

## Views from VanDeWalle

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### Biggest Grower Youth Competition

Nebraska Extension and the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture have launched a new student gardening competition to take place this summer. [The Biggest Grower](#) competition offers Nebraska high school students the opportunity to learn how to start their own garden and small growing operation. Students will plant, grow, cultivate, harvest and distribute their own fresh specialty crops in a garden space or in containers. Participants will be placed in virtual teams with one team chosen as The Biggest Grower and each team member will be awarded a \$50 Amazon gift card. Additionally, one high school junior or senior will be awarded a College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Department of Agronomy and Horticulture scholarship of \$1,000.

The goal of this competition is to help increase awareness in growing food, improve personal wellness and community involvement, explore opportunities in entrepreneurship and expand the availability of specialty crops in fresh food drought areas. Stacy Adams, an associate professor of practice in agronomy and horticulture and a Nebraska Extension specialist is in charge of the program.

This project can expose Nebraska youth to the fundamentals of plant production and demonstrate career opportunities in agriculture. Funding is provided through the [Nebraska Specialty Crop Block Grant Program](#) as a means to enhance the competitiveness of non-commodity specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, nuts and ornamentals. This competition is beneficial for both rural and urban students; growing specialty crops can expand income potential for farmers as well.

The Biggest Grower competition is free to Nebraska high school students entering the ninth through 12th grade this fall 2020. Nebraska Extension and a university horticulture student, who will be a personal garden mentor, will work with each student virtually on a weekly basis. Participants will be randomly placed into 10, statewide virtual teams of 10 gardeners. These teams will compete over the summer to find out which team is The Biggest Grower.

Students can register at <https://agronomy.unl.edu/the-biggest-grower>.

Each participant will use an existing garden space at their home or they can choose to grow in pots as a container gardener. Competition garden space as a backyard gardener is limited to 80 square feet, maximum. Participants will complete the activities assigned by the garden mentor and will be given a toolkit consisting of a hand spade, weeding tool, seeds and starter plants.

Participants will be asked to participate and complete the following:

- 10 weekly activities.
- develop and cultivate specialty crops in their backyard or container garden.
- record productivity data in the growers' leaderboard.
- record the amount of harvest consumed.
- record the amount distributed.



- participate in virtual The Biggest Grower Day hosted by the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture on June 26 from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln East Campus. High school junior and senior participants, who want to be eligible for the scholarship award, will be asked to write a 350 to 500-word essay on how The Biggest Grower competition affected them and their community, or the use of specialty crops in their future. Students must also enroll in one of four majors within the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture in CASNR at Nebraska.

The competition will begin May 25 and end Aug. 7. After all the data is entered and the essays are reviewed, The Biggest Grower team and the scholarship winner will be announced Sept. 4. Complete application guidelines and more information may be found [online](#).

*Source: IANR News & Stacy Adams, Associate Professor Nebraska Extension/ Department of Agronomy and Horticulture*

### **Cultivate ACCESS Announces New Summer Program**

Cultivate ACCESS is an agricultural mentoring program through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This program encourages students from rural towns to learn more about agricultural jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math (agSTEM). Participating high school students connect with college students and career professionals through online conversations about agSTEM careers. In this 10-week program students learn how to improve their communication, leadership, and teamwork skills.

Cultivate ACCESS participants include students from all over Nebraska. One participant is a student from McCook, NE interested in working for her family's business. Another participant lives on the other side of the state in Omaha and aspires to become a zookeeper. These students' career choices are examples of different careers in agSTEM. One Cultivate ACCESS participant commented on her experiences in the program, "No matter what your background is you can do anything you set your mind to." If you have an interest in gaining essential employability skills and exploring agSTEM careers this summer, we are currently accepting applications for the 2020 summer session of Cultivate ACCESS starting June 1st and running through August 7th.

Please see our website [cultivate.unl.edu](http://cultivate.unl.edu) to learn more and apply.