

# Agricultural Programs Support Nebraska's Premiere Industry

Lancaster County has approximately 1,540 commercial farms covering 421,000 acres — farm products bring in more than \$82 million annually. UNL Cooperative Extension continues to make agricultural profitability and sustainability a priority issue. Extension Educator Tom Dorn fulfills this goal through numerous workshops and meetings, educational resources, person-to-person contacts and a Web site.

A Crop Protection Clinic was offered to help ag producers make informed weed, insect and disease management decisions. Participants reported an estimated value of the program to be \$5.37 per acre — a total benefit of \$1.6 million to participants.



Financial Record Keeping workshops help farm operators develop more accurate financial records.

A series of four Financial Record Keeping workshops were offered in the surrounding counties to farm operators. Of the responses, 82 percent said they

learned to create reports that will help them make better management decisions and 58 percent expected to save time and/or money when preparing their income tax return.

Crop producers continue to take the Irrigation Home Study Course (developed by UNL Cooperative Extension in 1998) which teaches irrigation management schemes. Responses indicate an average savings of \$4.22 per acre — an estimated annual savings of \$3.5 million to participants.

Two Waste Pesticide Collections in Lancaster County last year safely disposed of 17,331 pounds of pesticide products and PCB's. These collections were held in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Nebraska Fertilizer & Ag Chemical Association and Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

Through the Pesticide Container Recycling program, about 9,500 pounds of pesticide containers were collected and recycled in Lancaster County last year.

## Understanding the 2003 Farm Bill

Six seminars were presented to help farmers take advantage of the new farm legislation to reduce risk and maximize profitability. There were 316 producers, ag lenders and farm managers who attended. These seminars were presented in cooperation with the Lancaster County Farm Service Agency.

Information on the farm bill was also made available through UNL Cooperative Extension's Web site, including a link to the Texas A&M Base and Yield Analyzer (BYA). The BYA Web site was accessed 2,304 times for farms in Lancaster County reflecting 459,580 acres (represented essentially all of the crop land in the county).

In one case, Extension Educator Tom Dorn helped two brothers who are farming more than 3,500 acres. The calculated program payments using the best option according to the BYA were more than \$10,000 per year higher (\$60,000 over the six years of the farm bill) than the option they were previously considering.

## Biosolids Program Saves \$4.5 million

After the 2003 harvest, Mark Benes had one field that yielded 10 percent more corn than ever before. This fact was even more amazing considering the lack of rain during the heat of the summer. He also had 50 acres of pasture that grew grass so lush that he could have grazed more cattle on it. He believes Lincoln's nutrient-rich biosolids, which were applied to these fields, was the reason for the increased yields.



Extension Technologist Dave Smith (above) takes soil samples to determine the amount of biosolids to apply.

Biosolids are organic solids that are separated from wastewater and biologically processed during wastewater treatment to make them safe for land application.

UNL Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County coordinates distribution and application of biosolids to agricultural cropland for the City of Lincoln Wastewater and Solid Waste Division.

Mark Benes was one of 20 farmers who used

biosolids in 2003. This past year more than 37,000 tons of biosolids were delivered and/or applied to 55 fields and 1,319 acres of crop land.

While results vary, Mark is not alone in seeing a significant improvement in crop yields. Most farmers report higher yields for several years after just one biosolids application. Studies have shown the nutrient value of biosolids is worth at least \$25 per acre for the first year's crop.



Since 1992,

when the City of Lincoln's Biosolids Land Application program began, more than 285,000 tons of biosolids have been distributed to crop fields. This program has saved taxpayers \$4.5 million by keeping this recyclable material out of the landfill.

Mark says biosolids are "worth their weight in gold" and will continue using them to improve his soil and crop yields.

## Increasing Outreach Through "Training the Trainer"

In addition to direct outreach, UNL Cooperative Extension trains individuals who, in turn, impact or teach others. This includes teachers, business professionals, food and other service industry workers, government employees, health professionals, childcare providers, master gardeners and community volunteers.

Here are some ways Cooperative Extension "trains the trainer" in Lancaster County:

- Provides integrated pest management (IPM) educational resources for **pest control professionals, health care professionals and social workers.**

- Provides training for **Commercial Pesticide Applicator** certification. More than 300 people were trained or recertified at the Lancaster Extension Education Center in 2003.

- Provides training for **Master Gardener volunteers** who then share the information with the public through phone calls, direct contacts, educational programs and special events.

- Offers termite and landscaping workshops which **Real estate licensees** receive continuing education credits from the Nebraska Real Estate Commission for attending.

- Educates **Commercial horticulture industry employees** on localized horticulture issues with commercial horticulture clinics and videos.

- Offers extensive resources on the Food Web site and e-newsletters for **health professionals and educators** to use for more successful food, nutrition and food safety programming.

- Presents leader training

lessons to **Family and Community Education club members** and other **community leaders.**

- Through 4-H, provides ongoing leadership training to **4-H leaders and parents** and Livestock Quality Assurance training to 4-H farm families.

- Through 4-H School Enrichment, provides **1-5 teachers** with curriculum, training and materials for hands-on classroom activities.

- In cooperation with other agencies, offers child care conferences which **Child Care Providers** gain inservice hours for attending.

- Developed head lice resources used by many **health professionals.**

- Developed a teaching program for **real estate and land appraiser professionals** to help promote functional and sustainable landscapes.

- Developed an award-winning game "Don't Get Bugged by a Foodborne Illness," for **nutrition educators** to teach consumers important food safety practices. More than 3,000 copies of the game have been sold to educators nationally and internationally.

- Through Neighbors Working Together, has led or facilitated several leadership trainings for **neighborhood leaders.**

- Has conducted Success Marker/Journey Mapping trainings for **extension staff** across the state.



**"Extension's programs turn knowledge into action which helps create a stronger Nebraska."**

—Wayne Heyen, Lancaster County Extension Board

## Volunteers Contribute to Extension's Success



4-H clubs and activities, such as Clover College (above), are made possible by numerous volunteers donating their time and talents.

Last year, UNL Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County programs benefitted from 1,320 volunteers investing 29,127 hours of time for a total value of \$481,761.\* Extension trains and supports, as well as coordinates the efforts of, a variety of volunteers: 4-H leaders and superintendents, Master Gardeners, Family Community Education (FCE) volunteers, NEP volunteers and **earth wellness festival** presenters and assistants. 4-H and FCE members often volunteer in community-related projects. Thanks to all these volunteers who help make extension's programs successful!

\*Independent Sector values volunteer time at \$16.54/hour.



Extension Educator Tom Dorn demonstrates protective clothing and equipment during a pesticide certification training.