

Acreages Can Offer 4-H Families “Room to Grow”

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The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development program offers more than 150 project areas. Youth can choose which, and how many, projects they participate in. Some projects take more resources than others.

Acreages offer 4-H families a range of resources. Land is the primary one, providing space to raise animals, plant larger gardens and for other needs. In Lancaster County, acreages provide country living within driving distance of city opportunities.

Here is a look at two Lancaster County 4-H families living on acreages.

Henshaw Family — South of Lincoln

Emily Henshaw’s 4-H projects take up a lot of space: 10 dairy goats (including four kids born this spring and more on the way), 12 rabbits, 10 ducks, four geese and one house cat. She gardens and helps care for the family fruit trees. Her family’s acreage south of Lincoln provides plenty of space — eight acres of it.

Prior to living on the acreage, Jim and Bonnie Henshaw lived in Lincoln with Emily’s three older siblings, Carrie, James and Erin. The children were in 4-H and participated in projects such as rocketry and baking.

When the family moved to the acreage in 1986, they found expanded opportunities for 4-H projects. Though they had a garden in Lincoln, the acreage has room for a bigger garden. There is room to raise animals. Even rocketry seemed easier, because instead of having to go to a park to do launches, it could be done in their pasture.

The Henshaws did find a few challenges they didn’t have



Emily Henshaw raises goats and poultry on eight acres south of Lincoln. She also helps with the family’s large garden and fruit trees.

in town: grasshoppers, the wind, and wildlife such as coyotes and hawks trying to go after their poultry. There were few trees on the land when the family moved, so they planted all kinds of fruit and windbreak trees.

Their youngest daughter, Emily (currently age 15) has lived on the acreage her entire life. She joined 4-H when she was nine and her parents let her choose a couple of goats to raise. Emily is now showing the granddaughters of those goats. Last year, two of her Oberhasli dairy goats received Senior Champion and Junior Champion at the Nebraska State Fair.

Emily helps out in the large family garden with planting, weeding and harvesting. On Saturdays, May through October, the family sells produce at the Farmers Market in Lincoln. Emily usually helps with setup and takedown of the stall. At the County Fair, she exhibits whatever vegetables and fruits are ripe. Emily also helps with home canning and has exhibited jellies, jams and canned vegetables.

Jim and Bonnie have volunteered for the 4-H program for more than 20 years. Bonnie is Lancaster County superintendent of the 4-H Dairy Goats and has been a presenter at the Ag Awareness Festival. Jim is a long-time member of the County Fair Livestock Booster Club, is Nebraska State Fair assistant superintendent of 4-H Dairy

Goats and has been County Fair superintendent of 4-H Poultry.

The family has provided goats to 4-H youth living in Lincoln who want to learn about goats but don’t have room to raise them. These 4-H’ers “adopt” a goat and then come to the Henshaw’s acreage on a frequent basis to help care for their goat and practice their showmanship skills.

“4-H is a fun experience,” says Emily. “It broadens one’s horizons and you get to meet people you wouldn’t meet otherwise. You get to do fun stuff like waking up at 6 a.m. to feed the kids. It is a family experience.”

Davis Family — Northeast of Lincoln

Tim Davis grew up on a cattle ranch near Valentine, and Jill grew up in Lincoln. When they married, they knew they wanted their children to be able to show cattle, so in 1990, they settled on four acres northeast of Lincoln. Before Will and Whitney were old enough to show cattle, the Davis’s built a show barn and marketed “club calves” from the family ranch to local 4-H and FFA families.

Between the ages of five and eight, Will and Whitney participated in a 4-H Clover Kids pilot club (now a standard part of 4-H) along with four to five other families. Club parents



Members of 4-H Teen Council, Will (above) and Whitney Davis have helped with the past two 5th & 6th grade 4-H Lock In’s.

took turns teaching projects — Tim taught beef cattle.

At age eight, Will and Whitney started showing cattle and “building” their herds. At the present, Will (age 18) and Whitney (age 16) have 15 registered cows. They keep their show heifers on the acreage and the rest on a pasture near Seward.

The youth have total responsibility of their show cattle: feeding twice a day (at 5 a.m. and at 5 p.m.), stacking hay, cleaning up manure, grooming, practicing showmanship and even giving shots if needed. It is an exciting time when their heifers give birth — Will and Whitney have even sent out “birth announcements.” So far this spring, two calves have been born on the acreage.

Will and Whitney attend Waverly High School. They show their heifers in 4-H and FFA shows at the Lancaster County Fair, Nebraska State Fair, Ak-Sar-Ben 4-H Youth Livestock Exposition, Nebraska Junior Beef Expo, and progress shows throughout the year.

They also show at regional and national Simmental shows. Whitney is the current Nebraska Simmental Queen Alternate and represents Nebraska Junior Simmental Association (NJSA) at various events. Will is the state secretary and board trustee of NJSA.

They have also exhibited other 4-H projects, including baked goods and photography. Jill, a former Miss Nebraska, passed along her love of sewing and modeling to Whitney, who has exhibited numerous sewing projects and qualified for the State 4-H Fashion Revue every year since age eight.

Jill has been a longtime 4-H volunteer as County Fair co-superintendent of the 4-H Style

Revue. Jill and Tim are both active members of the County Fair Livestock Booster Club.

When Will and Whitney became old enough to drive, it was easier for them to commute to various activities. They joined 4-H Teen Council (both are officers) and they are officers of Waverly FFA. Whitney is currently the 4-H Council secretary and is involved in the 4-H Citizenship



Every morning, Whitney Davis gets up at 5 a.m. to feed her show cattle.

Washington Focus group.

Will and Whitney have participated in speech, demonstration, and the Premier Animal Science Events livestock and meats judging contests.

The Davis’s say living on an acreage links them to both rural and urban experiences. From their gravel road, they can see the state capitol.

“With more space, you have the option for animals,” says Will. “It’s as close as you can get to a farm without all the responsibilities. You have a smaller space to take care of.”

“In the country, you work and interact more with the outdoors,” says Whitney. “I love that by showing cattle, I have friends from around the state and the world.”

Will says he sees more families moving to acreages so they have more space. “Acreages offer more room to grow.”

Extension’s Acreage Resources Online

Web Site: acreage.unl.edu

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension’s educational resources for acreage owners are available 24-hours a day, seven days a week on its “Acreage & Small Farm Insights” Web site. Updated weekly, the Web site features research-based information on:

- Animals
- Buildings
- Business
- Crops
- Custom applicators
- Farm management
- Haylands and pastures
- Home environment
- Landscaping
- Machinery
- Safety
- Water
- Waste water management
- Weeds
- Wildlife



Acreage E-News

Acreage owners can receive timely information by signing up for “Acreage and Small Farm Insights eNews,” a FREE monthly e-mail newsletter from the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. To sign up, go to acreage.unl.edu/Newsletter/newsletter.htm

Additional Resources

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN LANCASTER COUNTY
Phone: 441-7180 • Web site: lancaster.unl.edu
Educational resources on landscaping, water issues, livestock, wildlife, pest management and much more.

THE ACREAGE OWNER’S GUIDE
Web site: lancaster.unl.edu/acreageguide/localcontact.htm
Find your local fire district, a listing of utility companies and county offices.

NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCES DISTRICTS
Phone: 471-7670 • Web site: www.nrdnet.org
Locate your local NRD office which can provide information on erosion control, soil conservation, flood plain protection, irrigation wells and water quality protection.

LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
Phone: 441-8040 • Web site: www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/health
Animal Control: Animal bites and rabies, wildlife.
Environmental Quality: Waste management, air and water quality and illegal dumping.

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Phone: 471-2394 • Web site: www.agr.state.ne.us
Information on certification for private and commercial pesticide applicators, drought assistance, laws and regulations for noxious weeds, livestock and more.

LANCASTER COUNTY WEED CONTROL AUTHORITY
Phone: 441-7817 • Noxious weed complaints and control.

LANCASTER COUNTY ENGINEER
Phone: 441-7681
Maintenance and repair of county roads, streets and bridges.

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Phone: 471-2363 • Web site: www.dnr.state.ne.us
Well registration, groundwater, soil and water conservation.