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In the past year, Nebraska Extension has hired seven Water & Cropping Systems Extension Educators across the state. One of the most impactful roles for a Water & Cropping Systems Educator is to work with growers in their areas to conduct on-farm research. As a result of these new hires, there are great opportunities for farmers to engage with new Educators and grow the on-farm research base in many areas across the state where Educator positions have been vacant for several years. We are part of this new group of Educators, and we are very eager to develop on-farm research studies in our accountability regions in southeast Nebraska. Ritika covers Nemaha, Johnson, Pawnee, and Richardson counties, and John covers Lancaster, Cass, and Otoe. We are looking for any producers who may be interested in conducting research studies on their farms.

The Nebraska On-Farm Research Network (NOFRN) is an incredible resource for farmers to conduct randomized, replicated research on their own land, to address their production and profitability questions. There are about 80-100 on farm studies completed each year addressing topics like crop production, water and nutrient management, and cover crops. UNL Extension and Specialists along with the NOFRN team will help you design trials in your field, collect data, and will statistically analyze the data at the end of the season. It also gives producers a greater level of confidence in the research, knowing that the data is coming from a location that they are familiar with, and likely have a deep understanding of the variability across the landscape and how it has historically affected production.

For many years, John and his family worked with their county Extension agent to conduct wheat variety trials on their farm in eastern Colorado. The information they got was crucial for choosing wheat varieties each year. It also made them more confident in the results from trials conducted by Colorado State University, offering the ability to compare replicated small plot results to those collected on farm in real production conditions.

Both John and Ritika have backgrounds in cropping systems research and have conducted research in partnership with local farmers. One of our focuses for southeast Nebraska is to revisit nitrogen rate and timing studies to understand how we can better manage our fertilizer inputs in the face of water quality issues across the region. There is also more information emerging indicating that reduced nitrogen rates in corn may be possible with little risk for yield loss. With that information in mind, we have several example nutrient protocols that could be implemented, including grower N rate compared to +/- 50 lb/ac. However, we encourage any grower with questions, practices, or products they would like to evaluate on their farm to reach out to us as potential cooperators. We understand that on-farm research introduces some complexities and inconveniences during busy times of the growing season, but we truly believe it will help farmers across the region improve production, stewardship, and profitability of their farms. We encourage anyone who is interested or even curious about the program to reach out to one of us or visit on-farm-research.unl.edu for more information.