



## View from VanDeWalle

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### **Making One Agronomist at a Time**

Last week, eight Nebraska youth traveled to Iowa to participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Regional Youth Crop Scouting Competition held at Iowa State University's Field Extension Education Location near Boone, IA. These youth scouted six fields for diseases, insects, abiotic/biotic disorders, weed identification and crop growth stage and development. Teams from Iowa and Indiana also competed. Nebraska teams ranked 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectably. Between all three state competitions, 111 youth competed from Nebraska, Iowa and Indiana. Top two teams from each state competed at the regional competition. Congrats to all of the youth who not only networked with agronomic professionals, but also gained the most by improving life skills related to a potential career path.

While this is one program, which impacts a very small percentage of youth, it is very important to start training the next generation of ag leaders to feed our growing population. In fact the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) believes so strongly in the future of agricultural career pathways, they are funding \$3.1 million through a Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program (NNF). This fellowship will aid in supporting the next generation of scientists and innovators who will be key to the future of our food and agricultural systems.

The NNF program is for graduate degree (masters and doctoral) programs and postgraduate training. The [Nebraska Farmer](#) website says it well, "the purpose of this program is to develop intellectual capital to ensure the preeminence of U.S. food and agricultural systems. This funding invests in experiential learning, including international experiences, for individuals who demonstrate their potential to successfully complete graduate degree programs in disciplines relevant to NIFA's mission."

There are eight targeted expertise shortage areas in which applicants should target their projects which include: animal production; plant production; forest resources; agricultural educators and communicators; agricultural management and economics; food science, human nutrition and human sciences; sciences for agricultural biosecurity; veterinary sciences; food and agriculture data analytics and tools; and integrative biosciences for sustainable food and agricultural systems. Applications are due September 22, 2016. For more information go to <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/> and search "national-needs-graduate-and-postgraduate-fellowship-grants".

While this program is for graduate and postgraduate degree programs, it all starts by sparking the interest in youth, one at a time with the goal of "making on agronomist at a time."

For more information on how to engage youth in crops, visit our UNL CropWatch site at <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/cropwatch-youth>.