

Views from VanDeWalle

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Innovative Youth Corn Challenge Contest 2021 Results

To remain relevant in the ever-changing world, agriculture must evolve and find creative solutions for positive economic growth in U.S. agriculture. The USDA's Economic Research Service website says, "It is widely agreed that increased productivity, arising from innovation and changes in technology, is the main contributor to economic growth in U.S. agriculture." A five-year employment study initiated by the USDA expects that in the United States, "employment opportunities will remain strong for new college graduates with an interest and expertise in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources and the environment" between 2020 and 2025.

Since 2012, the Innovative Youth Corn Challenge has engaged 178 youth with in-depth, experiential learning. This partnership between the Nebraska Corn Board and Nebraska Extension has created an awareness of agronomic-related career opportunities and successfully involved youth in rigorous hands-on inquiry-based learning through completion of on-farm research or demonstration plots in corn fields across Nebraska. This year, nine teams signed up with four teams able to glean harvest data from their plots to complete the program. COVID-19 continued to make this a difficult year and created obstacles for some of the teams.

The winning team from 2021 growing season was York County 4-H CSI (Crop Science Investigation) which consisted of Luke Otte, Kate Otte, Marta Reener, Naomi Renner, Bridget Kavan, Conner Uffleman, and Annah Perdue. Their test consisted of a field with both irrigated and dryland plots that compared the use of Xyway fungicide in-furrow to control diseases throughout the season versus no fungicide. Jenny Rees was their project sponsor.

Receiving second place was the Fillmore Central FFA team that included Mackenzie Mumm, Connor Asche, Dakota Nun, Jordan Engle, Blake Nun, Carson Asche, Makin Girmus, Lilly Srajhans, and Brenner McCann-Coen with their irrigated plot located in Fillmore County. They tested the effects of five different nitrogen rates ranging from 0 lbs to acre to 200 lbs per acre to try and find the optimum rate balancing yield vs economics vs environmental concerns. Their project sponsor was Kurt VanDeWalle with assistance from Brian Mumm.

Third place team was the Bloomfield FFA team with Madie Ziegler, Lily Jessen, Logan Doerr, Blake Guenther, Brock Barney, Alex Jessen and Kaydee Alexander as their FFA Advisor. Their dryland test compared strip till with 10-34-0 vs Begin starter fertilizer in-furrow on the planter.

The **Lakeview FFA** team also completed their plot and consisted of Isaac Stromberg & Niels Schmidt with Emilye Yowell as their FFA advisor. Their irrigated test looked at the effect of titanium dioxide nanoparticles on *Xanthomonas vasicola*, commonly known as Bacterial Leaf Streak disease.

Other teams that participated but due to various circumstances were unable to finish their project included Bridgeport FFA Chapter, Boone Central FFA Chapter, Kornhusker Kids 4-H Club from Cuming County and the Country Corn Growers 4-H Club from Otoe County.



As a team, youth worked with an adult mentor throughout the process. Mentors can be extension faculty, ag teachers, or other qualified agronomy professionals.

Other awards handed out during the banquet held on UNL's East Campus included:

- The Extra Mile Award went to both Fillmore Central and Lakeview FFA Chapters.
- The Innovation Award was presented to the Fillmore Central FFA Chapter.

Nebraska Extension will execute this evolving, innovative, and in-depth program in 2022, which will be the eleventh year creating agricultural, science-informed graduates in the agricultural industry.

Prizes for participation in this project include 1st place - \$1,000, 2nd place - \$500, 3rd place - \$250, "Extra Mile" Award \$200, CORN Communications Award \$200 and \$50 for completion of the project. In addition, each team receives a crop scouting kit valued at over \$200, plot sign and the opportunity to engage with UNL agronomic professionals through "ask an agronomist" sessions.

For more information about this program and to register in 2022, go to <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/youth/cornchallenge>. Registration is due March 15th. Contact Brandy VanDeWalle at brandy.vandewalle@unl.edu or (402) 759-3712 for details about this program.