some creativity, as all parties need to maintain a viable standard of living.

This series of articles will highlight ideas and tactics for bringing another family member into the operation.

One tactic is to provide new family members with monetary compensation, such as an hourly wage or salary. The total compensation should be comparable to the market value of wages to hire a non-family member to do the same work.

Here are things to consider when employing this strategy.

- Start anytime – This strategy can begin early in life. Children under 18 can earn monetary compensation from the farm or ranch. This can give family members a sense of responsibility and allow them to learn how to manage

money at an early age. Furthermore, this can jump-start their savings for education, retirement, or business assets. Work with a financial advisor to explore tax-advantaged ways to save and invest on a child's behalf such as Roth IRAs or 529 Accounts.

- It's tax-deductible – Wages or salaries paid to family members may be tax deductible. The downside is that it may require additional paperwork. Work with your accountant to make sure you have the correct documentation and reporting.

- Financial Freedom – Providing monetary compensation can provide financial autonomy. A competitive compensation package shows that you value their contributions to the business. Additionally, being able to make their own spending and investment decisions can be empowering for them.

- Setting Expectations – One of the biggest challenges for farm and ranch families is setting expectations for work. Different generations often have different views on this matter. When setting a monetary compensation rate, also consider writing position descriptions that clearly define working hours and responsibilities

- Maintain control – By monetarily

compensating family members, ownership of the entity and capital assets are not being transferred. In the early stages of the transition process, paying wages or a salary may be a way to test the waters and see if working together in the operation is feasible. If it is not, the owner still maintains control of the capital assets. The family member also now has cash to start their own operation or choose a new career path.

Not all compensation has to come from an hourly wage or salary. Often, owners will compensate family members in various forms, such as housing, vehicles, insurance, etc. Non-monetary compensation should be valued and factored into the total compensation package. The total compensation package should allow both owners and other family members to maintain a viable standard of living. The monetary and non-monetary compensation package should be discussed and in writing before someone becomes involved in the operation.

One strategy to help transition someone onto your farm or ranch operation is providing monetary compensation. Look for future articles outlining other strategies on the Center for Ag Profitability website at cap.unl.edu.



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Understanding National Ag Day's History

National Ag Day was established in 1973 by the Agriculture Council of America (ACA). The ACA is a non-profit organization comprised of leaders in the agricultural, food, and fiber communities. They are dedicated to increasing public awareness about agriculture's vital role in providing a robust and sustainable food supply, creating job opportunities, and contributing to our nation's overall economic stability. National Ag Day is celebrated every year in March.

The Importance of National Ag Day

The importance of National Ag Day

cannot be overstated. In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to take for granted the enormous impact agriculture has on our daily lives. From the food, we eat to the clothes we wear and the fuel that powers our vehicles, agriculture, and farming are the cornerstones of modern society. National Ag Day shines a light on the essential work of the nearly two million American farms that fuel our way of life.

One of the core objectives of National Ag Day is to educate the younger generation about the significance of

See HISTORY, page 15

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History

(continued from page 14)

agriculture. For many young people growing up in urban environments, the connection between the food on their plate and the hard work put in by farmers may not always be apparent. National Ag Day bridges this gap by providing resources and educational materials to schools, engaging students, and informing them about the opportunities available in the agriculture industry.

With the average age of American farmers nearing 60, it is critical to inspire the next generation to take up the mantle and continue to grow our nation's food supply.

Farmers across the country are employing innovative and resource-conserving techniques to meet the rising demand for food while preserving the environment for future generations.

National Ag Day pays homage to these forward-thinking farmers and encourages dialogue about sustainable practices that will strengthen both the agricultural sector and the environment.

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Nebraska Corn leaders present at USGC's Corn Harvest Quality Report event

The Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) had two board members represent Nebraska during the U.S. Grains Council's (USGC's) Corn Harvest Quality Report events, with seminars recently taking place in Taiwan, Japan and South Korea for buyers in those markets.

Based on corn samples taken from 12 of the top corn-producing and

exporting states, including Nebraska, this year's report highlighted how the 2023 U.S. corn crop was the largest on record with the lowest percentage of broken corn and foreign material (BCFM) to date.

Following the release of the yearly report, USGC offices around the world gather buyers to provide clear expectations regarding the quality of corn for

this marketing year.

During these events, crop quality information is accompanied by updates on U.S. corn grading and handling, which provides importers and end-users with a better understanding of how U.S. corn is moved and controlled through export channels.

Jay Reiners, chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board and farmer from Juanita attended the Taiwan and Japan Corn Harvest Quality Report Jan. 10-12 where he presented on his operation and outlook for 2024.

"The Corn Harvest Quality Report trade mission provides an opportunity to enhance relationships and transparency," said Reiners. "I found value in conversations after the presentations because buyers and I always relate to one specific objective, providing the best quality product to consumers. When the corn leaves Juanita and arrives to them, my desire is it arrives in the same way it left the farm, top quality."

Later in the month, Brandon Hunnicutt, vice chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board and farmer from Giltner, presented in Korea regarding the Corn Harvest Quality Report.

"Although some may see these trade missions and wonder how an impact can be made in a limited amount of time off the farm, I will continue to emphasize how no one can or will tell our story better than us," said Hunnicutt. "When buyers see our willingness to step into another region



Jay Reiners, chairman for the Nebraska Corn Board, presented in Japan and Taiwan the Corn Harvest Quality Report in January.

where corn is purchased, it demonstrates our desire for connections and proof for responsibility of the corn we grow."

The U.S. Grains Council aligns with the Nebraska Corn Board's strategic mission of increasing the value and sustainability of Nebraska corn through promotion, market development and research.

Currently, there is a \$21 return on trade for every \$1 invested with the U.S. Grains Council. These trade mission opportunities allow for the extension of developing and maintaining relationships and markets.

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