Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) reimagined their Classroom Visits for the 2020-2021 school year and combined live, virtual teaching with hands-on activity boxes mailed to the classrooms. Classrooms may not be able to have visitors, but it doesn’t mean they have to miss out on enhanced learning experiences.

Classrooms are invited to participate in the customized lessons and hands-on activities where students can learn agriculture is their source of food, clothing, and shelter. Each classroom visit lesson is aligned to Nebraska State Education standards within science, social studies, math, or language arts.

AITC is currently holding a “Race Across Nebraska” challenge to schedule 10 virtual classroom visits in each Nebraska county. Participating classrooms in the successful counties will be entered into a drawing to win one of 12 accurate agriculture books or the grand prize of a $50 Amazon gift card.

To sign up for a lesson, visit www.nefbfoundation.org/classroomvisits.

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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New Resource Highlights Youth Farmers and Ranchers, Nebraska-Grown Food

Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom is proud to introduce Mapping Our Food! This educational resource for first-grade classrooms highlights ten Nebraska-grown products and the farmers and ranchers who raise them.

An engaging supplement for first-grade classrooms, Mapping Our Food is a language arts and social studies resource. The complete lesson kit includes letters from Nebraska youth farmers, posters featuring food items, and a map with stickers to track the locations of Nebraska farms and ranches. A teacher’s guide features connections to state standards, worksheets, and hands-on activities for further learning.

First grade is packed with important and exciting transitions as children leave behind much of the play of kindergarten and begin to develop more academic skills. Building reading and listening skills is an essential part of a first grader’s learning process. As they develop reading comprehension, they have meaningful discussions and gain a deeper understanding of what they read.

“When students read letters from kids just like them who raise food right here in Nebraska, the connection between their meals and the people who provide them becomes much more real,” said Courtney Shreve, director of outreach education. The ten food topics featured are apples, bacon (pigs), cookies (wheat), dry beans (dry edible beans), hamburgers (beef cows), honey (bees), milk (dairy cows), popcorn, potato chips (potatoes), and scrambled eggs (chickens).

In the beef unit, seven-year-old Charlie Smith from Elsmere, NE, writes to fellow students, “Do you like to eat hamburgers?” and “Have you ever wondered, ‘How did that hamburger get on my plate?’”

After sharing some information about beef and what his family does each day to care for their cattle, Charlie ends his letter with a meaningful connection: “There are more than 6.4 million cattle that live in Nebraska— that’s more cows than people! Next time you enjoy a delicious hamburger, remember it could come from a Nebraska beef ranch like mine!”

Students are future consumers, workforce members, and decision makers. Mapping Our Food aims to help students relate to peer farmers and ranchers and maybe even see their future selves in these important roles. “Real-life examples are what break down the barriers between rural and urban, and I am so proud of Mapping Our Food for both its educational value and its ability to showcase ten true stories about Nebraska agriculture,” said Megahn Schafer, executive director.

Every elementary school in Nebraska received Mapping Our Food in September. The project received support from private donations including leadership gifts from the Nebraska Beef Council, the Nebraska Corn Board, and the Richard P. Kimmel Charitable Foundation.

“The Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation provides high-quality educational resources to Nebraska classrooms free of charge, all thanks to support of generous donors,” said Schafer. “Our team works each day to put outreach education and Ag Pen Pal up with a Nebraska farmer or rancher and correspond throughout the school year by writing letters, emails, or meeting at the farm, ranch, or classroom. “There have been thousands of students across Nebraska that have participated in this program,” said Courtney Shreve, director of outreach education and Ag Pen Pal. “To see these classrooms come back to the program year-after-year shows how much our teachers who participate in our program value making the connection that agriculture is important to everyone.”

Many thanks to Ellen Hellerich who began Nebraska’s Ag Pen Pal Program during the 1990-91 school year!