The mission of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation is to engage youth, educators, and the general public to promote an understanding of the vital importance of agriculture in the lives of all Nebraskans.

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Teacher Engagement
Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) provides educator workshops and lectures for K-6 teachers at universities, colleges, teacher conferences, professional development days, and educational service unit trainings. Customized workshops provide educators opportunities to obtain resources and develop strategies for embedding authentic agriculture examples into standard-aligned curriculums.

Teachers receive:
• Hands-on engaging activities
• Professionally designed lessons and activities to take back to the classroom
• Opportunity to visit a working farm
• No cost for the teacher

In the afternoon of the workshop, teachers learned the intersections between agriculture and Nebraska’s educational content standards and how they can bring them alive in their classrooms.

Teachers from Creighton Community Public Schools attended the Teachers on the Farm workshop and got a tour of the Demerath Farm’s dairy and then a greenhouse. The dairy near Plainview is the first robotics dairy in Nebraska.

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As 20-year teacher Jane Gundvaldson reflects on the 15 years she’s been involved in the Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom’s Ag Pen Pal Program, she is reminded of how the personal connection to a farmer has affected her life and the lives of her students in such a rewarding way.

Continued inside
A background in agriculture

Jane grew up on a century-old farm near Rockwell City, Iowa. As a family of 10, the kids had a lot to do on the 360-acre farm, including walking beans, taking care of pigs and, sometimes, cattle, along with daily chores. Jane and her siblings loved exploring the farm. Whether at the creek or in a grove, there was always something to do on the farm. Jane uses her childhood experiences on the farm in her stories to her fourth graders.

Jane teaches fourth grade at Aspen Creek Elementary School in Gretna. When she first began teaching, Gretna was more of a farm town near Omaha, but now it has grown so much that it is more a suburb of Omaha. She’s seeing that students are not familiar with where their food comes from, and it is more meaningful now than ever that they are able to thank farmers for their contributions to the food supply.

For the past four years, Jane’s students have been pen pals with Chuck Homoka, a farmer and Merrick County Farm Bureau member with Central City. Chuck has helped organize four field trips that were funded with a grant from the Foundation. Being able to travel to the farm has helped students to make a direct connection with agriculture through all five senses. Throughout the school year, the students and Chuck correspond back and forth through letters. The students think of questions that they have about farm life, and Chuck answers them, relating his farm experience to the kids’ interests as well as what they are learning in the classroom. Jane explains that this is formal teaching really resonates with the kids, and they look forward to receiving Chuck’s letters. Jane has also gotten other teachers from her school involved in the Ag Pen Pal Program.

Connecting students to agriculture

Each school year, the fourth-grade students learn about the state of Nebraska and its history. The Nebraska History Book snapshots various products that are from Nebraska. Jane tasks the students to pick a product and write letters to companies that produce them, letting them know that they would love to have a sample of their products for their tasting. Once they receive the samples, they talk about where they are made and the ways that they are connected to Nebraska. The students love that they can shop “Nebraska” when they are at the grocery store.

Jane uses many of the Ag in the Classroom resources, including the Farming in a Glove activity and posters, and her class attends virtual field trips that the program offers.

“I am grateful for all the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation has provided me and my students, and I want to share my thanks with everyone who supports these valuable programs.”

All of these resources have helped her students understand how agriculture impacts their lives each day.

Opportunities to grow

In 2017, Jane was one of two teachers awarded the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation Teacher of the Year. With that award, she received the opportunity to attend the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference. At the conference, teachers from across the nation learn how agriculture can be used effectively in formal classroom instruction. Jane said it was great to bring so many teachers together to share ideas about incorporating agriculture into their teaching of core subject areas like math, reading, social studies, and science. She hopes to attend more conferences in the future. Overall, Jane says adding the context of agriculture to her lessons has enriched her students’ learning. Connecting with today’s farm and ranch families brings the Nebraska studies unit to life and gets students thinking about the exciting career opportunities available in their home state.

Stephanie Wolf from Brady Public Schools brings agriculture into her classroom by using the Lincoln County Farm Bureau Learning Barn, live animals, and hatching chicks. These activities give the students real-life experiences that they may not otherwise have.

Jennifer Johnson from Sutton Public Schools transforms her classroom into a farm by bringing in straw bales, a saddle, feed, farm equipment, books, and animals. The students discuss each item in their “farm” classroom and how each is used on the farm. In the afternoon, she invites ranchers to come in and talk about their jobs and how the animals have to be taken care of every day.

Each year, the Foundation awards two teachers as their Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom Teachers of the Year. The award is given to teachers that incorporate agriculture into their classrooms through innovative ideas and lessons.

2018 Teachers of the Year

In 2018, the Foundation published its first AgMag publication titled, At School with Agriculture that highlighted the connection that agriculture has with our schools from what’s for lunch to items in the classroom that are made with agricultural products. With AgMag, students explore Nebraska through the lens of the food, fiber, and fuel system that benefits us all each day.

The latest version of AgMag, Protecting Our Environment, introduced students to how farmers and ranchers care for the land and livestock across the state of Nebraska and how that care relates to consumers. 45,000 copies of the AgMags were distributed to fourth grade classrooms across Nebraska with another edition slated for the Fall of 2018.