

A Fresh Look At Nebraska



By LuAnn Schindler

Nebraska's agricultural heritage began as soon as settlers staked claims on the windswept prairie. Families tended crops and livestock, anticipating a decent yield in return for long, industrious hours spent in the field.

Nearly 150 years later, strong farming traditions continue to define who we are and how agriculture affects every citizen of the state. Some farming methods vanished, along with hopes and dreams. Others withstood time, tweaked by experimentation and advancements in technology.

Over 21 million individuals work in some segment of the ag industry, the largest employer in the nation. Many Nebraska farms are family ventures, a trend that follows the national norm. Families operate 98 percent of all U.S. farms.

It's a career that relies on seasoned farmers as well as new blood.

It's a calling for many, and youth need support to break ground in the ag industry.

One organization in particular – FFA – encourages youth to take an active role in the agriculture movement.

Schools across the Cornhusker state participate in the FFA program. Visit the FFA chapter at area schools and you'll find students learning about farm basics, business and technology. Dig deeper and you'll see students studying food science, wildlife management, environmental science or biotechnology.

Look closely at the organization's emblem stitched in gold onto a field of deep blue and you'll get a sense of the elements that embody FFA. A soaring eagle sits atop a cross-section of an ear of corn. The rising sun beams across growing crops, and the wise owl rests on a horse-driven plow.

The Nebraska connection to the FFA emblem extends beyond the doors of the agricultural classroom.

The insignia's design took root in Lincoln and blossomed until it reached the national level.

Adeline Nolde was born in 1916 and grew up in Sutton. By age 17, she worked as a secretary in the State Department of Vocational Education in Lincoln. Her boss remembered that Adeline enjoyed drawing and asked if she would create a design. She agreed. After receiving a list of necessary components, Nolde drew the emblem that evening. It took two hours.

That year, FFA members convened in Kansas City for the national meeting, and the emblem boldly stood out on thousands of brochures. Later that year, when the first FFA jackets were sold, the emblem became a permanent symbol of the organization.

I never participated in FFA. My high school offered one ag class – girls weren't encouraged to take it - and didn't host an FFA chapter. How times have changed! Forty-one percent of FFA members are female.

I have had the opportunity to teach in several school districts that boasted strong FFA programs. Students took on a variety of projects. Some raised livestock, others grew flowers or produce. Several organized a farmer's market.

FFA students share the rewards and letdowns associated with a farming enterprise. They exemplify hard work demonstrated by the ancestors of Nebraska agriculture. They possess the ingenuity necessary to compete in today's farming scene.

They are the future of agriculture.