

Official Newsletter of the Nebraska LEAD Program

From the Director's Desk

BY KURTIS HARMS

The Nebraska LEAD Program season is in full swing, and what an exciting start it has been! This fall, we officially welcomed Nebraska LEAD Class 44. I'm both excited and encouraged by the energy and enthusiasm of these new Fellows as they begin their journey of growth and discovery.

While Class 44 is just embarking on its leadership path, Nebraska LEAD Class 43 returned to Chadron to launch its second year of seminars. It seems like only yesterday these Fellows were gathered quietly in Lincoln, meeting for the very first time during their kickoff seminar. What a difference a year makes. Watching their growth and confidence take shape—and seeing new friendships deepen—has been incredibly rewarding. This seminar was especially exciting as the Fellows learned where their international study/travel seminar will take them in January. (Keep reading to find out where they're headed!)

Each time I connect with our Fellows, I'm reminded of the transformative nature of the Nebraska LEAD Program. The development, passion and resilience I see in our participants underscores why this work is so meaningful. It is a privilege to witness their eagerness to engage with the tough issues facing Nebraska's agricultural systems and rural communities.

It is truly an honor to serve as your Nebraska LEAD Program Director. I look forward to the year ahead and the continued growth of our Fellows.





Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council

ADMINISTRATION:

Nebraska LEAD Program Kurtis Harms, Executive Director Shana Gerdes, Administrative Associate Irene Malzer, Office Associate

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A Message From the Chair of the Board

BY JESSICA GROSKOPF, NEBRASKA LEAD 33

Growing up on the plains of Colorado, I learned early on that in agriculture, relationships often matter just as much, if not more, than knowledge. Ours is a close-knit industry. Whether it's the local coffee shop gathering, the county extension board, a political organization, or a commodity group, it's common to cross paths with the same people in many different roles over time.

In 2012, I joined Nebraska Extension as a Regional Economist based in Scottsbluff. Two years into the role, I felt confident in my work but realized my professional network was still largely confined to the Panhandle. As a new Nebraskan, I was eager to broaden my perspective, deepen my understanding of the state's diverse agricultural landscape and connect more meaningfully with others across Nebraska.

With a little encouragement from coworkers, I applied to be part of Nebraska LEAD Class 33. The Nebraska LEAD Program gave me more than I expected: a richer, broader view of agriculture in Nebraska and beyond and a network of passionate, thoughtful leaders who continue to inspire me.

Now, serving as chair of the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council Board is a full-circle moment. I've seen just how transformative this program can be not only for individuals, but for the future of Nebraska agriculture. Under Mr. Harms' leadership, LEAD continues to evolve and strengthen. But the success of this program doesn't rest on one person, it's the result of countless donors, speakers, volunteers and hosts who believe in its mission and invest in its future.

So, I ask you:

- Who in your world is ready for the challenge of LEAD, but just needs a nudge?
- What doors has LEAD opened for you, and how are you paying that forward?
- In what ways are you helping ensure this program thrives for the next generation of Nebraska leaders?

Thank you for continuing to support Nebraska LEAD. Together, we are cultivating the kind of leaders Nebraska agriculture needs for the future.

Nebraska LEAD 43 to Visit Morocco, Portugal and Spain!



Excitement is building for Nebraska LEAD Class 43 as they prepare for their International Study/Travel Seminar in early 2026. During their year two kickoff seminar in Chadron on September 28, Fellows learned they'll be traveling to Morocco, Portugal and Spain. This global experience will give participants an up-close look at agricultural systems abroad while exploring international policy, leadership and culture—insights that will help shape their leadership journeys back in Nebraska.

Save the Date!



Nebraska LEAD alumni and friends: Mark your calendars to attend the Annual Recognition Banquet and graduation ceremony for Class 43 on March 13, 2026, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's East Campus Union. The social hour begins at 5:30 p.m. and dinner begins at 6:30 p.m. (CT).

Tickets are \$50/person for NALC members and \$100/person for non-members.

Nebraska LEAD Class 14 will also be recognized as the class reaches its 30th anniversary.

Resilient Rural Systems

SEMINAR 10 FINDS A NEW HOME IN NEBRASKA CITY

This December, Nebraska LEAD 43 Fellows will experience their tenth in-state seminar at a new location with a fresh theme designed to spark ideas and leadership growth. From December 7–9, Fellows will gather in Nebraska City for the inaugural "Resilient Rural Systems" seminar, exploring the many ways rural areas and communities in southeastern Nebraska are adapting, innovating and thriving.

The seminar will take place at the Kimmel Education and Research Center, but Fellows will also take part in several side tours. The seminar will highlight a variety of alternative agricultural operations in the region to give participants a better understanding of the diversity of agriculture in the state. Fellows will tour a salmon and shrimp farm, learn from the apple and fruit orchards of the Kimmel Orchard, and explore enterprises such as a direct-to-consumer boxed food business, floriculture and specialty egg production. Conversations with community leaders will further highlight how small towns in southeastern Nebraska are finding creative strategies to remain vibrant and resilient in the face of change.

This updated seminar was made possible through support of the Richard P. Kimmel and Laurine Kimmel Charitable Foundation, which provided a catalyst grant to the Nebraska LEAD Program. Established in 2024, these grants are designed to advance education and innovation by fostering strategic partnerships between the Kimmel Orchard and Vineyard Educational Foundation and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, including Nebraska Extension, the Agricultural Research Division and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

By introducing Fellows to diverse agricultural systems and rural revitalization strategies, Seminar 10 in Nebraska City will provide a powerful new perspective on leadership, resilience, and the future of Nebraska's communities.

You're Invited!

Join Us for the First-Ever Nebraska LEAD Alumni Dinner in Nebraska City!

We're excited to invite our alumni and their guests to the inaugural Nebraska LEAD Alumni Dinner, held in conjunction with Seminar 10 of the Nebraska LEAD Program. This special evening will give you the chance to connect with current LEAD Fellows, hear about their experiences in the program, and learn how they're engaging in the brand-new Resilient Rural Systems seminar in Nebraska City.

- Monday, December 8, 2025

Social Hour – 5:30 p.m. Dinner – 6:30 p.m.

The cost to attend is a \$50 per person donation, with proceeds supporting the Nebraska LEAD Program. To register, please call the LEAD office at 402-472-6810 or email us at leadprogram@unl.edu. Registration closes December 1.

Don't miss this opportunity to reconnect, celebrate LEAD and be part of a new tradition!



Nebraska LEAD 43 Fellows visited Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City on February 5, 2025. In recent years, Fellows only made a brief stop in Nebraska City—along with visits to Peru State College and Cooper Nuclear Power Plant—while en route to Kansas City for their National Study/Travel Seminar. By reimagining Seminar 10 as a full Nebraska City experience, Fellows will now have the opportunity to engage more deeply with rural agriculture and community vitality in southeastern Nebraska. This shift also allows the National Study/Travel Seminar in year one to be more focused and efficient.

Welcome New NALC Board Members!



Josh Frizzell (LEAD 35)

A native of Osceola now living in Kearney, Josh Frizzell is a broker and cash advisor for AgWest Commodities in Holdrege. His passion for agriculture began on his grandparents' farm and has shaped his career ever since. A UNK graduate with degrees in ag business and marketing, Josh has served on several local boards and enjoys golf, sports and time with his wife, Becky, and their sons, Koby and Jaxon.



Boone McAfee (LEAD 38)

Originally from Leigh and now living in Omaha, Boone McAfee serves as director of stakeholder relations for Bayer Crop Science. A UNL graduate in agricultural economics, he began his passion for agriculture on his family's diversified farm and has built his career through roles with the Nebraska Corn Board and Cargill. Boone represents Bayer on various ag boards and committees, enjoys helping on the family farm, and cheers on the Huskers with his wife, Sarah.



David Moss (LEAD 40)

Originally from Burr and now living in Lincoln, David Moss serves as a developing markets officer with Farm Credit Services of America. He continues to farm with his dad and uncle in Otoe County. A UNL ag business graduate with an MBA from Ashford University, David has stayed active in leadership through Farm Credit, CASNR and the LEAD Alumni Association. He and his wife, Tarryn, have two sons, Cayson and Merrick, and enjoy farming, golfing and spending time outdoors.



Darrell Kahler (LEAD 32)

Originally from Osmond and now living in David City, Darrell Kahler is director of the protein ingredient division for Thomas Foods International USA. A 35-year food industry veteran and Kearney State College graduate, he has held roles in operations, R&D, quality assurance and sales. Darrell and his wife, Julie, have three sons and stay active in their community, where he has served in leadership roles with several local organizations.

Congratulations!

- Payton (LEAD 43) and Libby Schaneman on the birth of their daughter Hazel Louise
- Trevor (LEAD 43) and Jenna Spath on their marriage on May 31, 2025
- Cale (LEAD 38) and Rachel Buhr on their marriage on June 21, 2025
- Garrett (LEAD 44) and Avery Elfeldt on their marriage on July 19, 2025
- Dillon (LEAD 44) and Caty Kuehn on their marriage on August 2, 2025
- Nate (LEAD 40) and Kaydra Parde on their marriage on August 9, 2025
- Cale Harrington (LEAD 43) and Callie Hamilton on the birth of their daughter Ila June on October 3, 2025
- Brennan (LEAD 43) and Lauren Costello on the birth of their daughter Rose Elizabeth on October 8, 2025
- Stephanie (LEAD 40) and Justin Hartmann on their October 11, 2025 wedding
- Bekah (LEAD 39) and Terry Bankson on the birth of their son Boone Randy
- McKinley Harm (LEAD 43) for receiving the 2025 Rising Star Award from the National Hydropower Association

LEADing the Way

- Kyle Shepherd (LEAD 26) was recently elected as the president of the board of directors for the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District
- Catherine Klein (LEAD 42) started a new position with Bayer Crop Science
- Lisa Lunz (LEAD 17) was appointed to the Nebraska Corn Board (District 4)
- Michael Dibbern (LEAD 38) was named president of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association
- Kelby Sudbeck (LEAD 42) was selected to be the new feedlot performance manager at Balance4Ward
- Amy Warner (LEAD 43) was appointed to serve on the Nebraska Wheat Board (District 5)
- Lucy Kimball (LEAD 43) began a new role with Raising Nebraska



Blezek Memorial Fellowship

Jared Stauffer (LEAD 43) of Lincoln continues his second year as the Dr. Allen G. Blezek Memorial Fellow. Established by the Nebraska LEAD Alumni Association and the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council, this fellowship honors the late Dr. Allen G.

Blezek, who served as director of the Nebraska LEAD Program.



Dr. Allen G. & Kay L. Blezek LEAD Fellowship

Shane Wohlgemuth (LEAD 44) of Funk was selected as the Dr. Allen G. and Kay L. Blezek Fellow for Nebraska LEAD Class 44. Established by Dr. Allen and Kay Blezek to support leadership development, the fellowship honors Dr. Blezek's lifelong dedication to

agricultural education. A longtime UNL professor and department head, Dr. Blezek founded the Center for Leadership Development and was the director of Nebraska LEAD from 1984-2008.



M. Eighmy Fellowship

Cale Harrington (LEAD 43) of Loup City begins his second year as the M. Eighmy Fellow. Established through the M. Eighmy Foundation LEAD Fellowship Fund, this award honors Mervin R. Eighmy, a Custer County rancher, animal scientist and former president

of Gooch Feed Mill. Before his passing in 2000, Eighmy created a foundation to support Nebraska agriculture, youth and education—efforts that continue today through scholarships, farm management initiatives and the Nebraska LEAD Program.



Gudmundsen LEAD Program Fellowship

Alexis Corman of Bridgeport was selected as the Gudmundsen Fellow for Nebraska LEAD Class 44. Established through the generosity of Pete and Abbie Gudmundsen, longtime Sandhills ranchers, the fellowship reflects their enduring support of the

University of Nebraska. Their donated ranch near Whitman became the 12,800-acre Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory, a vital research and education site. Alexis is the 15th Nebraska LEAD participant to receive this honor.



Neal E. & Leone S. Harlan Fellowship

Courtney Nelson (LEAD 43) of Norfolk continues her second year as the Neal E. and Leone S. Harlan Fellow. The Harlans have long supported agricultural and law programs at the University of Nebraska through initiatives such as the Harlan Vice

Chancellorship in IANR, the Neal Harlan Professorship of Agribusiness and scholarships within UNL's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and the College of Law.



Dr. James T. & Connie Horner Fellowship

Valerie Bohuslavsky (LEAD 44) of Columbus was selected as the second Dr. James T. and Connie Horner Fellow. Dr. Horner, founding director of the Nebraska LEAD Program, was a lifelong educator and leader who established LEAD in the early 1980s. Dr.

Horner dedicated his career to leadership development, proudly calling the Nebraska LEAD Program his greatest professional accomplishment.



Kreuscher LEAD Fellowship

Kelsey Scheer (LEAD 44) of Glenvil was selected as the second Kreuscher LEAD Fellow. Established by John and Kristi (Kammerer) Kreuscher of Gothenburg, the fellowship honors Jo parents, Allen and Marvin, for their lifelong dedication to

agriculture and community leadership. John, a LEAD 4 alumnus, has spent nearly 50 years in agricultural lending, while Kristi served in Nebraska's court system as Clerk Magistrate and Senior Business Analyst.



Lancaster County Farm Bureau LEAD Fellowship

John Sullivan (LEAD 43) of Superior begins his second year as the first Lancaster County Farm Bureau LEAD Fellow. Established to support Farm Bureau members dedicated to advancing agriculture, this endowment reflects the county organization's commitment to

leadership development and serves as an example for other county Farm Bureaus across Nebraska.



Larry V. & Linda J. Pearson LEAD Fellowship

Jaclyn Frey (LEAD 44) of Albion was selected as the second Larry V. and Linda J. Pearson Fellow. Established to support the Nebraska LEAD Program and agricultural producers from northeast Nebraska, the fellowship reflects the Pearsons' commitment to

leadership and community service. Larry, a Wausa native and retired Tenaska executive, and Linda, originally from South Dakota, have been deeply involved in civic, educational and faithbased organizations across Nebraska.



Frank & Shirley Sibert LEAD Fellowship

Neleigh Gehl (LEAD 43) of Ericson continues her second year as the Frank and Shirley Sibert Fellow. Lifelong supporters of Nebraska agriculture and the University of Nebraska, Frank and Shirley Sibert devoted more than 65 years to volunteerism and

philanthropy benefiting the Nebraska LEAD Program. Both graduates of Red Cloud High School and UNL, they left a lasting legacy of service. Neleigh is the 14th recipient of this fellowship.



Jerry & Naomi Warner Fellowship

Amy Warner (LEAD 43) of Edison begins her second year as the Jerry and Naomi Warner Fellow. Both UNL graduates—Jerry in agricultural education and Naomi in family and consumer science education—the Warners have long supported the Nebraska LEAD

Program and its impact on leadership development.



Kathy Wittler, DVM LEAD Fellowship

Chase Hoffschneider (LEAD 44) of Kearney was selected as the second Kathy Wittler, DVM LEAD Fellow. A LEAD 6 alumna from Cozad, Dr. Wittler established this fellowship to give back to the program that inspired her to pursue veterinary school

at age 50. After earning her DVM from Kansas State University, she practiced in the Omaha, Lincoln and Council Bluffs areas for 17 years before retiring.







Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation Scholarship Recipients

Since 2003, the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation has awarded \$1,000 scholarships to Nebraska LEAD Fellows who demonstrate strong commitment to agriculture and Farm Bureau leadership. Congratulations to this year's recipients:

LEAD 43: Jacobi Swanson of Wahoo, Austin Kniss of Minatare, and Courtney Nelson of Norfolk

LEAD 44: Alexis Corman of Bridgeport, Erika Coulter of Bassett, and Kelsey Scheer of Glenvil

To qualify, recipients must be active Farm Bureau members with "Professional Producer" status and, upon completing the LEAD Program, agree to serve in a county or state Farm Bureau leadership role.













APPLY FOR NEBRASKA LEAD 45!

Applications and nominations are now being accepted for Nebraska LEAD Class 45 which begins in the Fall of 2026.

Applications are due by June 15, 2026.
Visit LEAD.UNL.EDU to request an application or call 402-472-6810.

Condolences

The Nebraska LEAD Program extends our deepest sympathy to the families of:

- **Brett (LEAD 20)** and Marlene Heiting with the passing of their son, Corey
- John (LEAD 23) and Darren (LEAD 28) Nelson with the passing of their mother
- Susan Nelson (LEAD 26) with the passing of her father
- Doug Gibson, Friend of LEAD and former NALC board member
- Terry (LEAD 17) and Genie Dittmer with the passing of their daughter, Becky
- Gale Lush (LEAD 2)
- Anne Meis (LEAD 33) with the passing of her mother

Program
Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council

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