

Views from VanDeWalle

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December 2, 2020

Agronomy Project – No Field Required!

Attention all youth interested in agriculture! Do you want to learn about agriculture? Do you want to raise a crop that requires little space? Do you enjoy learning about non-traditional crops? If you answered any of those questions, this project is for you!

The Nebraska Extension Special Agronomy Project gives 4-H members an opportunity to experience a crop that is grown, was grown or has the potential to be grown in Nebraska. Youth participate by receiving seed and resources to grow the crop, research traits of the crop and determine the viability of that crop in the part of the state they live. The project allows 4-H members interested in agronomy to grow something fun, new, and different.

To kick-off the inaugural year of the special agronomy project, youth will explore teosinte. The plant looks and is very similar to corn, in fact it is believed to be the wild ancestor of today's corn!

The focus of the 2021 Special Agronomy Project is the Teosinte plant. Teosinte is the ancestor to today's corn, including dent, sweet, and popcorn. Native to Mexico and the surrounding area, this plant was adapted and changed by humans over time. There are both similarities and differences between them. Both plants have a tassel at the top. However, instead of a single stalk with a large ear, teosinte has multiple branches that produce many small spikes of trapezoidal seeds if the growing season is long enough.

Youth should enroll for the Special Agronomy Project through 4-H Online. Once enrolled in 4-H Online, youth are to call their local office to sign up for the project (order the seeds) by February 1st. By enrolling through 4-H Online, youth will have access to a folder with educational materials including a growing newsletter, potential virtual field trips & evaluation.

Youth will have three options to enter this project at the county and state fair. One option is a special agronomy educational exhibit which youth share what was learned from the project in either poster (14" x 22") with a short essay. The second option is to create a short 2-5-minute video presentation related to what they learned about the project. Finally, youth can enter the plants themselves and include supporting documentation about the project. Details can be found on the state fair book webpage and <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/special-agronomy-project>.

This is the first year for this project. If you have suggestions or any questions about the project, please contact Brandy VanDeWalle at brandy.vandewalle@unl.edu or Aaron Nygren at anygren2@unl.edu.