



# Farm & Ranch Volunteer Handbook

Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation  
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## Getting Started

The classroom receives their match at the same time you receive your match.

The farmer/rancher is the first person to start the letter writing. You must write your letter by **September 30**. Please send the letters on time with the schedule below:

- September 30
- January 30
- April 30

Once you receive your match, it is a good idea to send a quick note or email to your new pen pal to let them know when you plan to send your letter.

As the Ag Pen Pal program continues, one of the keys to success is keeping in contact with the classroom you are working with. Remember, in the real world relationships take time to develop.

Here are some tips to try.

- Drop your pen pal a note to let them know when they can expect your letter(s) to arrive
  - Busy happens! Dropping a quick note to your pen pal to let them know that you haven't forgotten about them is very helpful in building a relationship.
- Determine ahead of time if you are going to send each letter individually or in one big batch
  - Receiving 30 letters at one time can be intimidating. Decide right away if you are going to write each student back individually or in one big letter. If you write back individually, make sure to include a letter addressed to the whole class and teacher with what is currently happening on your farm or ranch.
- Write letters, but don't be afraid to expand!
  - Use things like E-mail, a blog, Facebook or Twitter. It's an easy way to stay in touch with a busy classroom.
- Use basic terminology and describe everything
  - We often use "farmer and rancher talk" without even realizing it. Words like feed, poultry, bale feeder, and elevator have different meanings to students. You may find it easier to send pictures of words you are using.

### **History of Agriculture in the Classroom**

Agriculture in the Classroom is a grassroots program coordinated 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.

In Nebraska, the Ag in the Classroom (AITC) program is managed and funded by the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation. AITC has a long history of creating resources and curriculum tied to state standards to assist teachers in connecting their students to their source of food, fiber, and fuel – Agriculture!

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.

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.

Dear Class,

Hi, my name is Courtney Schardt, and I run a small cow/calf farm in Steinauer, Nebraska. If you go to a map, it is in the far Southeast corner of Nebraska. Your teacher could help you find it on the map!

When I graduated from High School, I knew that I wanted to do something in the agriculture industry. I've grown up with strong roots in agriculture and knew that was the path I wanted to take. In the future I want to continue to work with livestock. Livestock is the term we use to describe the animals we raise on the farm.

As for my operation, I run a cattle farm with about 15 cow/calf pairs made up of Angus and Simmental cattle. Angus and Simmental cattle are the breed that I raise. Just like you have different breeds of dogs, we have different breeds of cattle. For example, you have Dalmatian and poodle dogs and I have Angus and Simmental cattle.

There are two types of cattle raised in Nebraska: beef and dairy. Dairy cattle are the ones that give us milk and cheese, while beef cattle are raised for meat. In the beef cattle industry there are two main purposes for the cattle, meat and maternal traits.

My cow herd is composed of maternal cattle, which means they make excellent mothers. We breed these maternal cows to different types of bulls to make their offspring (their babies) quality animals. The offspring are then sold to be used for meat and maternal (mother) purposes. I try to sell them to kids who want to show them in 4-H and FFA so that they can become interested in cattle and perhaps, one day, may want to raise their own herd. A herd is how we refer to the group of our animals.

At this time of year my farm is working on preparing the cows to have their calves. Although the cows will not start the process of calving (having the baby) until the first of March, it takes months of planning and preparation. To have the mothers prepared for this requires me to feed them a grassy hay and a mixture of different vitamins and minerals to help their overall health and the health of their calf. It is important for me to start the calves' (babies) lives healthy so that as they continue to grow into mothers themselves, or into the source of food that we eat.

My herd runs on pasture. This means they live on a large field of grass. They get to graze throughout the day, and they always have water available to them. When they eat hay, they eat it from a bale feeder. I'll send you a picture of what a bale feeder looks like!

I'm glad we have been given the chance to connect, and I hope to hear from the class in the near future. I hope this will be a great opportunity for all of us. I'm open to any questions you may have, and I will do my best to answer them.

Sincerely,

### Nebraska Commodity Contacts

#### Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Christin Kamm  
(402) 471-4876  
christen.kamm@nebraska.gov

#### Nebraska Beef Council

Mitch Rippe  
(308) 236-7551  
mitch@nebeef.org

#### Nebraska Corn Board

Kurtis Harms  
(402) 471-2676  
Kurtis.harms@nebraska.gov

#### Midwest Dairy Association

Rod Johnson  
(402) 853-2028  
rod@nebraskamilk.org

#### Nebraska Pork Producers Association

Kyla Habrock  
(402) 472-2528  
kyla@nepork.org

#### Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board

(402) 471-4276  
sorghum.board@nebraska.gov

#### Nebraska Soybean Board

Teri Zimmerman  
(402) 441-3240  
teri@nebraskasoybeans.org

#### Nebraska Poultry & Egg Division

Kathi Schildt  
(402) 761-2216  
kschildt@youraam.com

#### Nebraska Wheat Board

Caroline Brauer  
(402) 471-2358  
wheat.board@nebraska.gov

### Dates to Celebrate Nebraska Agriculture

#### **September**

- National Chicken Month

#### **October**

- National Farm to School Month
- National Pork Month
- National Trucker's Day 10/4
- National Thank a Farmer/Rancher Day 10/12

#### **November**

- National Farm City Week 11/20 – 11/24

#### **January**

- Popcorn Day! 1/19
- National Cheese Lover's Day 1/20

#### **February**

- National FFA Week 2/16 – 2/23
- President's Day 2/18

#### **March**

- National Agriculture Week 3/19- 3/24
- National Reading Month

#### **April**

- National Soy Foods Month

#### **May**

- National Beef Month

### **Top 10 Ways to Get Agriculture into the Classroom!**

Questions to ask the teacher before a visit or sending items

- What is the school policy on food being served to students?
  - Are there any food allergies that I should be aware of?
- What is the school policy on animals being brought into the building?
- Do I need a criminal background check prior to the visit?

1. Send photos

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

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

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

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

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

4. Participate in a Google Hangout with your classroom.

- Technology is there! Create a google account to participate in a hangout or use the application Skype to video chat with your classroom. For assistance, please contact Courtney Schardt, (402) 421-4461 or [courtneys@nefb.org](mailto:courtneys@nefb.org).

5. Accurate Agriculture Books

- Send a book to donate to the classroom.
- Offer to read a book to your classroom or a classroom in your community.
- Check out the list of recommended books attached in this handbook!

6. Send seeds or plants to your classroom.

- Contact Courtney Schardt to request seeds to give to your classroom. Check out the activity Soybeanie Baby and Farming in a Glove on our website!

7. Tootsie Rolls

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

8. Record your voice while reading your letter.

- 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 Schardt, (402) 421-4461 or [courtneys@nefb.org](mailto:courtneys@nefb.org).

9. Coordinate a visit to your classroom

- Take a PowerPoint presentation full of pictures and information about your farm/ranch.
- Many students learn about life cycles. Check out our activities Farming in a Glove or Soybeanie Baby at [www.nefbfoundation.org](http://www.nefbfoundation.org) to share with students. Call for supplies!

10. Host a classroom to your farm or ranch

- Sometimes matches are far apart, but often classrooms call and want to take a field trip to a farm or ranch. Please share if you would be willing to host a classroom to your farm or ranch.



**Ag Book Recommendations**  
(All titles are available on Amazon)

**A Seed Is Sleepy**

By: Dianna Aston  
Grades K-6

**How Did that Get in my Lunch Box?**

By: Chris Butterworth  
Grades K-2

**Clarabelle**

By: Cris Peterson  
Grades K-6

**Tops and Bottoms**

By: Janet Stevens  
Grades K-6

**Seed, Soil, Sun: Earth's Recipe for Food**

By: Cris Peterson  
Grades K-6

**The Beeman**

By: Laurie Krebs  
Grades K-6

**Grandpa's Tractor**

By: Michael Garland  
Grades K-6

**First Peas to the Table**

By: Susan Grigsby  
Grades K-6

**Plant Secrets**

By: Emily Goodman  
Grades K-6

**Fantastic Farm Machines**

By: Cris Peterson  
Grades K-3

**Cattle Kids – A Year on the Western Range**

By: Cat Urbigkit  
Grades 3-6

**Husker Numbers**

By: Rajean Luebs Shepherd  
Grades 4-6

**C is for Cornhusker**

By: Rajean Luebs Shepherd  
Grades 4-6

**Farmer George Plants a Nation**

By: Peggy Thomas  
Grades 4-6

**Thomas Jefferson Grows a Nation**

By: Peggy Thomas  
Grades 3-6

**Apple Riddle Orchard**

By: Margaret McNamara  
Grades K-6

**From Seed to Plant**

By: Gail Gibbons  
Grades 4-6

### **Fast Facts about Nebraska Agriculture**

1. Cattle outnumber people in Nebraska more than three to one.
2. Pork is consumed by more people worldwide than any other meat.
3. One sheep will produce eight pounds of wool each year.
4. 2.8 million eggs are laid in Nebraska's commercial laying facilities.
5. There are 23,000 corn farmers across the state, producing six times more corn than in the 1920's.
6. Nebraska ranks first in the nation in Great Northern bean production.
7. Livestock and poultry in Nebraska use the meal from more than 24.5 million bushels of Nebraska soybeans.
8. Each year, Nebraska harvests between 55 and 70 million bushels of wheat.
9. Nebraska honey bee colonies produce more than 3.75 million pounds of honey annually.
10. Nebraska ranks first in popcorn production in the United States.
11. When fully grown, a sugar beet is about a foot long and weighs between two and five pounds.
12. About one third of Nebraska's potatoes are processed into potato chips.
13. Proso millet has the highest water-use efficiency of all cereals.
14. One in four jobs in Nebraska is agriculture-related.
15. Nebraska ranks twenty sixth in total milk production.

Your local paper 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](mailto:foundationforag@nefb.org).

### 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 letter 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 person 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. For the 2016/2017 school year the program matched more than 200 classrooms with farm/ranch pen pals. 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.”>

###

**CONNECT WITH US!****Mailing Address**

P.O. Box 80299  
Lincoln, NE 68501

**Physical Address**

5225 S. 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Lincoln, NE 68512

**Ag Pen Pal Contact**

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**Email**

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**Facebook**

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<https://www.facebook.com/neagfoundation>

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