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Welcome

Thank you for committing to a year in the Ag Pen Pal Program. On behalf of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, thank you for dedicating your time and energy to the Ag Pen Pal Program.

The Ag Pen Pal Program began in the 1990-1991 school year with a goal of connecting 20 classrooms to 20 farmers and ranchers to exchange three letters throughout the school year to introduce urban students to where their food comes from.

Today, the Ag Pen Pal Program provides a real-life connection to the agriculture community for students to see the daily life of a farmer or rancher. Every year this program matches volunteers to help more than 225 classrooms understand and appreciate the agriculture around them.

This guide contains ideas to get started and resources available to you. You can access the guide online at www.nefbfoundation.org/agpenpal.

In addition to this guide, monthly e-newsletters (Between the Rows) will be emailed to you with tips for each letter, a highlight of a current Ag Pen Pal, and ways to bring agriculture to the classroom. These newsletters will also serve as a reminder to write your letters.

Thank you for participating in the Ag Pen Pal Program. We are looking forward to a great year connecting farmers and ranchers to classrooms across the state. This program would not be a success without your dedication and hard work!
Agriculture in the Classroom® is a program coordinated by the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization and supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Its goal is to help students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so that they may become citizens who support wise agricultural policies. The program is carried out in each state, according to state needs and interests, by individuals representing farm organizations, agribusiness, education, and government.

The USDA established Agriculture in the Classroom in 1981. It has the endorsement of all living former Secretaries of Agriculture, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the National Conference of State Legislatures, most of the Governors of the States, and the major agricultural organizations and commodity groups. Significant progress has been made through these partnerships of agriculture, business, education, government, and dedicated volunteers.

Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) is a statewide program that helps PreK-12 grade students and teachers develop an awareness and understanding that agriculture is their source of life’s necessities. AITC has a long history of creating resources tied to state education content standards to assist teachers and volunteers in connecting students to their source of food, fiber, and fuel – agriculture!

In Nebraska, Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation manages the Agriculture in the Classroom program.

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 to all Nebraskans. Learn more at www.nefbfoundation.org.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization and has been determined as exempt from Federal Income Tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions or donations may be tax deductible.
Program Guidelines

The Ag Pen Pal Program connects a farmer or rancher with a classroom during the school year. The goal is for the pair to exchange letters three times during the school year. Letters can be in the form of hand-written letters or e-mail. Please discuss the schedule and how you will meet these requirements with your Ag Pen Pal classroom when you send the first letter. Although only three letters are required, more can be written.

As a Farm/Ranch Ag Pen Pal, please send your letters to the classroom by the following dates:
- September 30
- January 30
- March 30

If for some reason your letter will be late, please contact your classroom and let them know when they can expect your letter and if it will be coming in the mail or email. If you have questions or cannot get in touch with your pen pal, please contact the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation at (402) 421-4747 or agpenpal@nefb.org right away. Please do not wait until the end of the school year to report a lack of connection. We can help you get in touch or match you with a new classroom.
Advice from an Ag Pen Pal

Ag Pen Pals: Bruce & Karen Grant  
Hometown: Meadow Grove, NE  
Type of Farmer: Farrow to finish hog farm, corn, soybeans, alfalfa

Advice
A great way to blend our love for farming and our desire to inform young kids where their food comes from is to volunteer to be an Ag Pen Pal. Bruce and I have been Pen Pals with hundreds of kids over the course of approximately 10 years, but as with doing something you love to do, time flies and I really don’t know how long we have been with the program.

When choosing to write to a class, one needs to think about the age of the students, if they are from the inner city or the possibility that they are from a farm or rural area, or they could have grandparents or aunts and uncles on farms they are frequent visitors to. This makes a difference in how you write. If they have no idea about farm life, one needs to be very clear about what each item you are referring to is. A baler to a city child means nothing, whereas a rural child may make the connection.

I have trouble keeping my letters short, so the students don’t lose attention span, so I add photos. I also ask the teacher to use one item per teaching session if she feels the kids are losing interest. I try to make the information so it can be broken down into smaller topics.

If I visit the classroom, I take corn and soybeans, pictures from the farm, a book about farming that I read to them, and items from farm organizations that are age appropriate. If I am unable to visit the classroom, I send the items throughout the year for the teacher to hand out.

In the fall letter, I introduce myself and my family. I tell the Pen Pals where I live, what we have for animals, and what we grow for crops. I also tell them what we are doing at this time of the year. My second letter over the winter explains our row crops and alfalfa in more detail.

My third letter in the spring is usually a diary of what the family members are doing daily for a span of one to three days depending on the age of my pals. I always include a list of by-products from our crops and livestock.

I tell the students how proud we are of our occupations. What we do daily is not really a job to us because we love what we do. I emphasize that one farmer feeds 166 people. I emphasize that we eat the food we raise, we drink the water from the well near our pivots, we are environmentally safe, and we care about the community. I always try to think about what the kids will share with their parents when they leave the classroom. The teachers also learn much from you when you are a Pen Pal. The teacher has to answer many questions from the students so it is important the teacher understands and can answer correctly.

My favorite part of being an Ag Pen Pal is the joy it brings me to visit in the classroom or receive letters from the students and what they have learned about life on our farm and why we enjoy what we do daily. To hear the kids understand where their food source comes from is gratifying.
By Ag Pen Pals: Bruce & Karen Grant

Dear Ag Pen Pals:

Hello! I will be your Ag Pen Pal for the year. I am so excited to be your Pen Pal. I hope you learn where your food comes from. I hope you learn about animals, what a farmer does daily on the farm, and about the equipment farmers use. I also hope I learn a lot from each of you.

My name is Karen Grant. I live by Meadow Grove. It is in northeast Nebraska. I am married to Bruce. We have adult children. Jason and his wife Megan have Simon, age 4 and Ryan, age 8 months. Simon loves to visit our farm, sit on the tractors, see the pigs, and have lunch with us in the fields of corn or soybeans. We also have a daughter Kristen. She is married to Randy and they raise cows and calves (cow is a mom and calf is the baby she has). We also have a son Jeremy. He farms with Bruce and me. His wife helps on the farm. They have two boys, Luke and Darren. The boys are 3 months old. I will share pictures of them in my next letter. Bruce’s father, Richard, also farms with us.

We are proud to have three generations farming together. Here are Jeremy, Richard, and Bruce by the combine we use to harvest soybeans (the combine cuts the soybean plant off at the ground and sorts the soybean seed which we put in the semi-truck and haul to town to sell.) We harvest soybeans in September if the weather is nice. Soybeans are used to make soybean meal to feed to pigs and fish. Dry distilled grain is used to feed cattle. Soybeans are also used to make bio diesel to run tractors. Soy oil is used for cooking and lubricating, soy nuts are good to eat. Soy burgers and tofu come from soybeans.

Below is a photo of the combine harvesting corn. The corn is being augured into the grain cart. The tractor and grain cart will haul the corn to the semi-truck that is at the edge of the field. When the semi-truck is full Jeremy, Rich, or Bruce will drive it to the farm site to a bin where it will be stored until they have more time to haul it to a great big bin at the local cooperative. We harvest corn in October and November. Corn can also be choppd for corn silage to feed to cattle (cattle means many cows and calves.)

By-products are uses of a product. Corn is used for feeding cattle, pigs, and fish. Corn is used to make gasohol to run cars and pickups. Corn is also used to make plastic bottles and plastic bags, corn syrup, and corn chips. There is yellow corn, white corn, and popcorn.
Bruce and I also raise alfalfa. We windrow (harvest or cut the crop) alfalfa four times a year if we get nice rains to help the alfalfa grow. We can roll alfalfa into round bales, square bales, or chop it for silage. Alfalfa is used to feed cattle and horses over the long winter months.

Bruce and I have a farrow to finish pig farm. Farrow is when the sow (mom pig) has baby piglets. We raise the pigs to 290 pounds in six months. I will tell you about our pigs in my next letter.

I am anxious to hear about you. What is your favorite food to eat? Have you ever been to a farm?

Sincerely,

Your Ag Pen Pals
Bruce and Karen Grant
Send Photos

1. Ideas for photos can include photos of your house, family, livestock, machinery, special events in your life, the town closest to you, and more!

Create a photo book of the seasons on your farm or ranch.

2. Take a photo of the same area during each season (Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer).

Send videos of your farm or ranch to the classroom. Ideas for videos:

3. Combine driving during harvest, planter driving during planting, unloading a bale into a feeder, feeding cattle, taking the grain truck to the elevator.

Participate in a video-chat with your classroom!

4. Technology is available! Create a Google account, Zoom account, Skype, or Facetime to participate in a video-chat with your classroom. For assistance, please contact Courtney Shreve, (402) 421-4461 or courtneys@nefb.org.

Send seeds or plants to your classroom.

5. Contact Courtney Shreve to request seeds to give to your classroom or send your own seeds.

Tootsie Rolls

6. Did you know they can be made from beef cattle, pigs, corn, and soybeans?

Record your voice while reading your letter.

7. Most cellphones are capable of creating voice recordings. Write your letter and then record yourself reading it into your cellphone or tablet. Need help? Call or email Courtney Shreve, (402) 421-4461 or courtneys@nefb.org.

Visit Classroom

8. Visiting a classroom provides students with a unique learning experience. They can learn firsthand from the expert where their food comes from, how that food gets to their home, and what it is like to be a farmer. Turn to pages 10 and 11 for a guide to visiting a classroom.

Host a Field Trip

9. Invite students to your farm or ranch to give them a firsthand look at what farm life is really like. Turn to page 12 in this guide to gather tips and tricks for hosting a field trip from a real Ag Pen Pal!
Visiting Your Ag Pen Pal Classroom

Ask Questions

• What is the school policy on food being served to students?
  › Are there any food allergies?
• What is the school policy on animals being brought into the building?
• Do I need a criminal background check prior to the visit?

Choose an Activity

• Lesson Plan Activity
  › Lead an activity such as Farming in a Glove to plant seeds. Use this as an opportunity to talk about the seeds you grow on your farm/ranch. Check out activities at www.nefbfoundation.org.
• Literature Guide
  › Read a book and then lead an activity related to the book. Check out Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom’s Literature Guides, online! Auntie Yang’s Great Soybean Picnic is a wonderful story introducing students to soybeans with hands-on activities for you to lead.
• PowerPoint
  › Create a presentation with photos, videos, and information about your farm or ranch. This allows you to creatively showcase what you do as a farmer/rancher.
  › Bring props such as a rope, seeds, ear tags, and other items used daily on the farm/ranch.
• Agriculture Reading Hour
  › Receive a free book from the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, read it to a classroom, take a photo, and then donate the book to the classroom. There are a limited number of books available. Watch the Between the Rows newsletter for sign up information!

Choose a Time

• Teachers often want a visit in the fall or spring.
• Use national holidays to visit. Examples:
  › National Farm City Week: November 17-24
  › National FFA Week: February 19-26
  › National Ag Week: March 18-24
  › National Cookie Day: December 4
  › National Popcorn String Day: December 13
  › National Chocolate Covered Anything Day: December 16
Ag Pen Pals: Andy & Nikki Dunn  
Hometown: Fall City, NE  
Type of Farmer: Cow/calf, corn, soybeans, hay, and a retail greenhouse with garden, and bedding plants

Our favorite part of being involved with the Pen Pal program has been hearing back from the kids and seeing which parts of what we talk about or what facts stick with them. We wrote to a second-grade class last year but didn’t write any actual letters to the class. We communicated with videos Andy took out in the field or the cow lot. We always tried to share facts and information about what we were doing at the different times of the year. Our teacher was a first-year teacher and was great to work with.

We communicated with our teacher to help agriculture fit into their curriculum. Here are some examples of curriculum we could help with:

- Mapping
- Story Problems
  - Our teacher wondered if we could help students learn how to add 3-digit numbers. Andy mailed buyer cards and pens from the local sale barn as well as a video of what happens at the sale barn. He also made up a story problem for the students to do in class. The teacher said it helped spark an interest in doing math with a few students who hadn’t shown interest before.

We traveled to Omaha with two bucket calves and grocery items and items we use on the farm, such as a rope. At our visit, we shared facts about different commodities grown in Nebraska. We related those items to items students could find in the grocery store. We discussed other fun connections such as ethanol in Nascar and the number of crayons one bushel of soybeans can make. The most excitement came from meeting the bucket calves. Taking a trailer into downtown Omaha wasn’t the easiest, but I’d do it again just to help students learn more about agriculture.
Inviting students to your farm or ranch gives a firsthand look at what farm life is like.

1. **Plan Ahead**
   Plan with the weather in mind. Can activities be held in a shop if needed?

2. **Learning Stations**
   Have several learning stations to break larger groups down. Ask for help from neighbors and 4-H & FFA members to help lead sections. Sections can feature one stop at machinery and another with animals.

3. **Engage their Senses**
   Kids want to touch animals! Arrange an immersion time with bunnies, calves, or goats that kids can get close to and touch.

4. **Share a Meal**
   Sharing a meal together brings the story of food full circle. We grilled hamburgers because they are easy to prepare. With a feedlot, we can share the nutritional value of what the students are eating.

5. **Connect to their Studies**
   Plan examples of how math and science are used on your farm. We have ingredients used in a ration and talk about percentages, weights, and pounds per head that are fed. We talk about biology with the animal care and with how the land utilizes manure and holding pond water. Just remember to explain each word to students!

6. **Stay Authentic**
   Make sure your farm story is shared. How is your farm/ranch unique?

7. **Dig into Careers**
   Invite a veterinarian, nutritionist, nutrient manager, or another agricultural professional to visit over lunch about careers in agriculture. Anyone can be involved in agriculture even if they don’t live on a farm.

8. **Friendship is Important**
   Connect on an emotional level. Kids remember the smiles and outreach of a friendship.

“Students senses are engaged in the learning process of what we do on our farms. We believe field trips build positive experiences the students take into adulthood about how food is raised and the friendship they have with the farmer they visit.” Steve & Joan Ruskamp, Dodge, Nebraska

If you have questions or are interested in hosting a field trip with Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, please contact Courtney Shreve, director of outreach education, at courtneys@nefb.org or (402) 421-4461.
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Share Your Story

Your local newspaper may enjoy the opportunity to report on your participation in the Ag Pen Pal Program. Please feel free to share the good news! A sample news release is below, and our staff are available to provide further information. If you do receive media coverage, please share with us!

Also, if you have pictures that you would like to share, please email them to foundationforag@nefb.org.

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Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
<DATE>
CONTACT: <YOUR NAME>

Local Farmer/Rancher/Family is an Ag Pen Pal for <ADD TOWN> Classroom

<TOWN>, NE – <YOUR NAME OR THE "__________________" FAMILY> of <TOWN> has/have been an Ag Pen Pal with students at <SCHOOL NAME> in <TOWN> during the past school year. <YOUR NAME OR THE "__________________" FAMILY> has been exchanging letters with <GRADE LEVEL> graders taught by <TEACHER NAME>.

The Ag Pen Pal Program is part of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation’s Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom program. The aim of the Ag Pen Pal Program is to make a personal connection between students and farmers and ranchers in Nebraska. Through the program, students get a real view of Nebraska agriculture and gain a better understanding about how their food, fiber, and fuel is produced. Pen pals correspond through letters, emails, and classroom visits.

<YOUR NAME> said the students were most interested to learn that <ADD A LIST OF SOME OF THE THINGS THAT YOU SHARED WITH THE STUDENTS>.

"It was interesting to me that the student didn’t know <RELATE AN EXAMPLE FROM A STUDENT QUESTION>. <YOUR NAME> said he/she/it learned from the students as well, for example that <RELATE AN EXAMPLE FROM SOMETHING THAT THE STUDENT TOLD YOU>.

In addition to letters, <YOUR NAME> sent the students <SEEDS/PHOTOS/VIDEO’S/ETC.> and received <INDIVIDUAL LETTERS, ETC.> from the students.

<ADD A CLOSING SENTENCE OR TWO HERE, SUCH AS “We’ve enjoyed telling these urban students about life on our farm/ranch and the importance of agriculture” or “Sharing our daily life with these students helps us explain to them where their food comes from.”>

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Your Match For The 2021-2022 School Year