

# Connections

## Welcome to University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Connections

*Connections* is one way we share a sampling of the breadth, depth and variety of ways extension benefits Nebraskans. *Connections* is a companion piece to *Connect*, our newsletter that updates you on extension programs three times a year.

In these four pages we cannot begin to capture all that extension does across the state, but we hope you'll recognize a few programs and learn about some new ones.

Extension helps people put knowledge to work. We provide research-based information people can use to make decisions affecting their lives, businesses, communities and families. Our priority areas address critical economic, social and environmental issues Nebraskans face, including agricultural profitability and sustainability; children, youth and families; community and leadership development; food safety, health and wellness; and natural resources and environment.

To learn more about NU Cooperative Extension and what we offer, please visit <http://extension.unl.edu> or call (402) 472-2966. Or, call or stop by your nearest NU Cooperative Extension office.

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

## Extension leads Technologies Across Nebraska

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is leading a Technologies Across Nebraska initiative to create awareness and provide communities with both education and support as those communities make decisions affecting their information technology future.

More than 40 organizations, agencies and educational systems are part of a Technologies Across Nebraska Partnership working to help communities create awareness of, access to and abilities to use the technology in the belief it can help communities be more globally competitive

and enhance businesses' economic viability. Currently eight extension educators work half-time on information technology issues, leading educational programs and teaching Internet-based programs.



*Jim Emal, right, and Terry Bockstadter, NU members of the Technologies Across Nebraska Partnership, in spring 2001 helped install Cooperative Extension's first nationwide two-way, high-speed satellite Internet system at the extension office in Fairbury.*

## 4-H public speaking boosts alumni confidence

Speaking before a group terrifies many people, yet good communications skills are important to succeed in many professions. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's 4-H public speaking and demonstration projects teach lifelong communications skills.

Surveyed alumni of this 4-H program report that skills learned in 4-H public speaking have served them well in their careers. In a survey of 4-H public speaking/demonstration contest alumni in one

extension district, 95 percent said their 4-H experience increased their self-confidence and 94 percent said it enhanced their ability to express themselves. They also said they gained skills that help them better handle pressure, be organized, express ideas, think critically and make decisions.

One former 4-H'er said public speaking is the foundation of everything she does.

## BRIDGES links Seward groups

Youth and families in Seward County are more easily able to find and access programs offered by schools, civic organizations, businesses and government agencies, thanks to BRIDGES Inc., a non-profit grassroots coalition. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Seward County coordinates this effort to provide youth, family and health-related services.

Since its formation in 1997, BRIDGES has introduced 17 programs, such as Juvenile Diversion, and recruited more than 400 volunteers who serve as educators, mentors and advocates for the families and youth who participate in the programs. In four years, this coordinated effort to identify and provide programs addressing key needs generated \$208,000 in grants and \$200,000 of in-kind money, which now fund 75 percent of the programs.

A local school principal said the coordination is paying off: "At last all the schools are working together so now we can use each other's resources to get more for our money and time."

### Did you know?

— University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension serves all 93 Nebraska counties through 83 county offices and five research and extension centers.

— Extension carries forth the land-grant mission of taking resources of the university to about 400,000 urban and rural Nebraska residents annually.

## ServSafe spreads food safety information

Americans eat half of all meals away from home so assuring food safety in restaurants, schools and nursing homes is

a big job. It's also the goal of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's ServSafe program, conducted in cooperation with state agencies and the Nebraska Restaurant Association.



Between 6,000-7,000 restaurant managers have learned safe food handling procedures through the program since 1994. At least 95 percent of ServSafe participants pass a national certification test following training. Each trained manager, in turn, is estimated to teach food safety information to another 15 people, greatly extending extension's efforts.

*Julie Albrecht, NU Cooperative Extension food safety specialist, checks the proper heating temperature of a potful of thickened water, a technique used in ServSafe, the industry standard in food safety training.*

## Parents Forever helps during divorce

Through Parents Forever, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension provides research-based information to help both parents and children when parents divorce.

Parents Forever addresses the grief cycle, knowing what is normal behavior for children, helping parents know what to say to their children and more.

A 10th Judicial District judge, who requires the six-hour workshop for divorcing parents, said most parties are glad they complete the program. One

parent said the course helped her remember to think about the child first, rather than the divorce.

Since its beginning in Nebraska in 1999, Parents Forever has educated 335 adults and impacted more than 700 children. A companion program, extension's Kids Talk About Divorce, teaches children ages 5-18 communication and coping skills, how to recognize and deal with grief and loss, anger management and how to interact with parents on emotional issues.

### 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.

## Practicum ranges from classroom to field

The right combination of livestock, forage and economics has helped create a very effective integrated Ranch Practicum sponsored by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, coordinators say.

Sessions taught by extension educators and specialists run from June to January with two days in a classroom and five days in the field. At home on the range, participants practice solving real-life problems such as calculating stocking rates for pastures, considering the economics of various management practices and developing rations for their livestock based on stage of production.

The first two practicums in 1999 and 2000 attracted 61 participants from Nebraska and other states. Participants from 2000 estimated the knowledge gained is worth almost \$34 per head, which would indicate an average savings of \$35,313 per participating rancher. More than 80 percent of participants surveyed said they expect to improve operational sustainability, thanks to the practicum.

Wrote one participant: "(The practicum) has given me the knowledge and tools that would have taken me years to otherwise learn."

## Farmers and Ranchers College sharpens skills

Farmers and Ranchers College, composed of four workshops, supported by agribusiness and University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, boosted marketing and insurance knowledge for about 400 producers in southeast and south central Nebraska in winter 2001. With the support of agribusiness, presenters addressed local needs and helped producers with the latest tools to make well-balanced decisions based on facts.

More than 75 percent of workshop participants returned surveys describing the effectiveness and usefulness of the

workshops. Of those, more than 30 percent estimated they saved or anticipated saving \$9 per acre based on knowledge gained from the crop workshops. Another 30 percent estimated they gained or anticipated gaining more than \$19 per head from the beef workshops. Participants manage more than 180,000 acres of crops and more than 15,000 head of cattle.

One farm couple said crop insurance revenues, explained by a college presenter, helped them continue farming in 2001. A south central Nebraska banker who supported the college said, "It used to be

hard work and tending to business equaled success but it's not that way anymore."

The college workshops help producers "educate themselves and spot opportunities ... it sharpens them and makes them think out loud," the banker said.



*Gina Hudson of Belvidere, right, works with Terry Hejny, NU Cooperative Extension educator for Fillmore and Thayer counties, and a coordinator for the Farmers and Ranchers College.*

## Master Navigator can help people boost e-commerce

Conducting business over the Internet is a fact of life, some say, if businesses are to remain or become viable in today's entrepreneurial climate. Yet only 28 percent of Nebraska's rural businesses use e-commerce as a tool.

Since 1999, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Master Navigator has taught nearly 600 people the basics of Internet use. Those individuals agreed to pass their knowledge on to others. Participants can follow up with the more in-depth Electronic Main Street, which teaches more specifics on marketing and promoting electronic business.

Both communities and individuals benefit. In Seward County, for example, government, education and business teamed to post all 140 community businesses to the World Wide Web, which has directly resulted in additional business contacts. One 78-year-old who before hadn't touched a computer before the course went on to teach others how to buy stocks and make investments via the Web.

## Center assists food entrepreneurs, firms

The University of Nebraska's Food Processing Center offers technical and marketing/business development assistance to entrepreneurs and established food processing firms that has helped Nebraska's food processing industry grow from 220 food processing businesses in 1983 to nearly 400 today.

Center officials estimate its programs and services add about \$12.5 million of economic value to Nebraska's economy annually. One company manager said the center's expertise helped his company increase sales by \$250,000, reduce operating costs 7 percent, create 12 new jobs and invest \$100,000 in new capital projects.

## Rural businesses have the EDGE

Creating jobs is key to growing and sustaining Nebraska's small communities. A University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension program helps rural and small-town residents start or expand small businesses.

The Nebraska EDGE — Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs — training courses are taught by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. Since EDGE began in 1993, nearly 900 existing and potential Nebraska business owners have participated. About half of them started or expanded their businesses, creating more than 500 new jobs, mostly in rural communities.

One recent EDGE participant said he learned the importance of budgeting and projecting cash flow, which "... kept us from closing our doors." Another said the training gave him a whole new outlook on managing growth.

## Soybean info offered

Nebraska ranks seventh nationally in soybean production. To remain competitive, the state's soybean growers need the latest information on everything from emerging market trends to the latest management options.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension teams with the Nebraska and United Soybean Boards to offer Soybean Management Field Days that provide information to help producers maximize their efficiency. In 2000 and 2001, nearly 1,000 people attended sessions around the state.

Participants surveyed in 2001 said the knowledge they gained at the field days is worth \$1.88 million in total value, based on the participants and acres involved. About 90 percent of those surveyed said they expect to change their soybean field operations after attending the one-day workshops.

"Hopefully, it will enhance my bottom line by putting more beans in the bin, reducing costs and improving marketing," one participant said.

## Fresh produce part of Omaha farmers market

Fresh produce consumption among North Omaha residents has been lower than recommended for a healthy diet, partly because the community lacks easy access to affordable, appealing produce.

To change this, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension teamed with City Sprouts, a non-profit urban garden organization, and other groups to obtain a USDA grant to launch a seasonal farmers market that provides abundant, fresh produce. At the farmers market, extension provided nutrition information, recipes and samples demonstrating how to use fruits and vegetables to create healthy, tasty and culturally familiar foods. Fruit and vegetable sales at the market and market-goers' comments indicate produce consumption increased among participants.

Even a seasonal increase in produce

consumption should help decrease the community's risk of diet-related diseases, said one extension dietitian. Several market-goers said they discovered healthier, lower-fat ways to prepare traditional foods.



*Fresh fruits and vegetables are emphasized at an Omaha farmers market, where NU Cooperative Extension provides nutritional information and recipes.*

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<http://extension.unl.edu>

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