

CONNECT

EDGE HELPS ENTREPRENEURS EXPLORE COSTS, CONSIDERATIONS OF A NEW OR EXPANDING BUSINESS

Entrepreneurs thinking of starting or expanding a business can use an edge.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension supplies one.

The EDGE – Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs – program offers skill-based training for people who want to start or expand a business, or improve their business skills.

It helps potential entrepreneurs realize what needs to happen before they spend a penny, and that's a wise investment, said Marilyn Schlake, EDGE coordinator.

Hyannis businessman Cliff Dailey, owner of Cow Country Sales and Service, a tire and trailer business in Nebraska's Sandhills, agrees.

"EDGE is tremendous in networking, and in getting our numbers to where we can analyze them better and easier, rather than through trial and error," Dailey said. "It really opened our eyes to a lot of things.

We urge any small business to take (the EDGE course), even if they've been established for a while."

The 40-hour, 11-week EDGE course is taught by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. Participants learn about legal structures, market strategies, financial statements, bookkeeping, cash flow projections, financing and managing growth.

Schlake said EDGE participants have developed successful bed and breakfasts, direct beef sales, medical services, restaurants, auto and muffler repair shops, high technology services, web development and massage therapy services, to name a few.

"There's a lot of business ideas people have," Schlake said. Getting those ideas – and the figures to make them happen – down on paper is important.

"Let's test it with paper and pencil and make a wise decision from there," Schlake said. "Not everyone who has a business idea gets it off the ground – nor should they."

Dailey started his Cow Country Sales and Service in fall 1997 and participated in EDGE the following spring. He said the program gave him a whole new outlook on managing growth and was well worth the homework and weekly 110-mile drive to North Platte.

In total, 890 existing and potential business owners have participated in the EDGE program since 1993, Schlake said, most in rural communities. Of these, approximately 50 percent have started or



Marilyn Schlake, EDGE program coordinator, shows an instructor's manual used to help entrepreneurs who seek to make sound business decisions before investing, and to sharpen their business skills. Since 1993, 890 people have participated in this NU Cooperative Extension program.

expanded their business operations, including hiring more than 450 new employees.

EDGE continues in 2001, with an added emphasis on value-added agricultural ideas. Extension works with community sponsors and course instructors to provide the EDGE program.

Schlake can be contacted at (402)472-4138.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- pg. 3 Turning ideas into reality
- pg. 4 Grazing management education
- pg. 6 Food safety workshop
- pg. 8 Help for beginning farmers and ranchers

Dean's comments

Welcome to the first issue of *University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Connect* – *Connect* for short. This newsletter contains a variety of stories illustrating the broad and diverse work NU Cooperative Extension does in Nebraska.

We are proud of this knowledge-based work. We believe it matters – helping prevent food-borne illness, providing producers with alternatives to help increase profitability, aiding communities in meeting their needs – the list goes on. You'll find stories on these and other topics in this issue. They're only examples of what we do in extension's priority areas of agricultural profitability and sustainability; children, youth and families; food safety and quality; health and wellness; and strengthening Nebraska communities.

We've chosen the newsletter name *Connect* because that's what NU Cooperative Extension does. We connect the resources of the university with the state. We connect the state with the university. We connect people seeking answers to community concerns with each other and resources that can help them.

In extension we provide research-based education and information people can use to meet the challenges and opportunities of their lives. We teach in our areas of expertise, we facilitate, we collaborate. We bring in cooperating experts to help those we work with, and we teach other information and educa-

tion providers who then extend the education they receive to others.

Like the entire NU Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, of which extension is a part, we are partners with Nebraska.

We like to say in extension that we are part of, and partners with, our communities. Sometimes we're woven into the fabric of those communities and the state so well, and our work is such a part of daily life, that people may not always be aware extension is involved – they're just glad someone

is there with what they need.

Cooperative Extension of the 21st century is not the Cooperative Extension your parents or grandparents knew. Cooperative Extension continually evolves to meet the ever-changing issues important to those with whom we work. Our program content changes as research increases the knowledge base extension draws on. While we maintain close ties with our traditional audiences to meet their needs, we also expand our programming to meet the needs of new audiences. This is in the best land-grant tradition of taking the resources of the university to the state.

I hope you'll enjoy reading about our work in these newsletter pages. We're busy putting knowledge to work – for you.

Elbert Dickey
Interim Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension



Elbert Dickey

CONNECT

March 2001

Volume 1, Number 1

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Connect is published three times a year by the Communications and Information Technology unit at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln under the auspices of the Dean of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Written material may be reprinted, provided no endorsement of a commercial product is stated or implied. Please credit *University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Connect*. To simplify technical terminology, trade names sometimes may be used. No endorsement of products is intended nor is criticism implied of products not mentioned.

There is no charge for this newsletter. Each issue describes a few of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's ongoing, widely diverse programs. The newsletter is an informal report to interested taxpayers. Please send comments, questions and subscription requests to: Editor, *NU Cooperative Extension Connect*, 108 Agricultural Communications Building, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918.

Upon request, this publication can be made available in an alternative format for people with disabilities. For assistance call (402) 472-3031.

Interim Chancellor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Harvey Perlman

Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
John Owens

Interim Dean and Director, NU Cooperative Extension
Elbert Dickey

Editors
Cheryl Alberts
Judy Nelson

Writer
Cheryl Alberts

Designer
Renee Lanik

Photographers
Brett Hampton
Ron Cleveland
Kayla Hinrichs
Bob Scriven

Partners with Nebraska

Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.



University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Many work together to turn ideas into web site reality

One good idea often builds on another.

One hundred and forty Seward County businesses have a place in the international business arena and a portal to e-commerce because of strong collaboration and good ideas with roots in University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Master Navigator program.

Dennis Kahl, NU extension educator in Seward County, is one of several Master Navigator instructors statewide. The six-week Internet program builds on local capabilities in rural Nebraska communities.

Master Navigator participants agree in advance to teach others technology skills or to engage in Internet-related activities, such as building web pages to benefit their communities.

The class helps people grasp the technology, Kahl said. Participants explore what's available, and how sites can be used to promote, trade and do business.

"They have a clearer picture of how

that technology might eventually be used in their place of work," Kahl said. "These people all realize that whether they like the technology or not, it's here and if they don't use it they will lose customers."

Transactions, databases, suppliers and more are available online. Punching a button and instantly sending an order has replaced phone calls for many businesses, Kahl said.

As a Master Navigator instructor, Kahl had long believed there must be ways to involve local students to help local businesses. When Master Navigator participants and others visited in a fall 1998 Connect Seward Technology meeting, ideas began clicking.

One hundred hours later, Seward High School business and computing seniors had interviewed the county's business people and posted business information and photos to the World Wide Web. The site is <http://connectseward.org/>.

The process benefited students



Brett Hampton

(From left) Don Hain, Craig Williams, Dennis Kahl and Pat Coldiron are among the collaborators who helped launch or maintain a Seward community website.

because they learned interview and technology skills, said Craig Williams, Seward Public Schools' technology coordinator.

"We teach web publishing anyway, but this gave us a direct link back to the communications," Williams said. "The communications part was pretty important."

The project also benefited Seward businesses, said Pat Coldiron, Chamber of Commerce director and former Master Navigator participant.

Project benefits are "huge," Coldiron said. "I know of direct contact from people from other states because of our location on the web."

Master Navigator "gave us the impetus and courage" to move forward, said Coldiron, whose office eventually will maintain the site currently maintained by former Master Navigator participant Don Hain of Jones National Bank, Seward.

Since 1999 approximately 500 people have taken the Nebraska Master Navigator course. One 78-year-old who before hadn't touched a computer went on to teach web stock marketing, Kahl said.

Participants can follow Master Navigator with Electronic Main Street, which teaches more specifics on marketing and promoting electronic businesses. Both programs are scheduled statewide in spring 2001.

Kahl can be contacted at (402) 643-2981.

Nutrition education part of Omaha farmers market

Peppers, onions, collard and mustard greens are among the colorful vegetables at a new north Omaha farmers market.

Typically the neighborhood's African American, Latino and Native American residents haven't had easy access or transportation to acquire quality, fresh-grown produce, said Erika Tonsfeldt, University of Nebraska extension assistant in Douglas/Sarpy counties.

The market, begun in summer 2000 with aid from a USDA grant, helps change that.

Surveys show on average area residents eat one fresh fruit or vegetable per day, Tonsfeldt said, compared to the five recommended by the American Cancer Society.

The market brings fresh fruit and vegetable vendors, nutrition education,

cultural food samples and crafts to the neighborhood. Extension is one of the market's collaborators, said Tonsfeldt, who provides nutrition information and samples of healthy, flavorful ways to prepare favorite cultural foods.

Tonsfeldt said resident taste tests gave a thumb's up to her greens prepared with one pat of butter and seasonings. Typically greens are prepared with high-cholesterol fatback and ham hocks.

Tonsfeldt said the market received nothing but positive publicity, and also drew people from outside north Omaha.

Six markets, each attended by about 200 people, were held last year. A dozen markets with six to eight vendors are scheduled for 2001 and 2002.

Tonsfeldt can be contacted at (402) 444-6668.

Strong family traits listed on 240,000 grocery bags

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's message about strong families is on the bag—or, more correctly, 240,000 grocery bags printed by Affiliated Foods.

Last fall Affiliated Foods Co-op Inc. of Norfolk, working with Cooperative Extension, printed grocery sacks encouraging families to eat together and listing six traits of strong families. The idea came from Debra Schroeder, NU extension educator in Cuming County, and several of her regional colleagues.

It was one of a number of ideas implemented across Nebraska to increase awareness of the importance of strong families. A yearlong strong families emphasis kicked off during NU for Families month in November, when extension offices in 34 Nebraska counties coordinated activities that ranged from family activity nights to parent education. Theme of the month was "Eat with Your Family."

Schroeder said strong, healthy families share and communicate, and mealtime is a good time for that. She noted there's a natural tie between the grocery store and families eating together.

"As Mom goes to the grocery store at 5 p.m., it's a subtle reminder of sitting down with the family for that meal. For as long as the sack lasts, there's this message, reminding families of the six traits," she said.

Six strong family traits NU research identifies show strong families are appreciative and affectionate, committed, communicate positively, enjoy time together, experience spiritual well-being, and successfully manage stress and crisis.

The grocery sacks, with Affiliated Foods and NU Cooperative Extension identification and the strong families message, were distributed in 10 Midwest-ern states.

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

Grazing management education provides participants with

Jim Choquette of Upland understands his cows more as time goes on. The better he understands them, the more content they seem. Contented cows increase profit chances because they undergo less stress and show better weight gains.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's grazing management education made a difference for him, Choquette said, as it has for other family farm-sized Nebraska agricultural producers.

Grazing workshops, retreats, tours, on-farm visits and periodic newsletters provide producers a forum to explore different ways to profitability, said Bob Scriven, NU extension educator in Buffalo County and a workshop coordinator.

Scriven sees that exploration as a challenge—and necessity—because of today's high input costs and low commodity prices.

"If producers want to maintain a family farm and that quality of life, then they have to find a way to make it profitable," said Scriven, who knows even considering change can be difficult for people. "If something isn't working or isn't profitable, then doing more of the

same or doing it harder won't help."

Scriven and Terry Gompert, NU extension educator in Knox County, challenge grazing management participants to find what they can do better and less expensively than what is commonly done. They teach practical principles of a forage-based livestock grazing system and provide a positive environment for philosophical questions that dare participants to think in new ways.

"You take advantage of the other things people aren't doing and realize it's OK to do that... and move ahead," Gompert said. Not everyone should incorporate every suggestion, he added, but even a few changes can make a difference.

Considering grass as a primary income generator is one way to think differently, especially when marketed through livestock. With proper management, grass can create significant income, Gompert said.

Take Choquette. Two years ago, he was a row-crop producer.

"I never felt I had the knowledge or tools to make it just with the cattle,"

Choquette said. "Now I feel I have the tools to be a grass farmer. Extension people have changed my life."

Knowledge gained from extension helps Choquette manage the extra effort required to run 62 yearlings on



Bob Scriven

After participating in NU Cooperative Extension's grazing management education, Jim Choquette of Upland has been able to focus on his beef cow herd over row-crop farming. Extension's grazing programs help producers explore different ways to profitability, such as rotational and irrigated grazing.