

College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

# Social media tells the story of ag

Just as more of today's consumers are generations removed from the farm, more are looking online for information about agriculture.

College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources students and alumni using social media to "advocate" for agriculture also strive to better connect with consumers, providing them correct information about food sources.

Take, for example, Ashton Meints, an agricultural education senior from Plymouth, and alumni Hilary and Brian Maricle, the sixth generation on Maricle Family Farms near Albion. They are three of many farmers and ranchers nationwide to use social media to discuss agricultural information firsthand.

"Education is very important," Meints said. "A lot of people don't understand agriculture. I want to educate people."

When Meints blogs at <http://ashton-meints.wordpress.com/>, she uses current events and news articles as educational tools. She takes articles relating to issues ranging from animal care to food origins and sprinkles them with her own insight of family farm life.

Meints began blogging when she was selected as the ambassador for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, of which CASNR is a part. She blogs about her ambassador activities, and connects with IANR supporters.

Meints said CASNR gave her the networking skills and put her in contact with

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Ashton Meints

Ashton Meints blogs about agriculture issues and life on the farm. Meints serves as the ambassador for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, of which CASNR is a part.

Hilary and Brian Maricle use social media to help the food consumer make a connection to the farmer. The Maricles are the sixth generation on Maricle Family Farms near Albion.



Hilary Maricle



## The Dean Says:

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Chancellor, University of Nebraska–Lincoln  
*Harvey Perlman*

NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources  
*Ronnie D. Green*

Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
*Steve S. Waller*

Editorial  
*Judy Nelson*  
*Cheryl Alberts*  
*Sandi Alswager Karstens*  
*Daniel R. Moser*  
*Linda Ulrich*

Designer  
*Gary Goodding*

Photographers  
*Cheryl Alberts*  
*Carol Boehler*  
*Sara Cooper*  
*Hilary Maricle*  
*Ashton Meints*  
*M. Nash*  
*Ryan Overleese*  
*Dwight Thiemann*

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Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.

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### It doesn't seem that long

ago that, even if people weren't farming or ranching, they knew someone – a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, friend – who was. So they knew a little about farming.

Times change.

Today's estimates are that less than 2 percent of the U.S. population farms and ranches. According to the Center for Food Integrity, a U.S. farmer today feeds about 155 people worldwide.

In 1960, that number was 25.8.

We've seen a tremendous rise in agricultural productivity in 50 years, and with the world's population predicted to reach 9 billion by 2042 – up from over 6.7 billion now – productivity must continue to rise.

Predictions are that in 50 years, the world's population will require 100 percent more food, 70 percent of which must come from efficiency-improving technology.

For the good of our planet and people, let alone each individual's well-being, it is important a well-informed public understands the value and issues of food production and natural resources sustainability, and has accurate knowledge necessary to make informed decisions on policies and processes that affect our food, fuel and water supply.

Stewardship – the careful, responsible management of all entrusted to our care – is integral to what we teach in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. It is our responsibility today and our gift to the future.

I think stewardship of food, fuel and water is a shared responsibility of us all. Solutions will not only be science and technology based, but also found in policy and consumer behavior. It is imperative that our commitment to stewardship also include

our willingness to 'tell our story,' providing accurate information which people can understand and use in their own decision making.

That means talking and listening – intently – with

listening an important part of our conversations. We who care about agriculture and natural resources must listen carefully to those

with views different from our own, as well as those who share our passion.

What better place than a university to have a free exchange of views and to explore our collective vision for a shared future?

Mutual dialogue provides education and research-based information that promotes understanding of what's involved in the food system and natural resources stewardship; it can build bridges between differing views; it provides clarity around issues and catalyzes mutual understanding. It is our responsibility as caretakers of our children's future to provide and effectively communicate the knowledge base that will feed and fuel the world.

In this issue of *CASNR Class Acts* you'll read about people who are doing just that. I hope you'll share their passion and commitment to tell our story.

Steve Waller  
Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources



Steve Waller

# Sorority links food to origins

Making cattle brands out of popsicle sticks, or “churning” butter out of whipping cream shaken in a baby food jar are ways Sigma Alpha members help elementary children learn more about the food they eat.

Members of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources collegiate sorority this year worked with elementary teachers from five Lincoln schools to develop learning activities that fit into the children’s curriculum. Each year the women visit the classrooms two times, about a week apart, as their contribution to Sigma Alpha’s Ag in the Classroom national service project.

“The kids really enjoy having visitors,” said Sigma Alpha president Blake Becker, agricultural economics junior from Alliance. “It’s amazing what they remember from one visit to the next. We hear them repeat what they’ve heard from us.”

The Alpha Delta chapter of the national Sigma Alpha sorority was rechartered in 2008 to promote and support agriculture, scholarship, leadership, service and fellowship, said adviser Donna Woudenberg, a post-doctoral research associate in the School of Natural Resources. This semester there are 20 members.

The young women pay their own way to Sigma Alpha’s national conferences and support philanthropic projects such as Toys for Tots. To raise funds, members hold bake sales and coordinate contests for “Kiss-the-Pig,” held during the UNL



Cheryl Alberts

Rodeo, and “Mr. CASNR,” awarded at the Snow Stomp dance. Candidates for Mr. CASNR are nominated by agricultural fraternities and residence halls. The winning candidate is the one who generates the most money in paid votes.

“The Sigma Alpha ladies hope the fraternities and residence halls will want their person to win and put in a lot of money,” Woudenberg said.

Sigma Alpha members this year also arranged for children in the classes they visited to have agricultural penpals. It’s all part of giving back to the community and

Sigma Alpha members Melinda Rathman, left, and Jaime Hanson are ready to take cash votes for the sorority’s Kiss-the-Pig fundraiser in April. Rathman is an animal science senior from Farwell and Hanson is an animal science freshman from Comfrey, Minn.

knowing they’ve helped educate children about agriculture and science.

“Most of my students don’t know anyone who lives on a farm, and have never actually visited a farm,” said Jenna Davies, second grade teacher at Lincoln’s Meadow Lane School. Not only do children benefit from learning about the origins of food and other agricultural products, they better understand topics such as the food pyramid, Davies said.

Sigma Alpha women teach about agriculture as well as build their resumes, leadership abilities, confidence and lifelong friendships.

“The young women in Sigma Alpha develop camaraderie and have a great support system with each other,” Woudenberg added.

– Cheryl Alberts

## Calendar of Events

### College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

#### May

- 6 Salute to Graduates
- 7 Senior Send Off and Commencement

#### June

- 9, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27, 28, 30  
New Student Enrollment

#### July

- 1, 7 New Student Enrollment

#### August

- 13 Commencement
- 22 Fall Semester begins

#### October

- 17, 18 Fall Break

# Soybean science thrills children, teachers

Soybean plants in an elementary school classroom are opening up a world of science and agriculture previously unknown to many children and their teachers, generating excitement and appreciation for farmers, farming and future research.

Those are exactly the responses Tiffany Heng-Moss, professor in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, is seeking.

Heng-Moss and Jon Pedersen, professor in the College of Education and Human Sciences, launched the soybean in the classroom project in Lincoln's Maxey Elementary School in 2010. They plan to expand the project at Maxey and to northeast Nebraska, Omaha Public Schools, Kansas, Iowa and other states, and within three years reach 50 teachers and 1,500 children.

By nourishing soybean plants, children think of themselves as "farmers ... kind of," said Dwight Thiemann, Maxey fourth grade teacher.

Thiemann said he and other Maxey teachers are thrilled to have worked alongside CASNR scientists in their University of Nebraska-Lincoln laboratories and study the model organism, which enables them to better teach such scientific concepts as developing soybeans resistant to aphids and disease. In northeast Nebraska, teachers will work with Tom Hunt, entomologist at the Northeast Research and Extension Center at Concord.

"I love the fact that we had the opportunity to be involved in a real research project and follow basically the same scientific process the scientists follow," Thiemann said. "Often teachers become so focused on tests and standards we forget there is a real world out there that our students need to know."



As part of the soybean in the classroom project, Maxey Elementary fourth graders and teachers, Dwight Thiemann and Nancy Dondlinger, in fall 2010 visit the farm north of Lincoln of 1986 CASNR graduate Dave Nielsen. The project is expanding to other schools.

The soybean project aligns with state education standards, and provides seeds, soil, plant stands, trays, lights and a camera to schools.

Heng-Moss said science will create employment and fill the food gap for the world's 7 billion-and-growing population,

especially as only 1.5 percent of the U.S. population now farms.

"The demand for employees in agricultural fields will continue to grow over the next 20 years," Heng-Moss said.

Pedersen added, "Food and agriculture are perfect vehicles for delivering the con-

**In 2010, Nebraska's 22,000 soybean farmers produced nearly 268 million bushels of soybeans on more than 5 million Nebraska acres, making Nebraska the fourth largest soybean producer nationally. USDA valued last year's Nebraska soybean crop at more than \$3 billion.**

**Soybeans' No. 1 use is in the livestock industry. Soybeans also are processed into products from infant formula to fuel to crayons. About 60 percent of the world's soybean exports go to China.**

— Nebraska Soybean Board



# THE GARDEN GANG

## Students dig learning in the dirt

cepts of biology, chemistry, environmental and health sciences.”

Maxey technology specialist Greg Tebo said the university-elementary school collaboration “provides our students with a wealth of knowledge about every facet of soybeans, from what the breeder does with the plant to the entomologist’s role with the soybean aphid to the biotechnology

*“Agriculture and soybeans are great teaching tools ...”*

involved with the future of soybeans.”

Maxey children participate in soybean-related coloring contests; grow soybeans in different soil types and introduce insects to soil and plants to see how growth is affected; and build research projects and conduct an agricultural fair.

All help science be more meaningful and relevant to children so they better retain the knowledge.

Children are paying attention. Lisa Lunz of Wakefield, chair of the Nebraska Soybean Board, learned one Maxey student had his dad stop the car by a soybean field so the child could show the father what soybean aphids look like.

“As we talk about soybeans and science now, the students will have an opportunity to use that information when making a career choice. This also will help them understand issues when they become voting citizens,” Lunz said. “Agriculture and soybeans are great teaching tools because agriculture is science and science will play a large role in continuing to feed the world.”

The United Soybean Board and Nebraska Soybean Board fund the soybean in the classroom project.

– Cheryl Alberts

The Garden Gang helps elementary school children dig into gardening, amend their environmental literacy and harvest a deeper appreciation of the natural world.

A group of 12 College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources students called the Garden Gang grows CASNR’s connection with the community by conducting after-school nature clubs and helping children build raised bed, no-dig vegetable gardens at several local schools.

“A lot of kids have no idea where a potato comes from. We want them to enjoy being outside and show them that it’s OK to get dirty,” said Sara Cooper, academic adviser for environmental studies in the School of Natural Resources (SNR) and coordinator of the Garden Gang. “We want them to learn that they can get a lot of crop out of a small space, and we want their parents to see how easy it is to do, too.”

The project, which targets students in kindergarten through sixth grade, began last year at Saratoga and Randolph Elementary schools in Lincoln and Norris Elementary School near Firth. This year the program will expand to Park Elementary School in Lincoln where it will be coordinated through the Boys and Girls Clubs.

An indication of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln program’s popularity is that more than 70 students are on the waiting list at Randolph; other schools also have waiting lists; and many others would like to be part of the program, Cooper said.

It’s not just the youngsters who are learning. The Garden Gang has learned a lot about the community and working

with youth. Jerrod Bley, a nontraditional student from Hamilton, Ohio, became part of the Garden Gang because he wanted to give back to the community.

“I wanted to help the next generation learn about a more sustainable way of living. If they start young and become familiar with it, it should be a lot easier for

them to do it themselves when they get older,” said Bley, an environmental studies senior.

“I think it’s very important for kids to get exposure to something outside of electronic media,” he added. “Too many kids spend too much of their time on the Internet and playing computer games, and they lack that connection with the environment and the natural world.”

One SNR graduation requirement for undergraduate students is to write a thesis. Kelley Phillips, a senior from Papillion, based her thesis on her own research indi-

cating that students who participated in the nature clubs “greatly improved” their environmental literacy.

“People love it. The teachers love it, the parents love it, and the kids love it,” said Phillips, who has a dual major in environmental studies and anthropology. One parent called Phillips to tell her how pleased she is that her son loves to write in his nature journal.

“They (the elementary students) can’t wait to get outside. Most of them are not afraid to get in there and get dirty and help out,” Bley said. “They are really excited about it, and that makes us excited. It’s fun to see their faces light up.”

– Linda Ulrich



“Can I eat this tomato?” asks Marissa Armstrong, while helping clear CASNR’s Garden Gang garden beds at Norris Elementary School last August. Marissa was in kindergarten when this photo was taken.

Sara Cooper

## A brief glimpse

**D**ean Groskurth is one of the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service's "fact finders of agriculture."

Groskurth, director of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Nebraska Field Office, earned his degree in agricultural economics in 1985 from the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"My CASNR education opened my eyes to agribusiness and public service opportunities I never knew existed. My professors and classmates played key roles in broadening my horizons when looking at different career opportunities," said Groskurth, who grew up on a farm near Wisner.

NASS annually prepares more than 400 reports covering every aspect of U.S. agriculture from traditional, such as cattle, hogs, corn and soybeans, to specialties, such as aquaculture and horticulture; from farm finances and chemical use to detailed census of agriculture reports every five years.

Farmers and ranchers throughout the state voluntarily provide information to make these reports possible. Data is collected using the mail, telephone, Internet and personal interviews.

NASS estimates and forecasts help ensure an orderly flow of goods and services among agriculture's production, processing and marketing sectors, and help minimize the risks associated with commodity production, marketing and distribution.

"It would be hard to overstate the importance of NASS's work or its contribution to U.S. agriculture," Groskurth said. "Producers, agricultural organizations, agribusinesses, policymakers and government agencies all rely heavily on the information produced by NASS."



Dean Groskurth

Courtesy photo



Ryan Overlies

The first Ag Facts Friday was celebrated April 15 across more than a dozen universities, including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. One goal of the event, coordinated through the AgFACTS nonprofit organization, is to educate students and other consumers about agriculture. Sharing agriculture's story are, from left, Dustin Renken, prevet freshman from Bertrand; Eric Miller, agricultural economics/animal science freshman from Lyons; Siera Zuellner, agricultural education senior from Campbell; and Juliana Batie, agricultural education senior from Lexington.

## Instructors get in the know

**I**t seems like common sense, yet it's rarely done: Before an instructor can teach students, it helps to know what they already know and what their attitude is toward course topics.

Gary Bailey, general education coordinator in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, has put that notion into practice with AGRI/NRES 103, a first-year course for all CASNR students. Jim Brandle, a professor in the School of Natural Resources, teaches the course, and Bailey has worked with Brandle on a course assessment. He gives a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and a post-test at the end to determine students' attitudes and knowledge going in and how those change at the end. About 20 questions focus on knowledge and skill and about 15 on attitude; the test takes 20 to 30 minutes.

"It forces you in the beginning to ask yourself, 'what do I expect students to be able to do in order to show they've learned from my course?'" Bailey said.

Bailey did the pre- and post-tests for the

first time during the fall 2010 semester, with about 390 students taking the former and 320 the latter. The attitudes portion of the tests showed students began the course already having some strongly held environmental views, with strong majorities believing that evolution is ongoing, climate change is real and that human activity impacts it. They also offer feedback about the portion of the class from which they learned the most.

"Often we find we didn't teach what we thought we did," Bailey said. "We might have mentioned it in class, but did the students learn it?"

If pre-tests consistently show students know certain material, there's no need to spend time teaching it, Bailey added. The pre-test for the spring semester was about 40 percent different than the inaugural one and it will continue to evolve as Bailey and Brandle learn more about what his students already know and believe before beginning the course.

— Daniel R. Moser

— Linda Ulrich

## A brief glimpse



Kaitlin Leslie

**W**hen Kaitlin Leslie found out she was selected for the prestigious McNair Scholars Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, she was so happy she almost cried.

The forensic science junior from Malcolm said she thought her chances of being selected were very slight.

“I was a freshman at the time and did not think I had the experience they were looking for in a scholar,” Leslie said.

The program prepares selected UNL undergraduates for graduate study at the doctoral level. Only 10 to 15 new scholars are selected each year.

Leslie said her College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources education inspired her to apply. An agricultural leadership, education and communication course helped her focus on perspective and how it ties into leadership. An AGRI 103 course taught her how to think critically and how to get the most out of a scientific article.

Her forensic science professors also were supportive, encouraging and there to help.

Leslie’s 2010 summer McNair research project focused on blood spatter research she hopes will make bloodstain pattern evidence more reliable in court. She presented at Berkeley in August 2010. She did UCARE research for 2010-2011 that built off her summer research.

The McNair program was established in 1986 by the U.S. Department of Education in memory of astronaut-physicist and Challenger crewmember Ronald E. McNair.

– Sandi Alswager Karstens



Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow members assisting with food distribution at the People’s City Mission Distribution Center in Lincoln this past winter are Stephanie Smolek, a sophomore from Battle Creek; Emilee Dorn, a junior from Minden; and Amanda Bergstrom, a senior from Wilcox. The activity is one of many ACT community service projects.

## Social Media

*continued from page 1*

people and activities that make her more aware of agriculture’s role in Nebraska and in the world.

“CASNR has helped expand my passion for agriculture and strengthens it every day,” she said.

The Maricles decided to get involved in social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Foursquare and YouTube – when they chaired the Nebraska Farm Bureau’s 2011 Young Farmers and Ranchers Conference in January.

Hilary Maricle earned her bachelor’s in animal science and agricultural education in 2001 and her master’s degree in leadership education in 2003. She said it’s essential to build relationships by tweeting or posting information online about family farm work and activities, as is done about family, sports and popular culture.

This allows people to see that farmers are normal, everyday people, Maricle said, and helps the food consumer connect with the farmer. The Maricles tweet @mariclefarm and @mariclebeef.

“We are constantly working to talk about how we and farmers throughout the nation truly do care about food and the animals that we have responsibility for,” she said.

Hilary and Brian, a 2000 mechanized systems management graduate, say their CASNR education helped enhance their knowledge of agriculture beyond their farm.

“What we learned in class and from campus activities helped us to grow in our understanding of global agriculture and to gain confidence that we are qualified to speak up for agriculture,” Maricle said.

– Sandi Alswager Karstens

## Meeting farm animals 'up close and personal'

One of the surest ways to a kid's heart, and brain, are animals. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Block and Bridle Club taps into this with its annual Kids' Day activities.

Held every fall, the event brings children from preschools and day-care centers in the Lincoln area to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln animal science arena on East Campus, where kids get up close and personal with a variety of university-owned animals, from mice and hens to steers and pigs.

Last year's event drew about 250, said Stephanie Smolek, an agricultural journalism and animal science sophomore from Battle Creek. Smolek is Block and Bridle's historian.

"We want to show kids who grew up in the city what the animals are for," Smolek said. "We feel that's important. Society in general has moved away from the farm. Kids and adults don't understand where their food comes from. We want them to know what farmers and ranchers do to bring them food."

Getting this point across to young children whose only experience with animals is as pets or as television or movie characters is a challenge, Smolek added. But club

members believe it's important to start teaching this early.

"They're open to things. They're so interested in everything. They have a ton of questions."

One teacher who has taken preschoolers to Kids' Day the last

two years agrees. Lindsay Krackman of the Williamsburg Village Child Development Center said her students who went to the event the first year were thrilled when they discovered they were going again in 2010.

"They were pumping everyone else up about going there," Krackman said. Last year, she added, teachers prepared students ahead of time with some lessons about farm animals so they'd have an even more educational and interesting experience.

"They really asked good questions," she added. "The kids really liked being around the animals up close."

Smolek said an old horse named Blues was a big hit with kids last year. Krackman said her students also were fascinated by



Courtesy photo

The Block and Bridle Club's annual Kids' Day brings scores of children from preschools and day-care centers to the UNL East Campus to get acquainted with farm animals and to ask questions.

the mice, which were shown at different stages of development, from tiny, furless little babies to adults.

"It's a really good educational experience," Krackman added.

Each child received a goodie bag with coloring book, crayons, pencils, "tattoos" and ag education materials. The Nebraska Corn Board, Nebraska Soybean Board, Nebraska Pork Producers and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture joined CASNR in providing materials.

— Daniel R. Moser