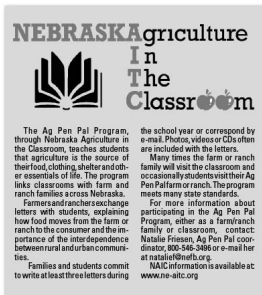


## Local farm life revealed through letters

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Wednesday, 28 July 2010 21:12 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 July 2010 21:14

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### Ag producers participate in pen pal program with students from city.

“You’ve got mail.”

Whether through e-mail or the old-fashioned letter route, city kids learned about agriculture the past year from local farmers.

Through Nebraska’s Ag Pen Pal Program, agricultural producers are matched with classrooms across the state.

By corresponding with students, farmers try to show how agriculture provides food, clothing, shelter and other essentials.

Kris and Perry Loostrom corresponded with a second grade class at Milliken Park Elementary in Fremont.

Kris said they sent cards and letters five times during the past year and received hand-written cards or notes from each student in the class each time.

“The kids were great to ask questions and share what they were doing.” she said.

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Jo Anderson of Gothenburg is a pen pal and is also on the ag promotion committee for the Nebraska Farm Bureau.

Kris said Anderson was helpful in obtaining promotional items from the Nebraska Farm Bureau to send.

“Each time we wrote, we tried to include some of those items for the kids to take home with them,” she explained.

Because the class was interested in pictures, Kris said they often sent those along with trivia about what was pictured.

Pat and Deb Hecox found time to correspond with a classroom of fourth graders in Ashland.

Deb said students were most interested to find out what crops they planted.

“It was interesting to me that the students didn’t know when crops were planted and how livestock is cared for,” she said.

The Hecoxes also sent pictures, workbooks and games about farming to their pen pals to increase their knowledge of agriculture.

“They were very surprised when we sent a pamphlet about pizza and how it was made from all agricultural products,” Deb said, noting that the class shared information with them about their school and personal lives.

From the country home of Page and Karen Peterson, elementary-aged sons Patrick and Evan corresponded with a fourth-grade class at McDade Elementary in North Platte.

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Even though North Platte is in central Nebraska, Karen said the students didn't seem aware of the need for agriculture.

Patrick and Evan said they liked getting letters from the North Platte students and answering their questions.

Evan said he enjoyed telling his story about the family farm to kids who may not have known about pigs or baby calves.

"Patrick liked researching and sending that information to the class," Karen said.

She said she asked the boys if they wanted to share again with the class or another one and they replied: "Of course, we have more to talk about."

The Loostroms shared a letter they wrote to fourth graders in Fremont.

Dear 2nd Graders,

Can you believe that school is almost out? I don't know about all of you, but our family is getting very excited about summer vacation!

Your field trips to the Omaha Children's Museum sounded like a lot of fun. As farmers, a great deal of the way our crops are planted and grown has to do with plant science. Science has even been able to improve the seed itself through cross-pollination and genetic modification.

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Why would they do that, you ask? Farmers want seeds that grow into strong, healthy plants and that can be free from disease and withstand the wind and heat.

Science helps the farmers achieve that. It also helps ranchers know which male animals to breed with which female animals to produce the desired result.

As promised, here is a picture of one of our baby calves. Interestingly, most of our calves look very similar to this one. Black calves are referred to as Angus and ranchers like this particular breed because they calve easy and do not have horns. Some people also claim that the quality of beef is superior. While we don't know if this is really the case, black cattle do actually bring a little bit more money when you go to sell them than, say a white calf, for instance.

This is our dog Lady. She is a border collie and, much like you and me, was born with certain unique and natural abilities.

Border collies are known for their high energy, agility, and natural instinct to 'herd'. When Lady sees cows, she immediately wants to get them together and get them moving in a certain direction. She does this by nipping at the cows' heels and barking! It's very helpful to have a working dog like Lady on a ranch.

Here is a photo of one of our neighbor's new colts. Do any of you have horses? This colt is what they call a pinto or paint because it has spots. The pinto horse is actually the most popular coloring in the United States and, as with the black Angus calf and the border collie, also occurs through selective breeding. In the American west, the Pinto has traditionally been regarded as a horse the American Indian favored as a war horse since its coloring provided a natural camouflage. Ranchers just like the variety of color.

We have enclosed a little something for you to take with you as you travel in Nebraska this summer. It is an I Spy game identifying different things associated with farming and ranching. It also has some wonderful information about the sites you'll see. Enjoy!

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We wanted to thank you again for all of your cards and letters this year. Your writing skills are coming along nicely! We want to encourage you to share your thoughts on paper and send some notes to someone you care about this summer. Each one of you has something to share and we have thoroughly enjoyed the notes.

Keep reading and writing over the summer and good luck in third grade!