

## Views from VanDeWalle

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### Innovative Youth Corn Challenge Contest 2020 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 147 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, seven teams signed up with two teams able to glean harvest data from their plots to complete the program. COVID-19 made 2020 such a difficult year with everything and of course with such uncertainty and unable to meet in person for many events, it created obstacles for many of our 2020 teams.

The winning team from 2020 growing season was Boone Central FFA which consisted of Dustin Andreasen, Carson Maricle, and Cody Maricle with Abby Hitchler as their FFA Advisor. Their irrigated test plot consisted of 4 main variables compared to a control. The first variable they tried was including a biological with their starter. The second was trying an earlier side dress timing of 32% UAN at V5 compared to V8 for the rest of the plots and the control. The third variable was a plot without a 6-24-6 pop up starter fertilizer, while last variable was population, where they compared populations of 36,000 and 38,000 seeds/acre compared to a control of 34,000 seeds per acre. Their controls were the same hybrid of corn with an in-furrow pop-up, planted at 34K seeds/ac, and side dressed with 32-0-0 at the V8 growth stage. Looking at the results, the biologicals yielded 249.49 bu/acre, the earlier side dressed N application yielded 258.85, the without in-furrow pop-up was 249.26 bu/ac, the 38,000-population yielded 263.74, and the control plot yielded 255.52.

Receiving second place was the Fillmore Central FFA team included Mackenzie Mumm, Kaylea Geiser, Abby Geiser, Connor Asche, Dakota Nun & Jordan Engle with their irrigated plot located in Fillmore County. They tested the effects of Realize biostimulant applied in furrow at planting. The purpose of this is for a quicker seed emergence and consistent stands and cost \$7.06/acre. Their challenge plot with Realize increased yield by one bushel at 255.2 bu/acre compared to 254.1 bu/acre on their control plot. Using a corn price of \$3.90 per bushel and the cost of the Realize at \$7.06, the 1 bu/acre increase was not cost-effective. Their project sponsor was Kurt VanDeWalle with help from Brian Mumm as the producer and Zach Ekeler as their agronomist.



Other teams that participated but due to various circumstances were unable to finish their project included Arthur FFA Chapter, Wayne FFA, Rising Stars 4-H club from Platte Co., the Rolling Meadows from Frontier county and the Kornhusker Kids 4-H Club 4-H Club of Cuming 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 Boone Central FFA Chapters.
- The Innovation Award was presented to the Boone Central FFA Chapter.

This program continues to evolve and has exciting changes planned for the 2021 growing season with IYCC 2.0. A citizen scientist component will encourage youth to connect with researchers on a real problem facing corn growers and assist in collecting data or designing a tool to solve a real-world problem.

The IYCC 2.0 will also feature an agricultural literacy piece which will help others understand corn production practices and highlight teams' efforts. This will allow youth to promote their own work through creative works such as a video or other multimedia tool. Nebraska Extension will execute this evolving, innovative and in-depth program in 2021, which will be the tenth year creating agricultural, science-informed graduates in the agricultural industry.

Prizes for participation in this project include 1st place - \$1,000, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2021, go to <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/youth/cornchallenge>. Registration is due March 15<sup>th</sup>. Contact Brandy VanDeWalle at [brandy.vandewalle@unl.edu](mailto:brandy.vandewalle@unl.edu) or (402) 759-3712 for details about this program.