

NCTA flips the switch for new irrigation technology

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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CURTIS—North of the main campus on a college farm laboratory, agriculture students in a new irrigation technician training program at Curtis can now put their hands on the latest center-pivot technology.

On Thursday, with a full complement of volunteers from various regional dealerships and cooperators, Reinke Manufacturing of Deshler, donated and installed an on-farm teaching tool at the University of Nebraska-Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture. It is the third pivot system at the NCTA field laboratory for student education.

“The new system will be used to irrigate a 33-acre field near the campus, as well as train students in both the irrigation technician concentration and agronomy division,” said Ken Goodall, Reinke director of sales, west region. “This system is being equipped with the latest in technology in an effort to educate students and keep them on the cutting-edge while studying to become irrigation technicians—a career with many employment offers.”

In addition to the irrigation system, Reinke is also donating supplies, parts and other equipment to supplement the NCTA-Reinke Irrigation Technician Concentration.

Nebraska leads the nation in total irrigated crop land with more than 8.5 million acres irrigated by groundwater and surface applications.

“Outputs from American agriculture have more than doubled in the past half-century while inputs have remained relatively constant,” said NCTA dean Ron Rosati. “The center pivot irrigation system is one of the key technologies responsible for this significantly improved agricultural productivity.

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“We appreciate the ability to partner with Reinke, to train young men and women on how to properly keep this technology functioning in Nebraska, where it is so vital to our agricultural industries.”

Students enrolled in the two-semester programs are required to take 34 credit hours of courses in electricity, welding, safety, mathematics and business communication. Program coordinator is Brad Ramsdale, who also is chair of NCTA’s horticulture and agronomy division. He teaches irrigation management, precision farming and agronomy courses.

“The pivot will be utilized already this summer for our student interns in training how to operate and maintain the pivot,” Ramsdale said. “Agronomy students are trained in irrigation scheduling to maximize water use efficiency, and are taught how a pivot nozzle package is developed to match field and soil conditions.”

Strong industry demand for skilled technicians across the U.S., and even globally, prompted NCTA to establish the new program in early 2014.

When all applicants and scholarship recipients arrive on campus this fall, the program will have 13 students enrolled in technician or associate’s degree courses. Some graduates will be ready to work with irrigation companies in May, 2015, said Scott Mickelsen, NCTA associate dean.

“It is great to forge this new partnership with a leading irrigation company,” Mickelsen said. “We are not only training technicians, but Reinke has stepped up with the pivot and tools. It is partnerships like the one between NCTA and Reinke that help make agriculture a bright future for all.”

Reinke is offering a \$1,000 scholarship to match local Reinke dealership scholarships for tuition, room and board assistance. In turn, the student-turned technician will provide three years of employment after graduation. Graduates may pursue Reinke PLUS (Proven Leaders in Unmatched Service) certification once employed with a dealer.

Ten workers installed the pivot at NCTA, representing the following dealerships: DSK Irrigation

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of Imperial, Electric Rain of Gothenburg; and Plains Equipment Group of McCook and North Platte locations. Holdrege Irrigation delivered the system to the field and Nelson Irrigation, Walla Walla, WA, donated the sprinkler heads.

A public ribbon cutting and program is slated for Sept. 12 after students return to NCTA for fall classes.

For more information regarding NCTA courses, contact the Office of Admissions or Ramsdale at 1-800-3CURTIS, or visit <http://ncta.unl.edu>.