

# 2021

## FARM TO SCHOOL INSTITUTE





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVENT

The Inaugural 2021 Nebraska Farm to School Institute was held virtually the week of June 14th, 2021. Hosted by the Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska Extension, this effort resulted from a successful grant application to the USDA Farm to School Grant Program. The Farm To School Institute model was developed by Vermont FEED using evidence-based best practices in professional learning. Farm to School Institutes are gaining momentum across the country and proving to be an effective model for schools and districts to develop collaborative action plans that grow farm to school activity. The Institute creates positive lasting impacts in classrooms, cafeterias, and communities.

An intended outcome for this project was to increase capacity within Nebraska Extension to more effectively deliver farm to school (F2S) programming. A second outcome was to deliver the Institute to at least eight school teams from across Nebraska and provide technical assistance and support from coaches to the F2S teams throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

To accomplish this first goal, from September 2020 to April 2021, three webinars were offered for Extension professionals to learn best practices in F2S programming. These webinars included speakers from across the country to highlight their F2S efforts and engage Extension professionals in dialogue. Each of these webinars was recorded and can be viewed here: [September 2020](#), [December 2020](#), and [February 2021](#).

In March of 2021, a Request for Applications was released to all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program in Nebraska, inviting schools or districts to apply to participate in the Institute. The Institute had capacity to host up to eight teams at the, with at least four of those teams coming from schools with greater than 50% free-and-reduced lunch (FRL) participation rates. Twenty-four applications were submitted. Requirements for participation included the formation of a team from each school with at least one administrator, one food service staff, and one Extension professional as team members. Teams could include up to seven members, with recommendations to include teachers, parents, students, producers, community members, and other relevant stakeholders.

The project team developed a scoring rubric to rank applications. Institute Teams were chosen based off of these scores, as well as consideration of team diversity, racial and ethnic diversity of student body, geographic location, school size, and FRL rates. The following Institute Teams were selected:

SCHOOL	GRADES	STUDENT POPULATION
Banner County School	Pre-K – 12	150
Burwell Public Schools	K – 12	291
Gering High School	9 – 12	640
Humboldt Table Rock Steinauer Public Schools (H-T-S)	Pre-K – 12	311
Overton School	Pre-K – 12	298
Pius X	9 – 12	1150
Southern Public Schools	Pre-K – 12	376
UMÓ <sup>N</sup> HON <sup>N</sup> NATION Public Schools (UNPS)	K – 12	450

# REGISTRATION OVERVIEW

## BREAKDOWN BY ROLE

TEAM	Administrator	Teacher	Extension	Food Service	Producer	Parent/ School Board	Other	Total
Banner County	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4
Burwell	2	1	1	1	0	0	2	7
Gering	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	6
H-T-S	1	1	1	0	0	3	0	6
Overton	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	7
Pius X	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	7
Southern	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	5
UNPS	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	6

## TOTALS



9

ADMIN



12

TEACHERS



11

EXTENSION



11

FOOD SERVICE



2

PRODUCERS



3

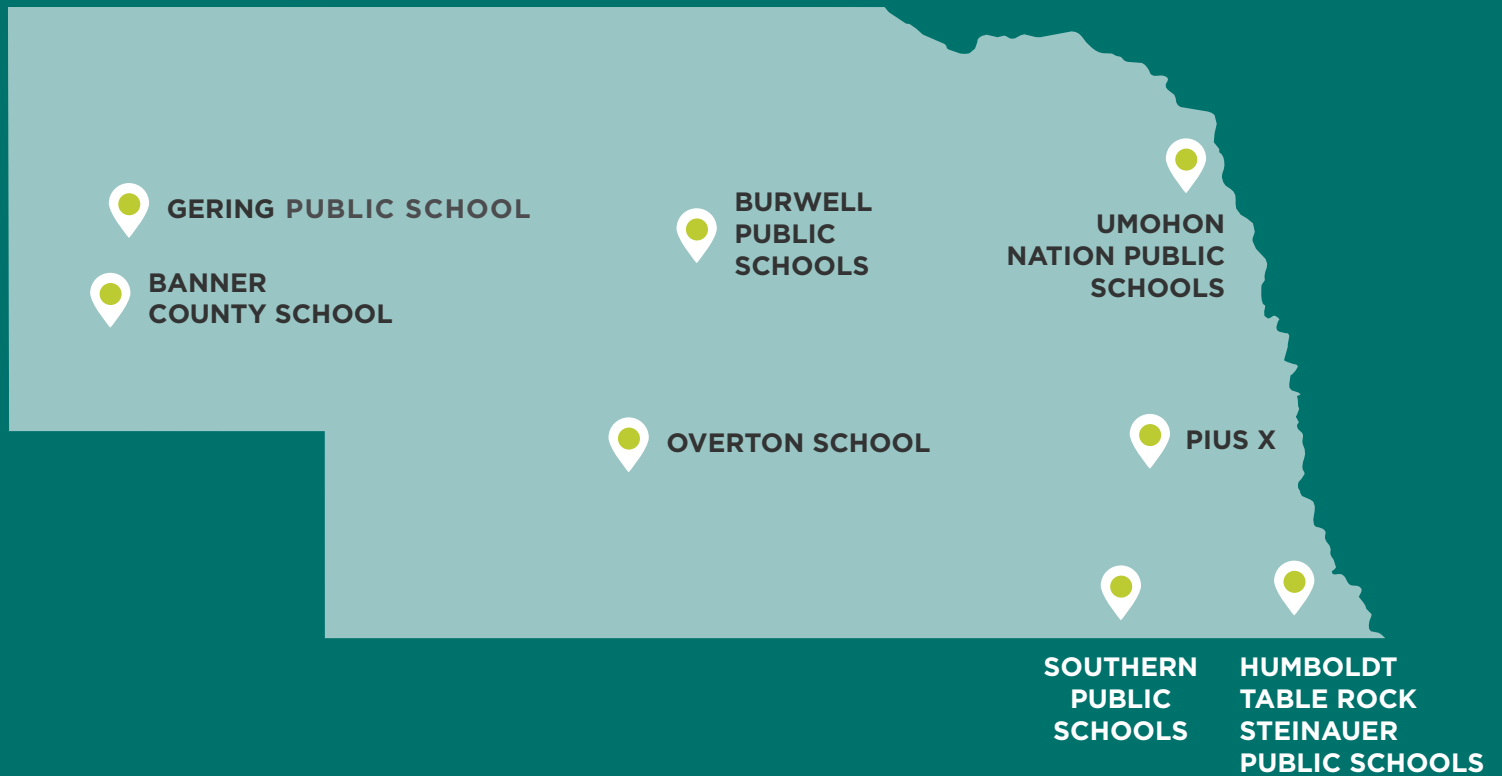
PARENTS OR  
SCHOOL BOARD  
MEBERS



4

OTHER

## TEAM LOCATIONS



**48**

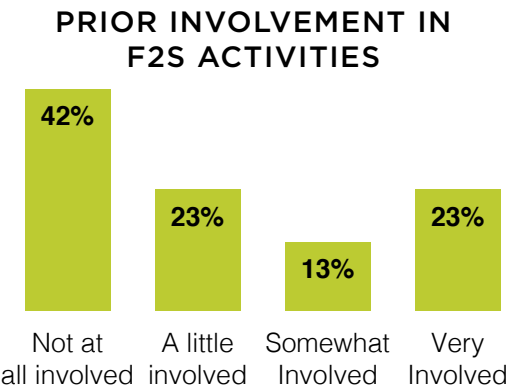
**TOTAL ATTENDEES**

# EVALUATION SUMMARY

Evaluation for this project was contracted to UNL’s Methodology Evaluation and Research Center (MERC) with guidance and input from the project team. Pre/post-test surveys were delivered to Institute participants to collect data on the effectiveness of speakers, materials, and delivery of information. Thirty-one responses were collected from the pre-survey and eighteen from the post-survey. Survey questions covered prior involvement in F2S activities and feedback on Institute speakers, among many other topics. A full synopsis of the evaluation can be found [here](#).

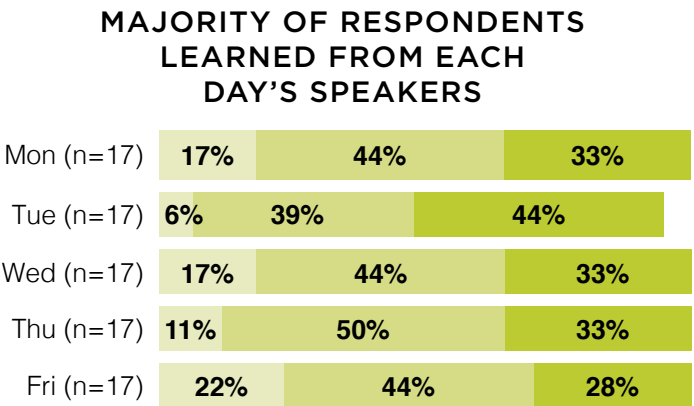
## PRIOR INVOLVEMENT IN F2S

Participants were asked about their previous experience in F2S activities. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported that they were “not at all involved” or only “a little involved” in F2S activities, while less than one-quarter of participants reported being “very involved” in F2S. This finding indicates that F2S is a relatively new concept in many Nebraska schools and aligns with what the project team knew from past work and data reported in the 2019 USDA Farm to School Census. The newness of F2S in Nebraska was a major motivating factor in the development of this project.



## LEARNED FROM DAILY SPEAKERS

Participants were asked to provide feedback on each day’s speakers to gauge how well the Institute presented information relevant to the teams. Later in this report, we provide information on each of the speakers from the Institute; recordings of each speaker can be found on the Institute website. Survey results indicate that participants found the speaker content valuable, with 72-83% of respondents indicating that they learned “something” or “a lot” from each day’s speakers. The speakers on Tuesday, which focused on the cafeteria aspects of F2S, received slightly higher ratings than the other speakers.



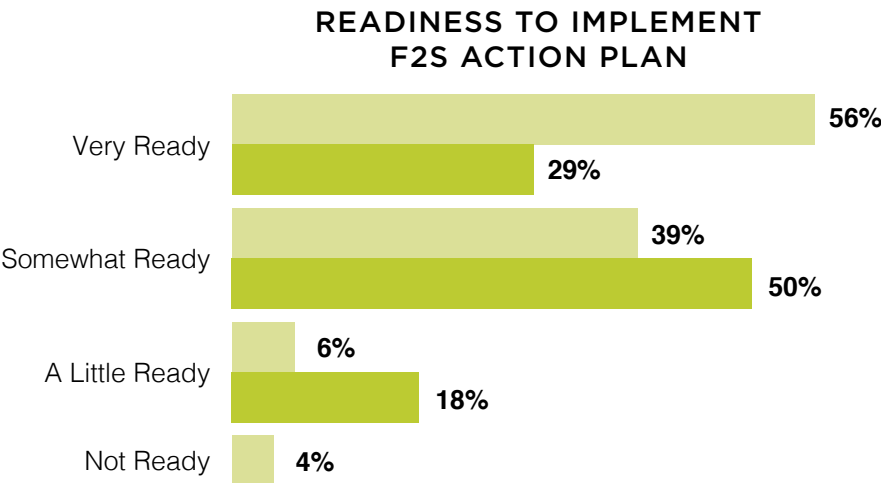
# HELPFULNESS OF COACH

Institute models across the country have shown that assigning a coach to work with F2S teams provides considerable value and leads to better outcomes post-Institute. We recruited several coaches from within Nebraska Extension to identify coaches from within Nebraska Extension to work with teams, thereby increasing the capacity of Extension professionals in F2S work. Of the eight teams at the Institute, five were partnered with a coach from Extension and three from other partner organizations.

Coaches helped coordinate the work of their Team at the Institute, and also continue coaching throughout the following school year as Teams work to implement their action plans. Coaches were introduced and met at least one time with their team before the Institute. Each day of the Institute, coaches organized meetings with their teams to debrief on the day's

content and to work on a section of the team's action plans. Post-Institute, coaches meet with their teams monthly. Given that most of the participants had never been involved in F2S efforts prior to the Institute, we saw the coaches as a critical component and essential for supporting teams through the Institute.

Feedback from participants clearly showed the value of the coaches during the Institute. Eighty-three percent of respondents said that the coaches were either "helpful" (12%) or "very helpful" (71%).



## READINESS

Finally, a key question in the evaluation was to identify the impact of the Institute content and trainings on the readiness of teams to implement their project plans. In the pre-survey participants were asked to rate their readiness to implement a F2S action plan. Less than one-third (29%) said that they were "very ready" to implement, with 68% indicating they were "somewhat ready" (50%) or "a little ready" (18%). In the post-survey results, we saw a big jump in participants indicating they were "very ready", nearly doubling from 29% to 56%.

# DAILY SUMMARIES

## DAY 1: F2S OVERVIEW

Day 1 of the Nebraska Farm to School Institute focused on establishing a baseline understanding about F2S across the country and within Nebraska. Welcome address speakers Julie Brewer and Cheryl Kennedy from USDA kicked off the day with an overview of USDA's active supports and future plans for F2S programs. Betsy Rosenbluth, Project Director at Vermont FEED, provided the keynote address. VT FEED is the organization that created the Institute's 3 C's model of change; "Change happens by connecting the Classroom, the Cafeteria, and the Community. Connecting all three of these will build a culture of wellness and staying power." Our project team provided detailed insight into the rest of the week's activities, as well as a deep dive into Nebraska's many F2S programs and projects.

[Slides](#)[Recording](#)

## DAY 2: CAFETERIA

Summary: Day 2 focused on the cafeteria elements of F2S. Keynote speaker Kendal Chavez from the New Mexico Public Education Department provided an overview of innovative local food procurement methods, building relationships that expand local purchasing, and best practices for increasing avenues for local purchasing. Additional speakers included a panel of Nebraska producers discussing the challenges and benefits of selling to local schools and suggestions for how school buyers can make it easier to source local food items. Panelists included Gary Fehr (Green School Farms), Justin Jones (Lone Tree Foods and Jones Ecofarm), Beth Corymb (Meadowlark Hearth) and Nancy Williams (No More Empty Pots).

[Slides](#)[Recording](#)

## DAY 3: CLASSROOM

Day 3 explored how F2S can be implemented within school classrooms. Topics included how to identify high quality curricula sources, the use of school gardens for teaching purposes, and the importance of equitable access to learning resources. Keynote speaker Raquel Vigil, Edible Schoolyards in Berkley, CA, spoke to the value of integrating farm to school into curriculum and engaging students with hands-on and experiential food and agriculture activity. In addition, several Nebraska organizations presented about their F2S educational programming and how teams from across the state can tap into, learn from, or be inspired by that programming.

[Slides](#)[Recording](#)

## DAY 4: COMMUNITY

Day 4 provided attendees with detailed information on how they can increase the staying power of their F2S programs with strong partnerships in their communities, how to obtain funding to sustain their efforts, and the importance of outreach and marketing to local media outlets. Keynote speaker Kimberley Donna from Georgia Organics outlined their efforts to connect numerous community partners with their F2S program. In addition, local speakers on Day 4 gave participants insights into Nebraska resources, funding, and partnerships to support their programs.

[Slides](#)[Recording](#)



## DAY 5: WRAP-UP & PRESENTATIONS

Day 5 brought the Institute to a close with final team presentations. Each team outlined their F2S action plans and were given the opportunity to receive feedback from other participants and our leadership team. Finally, keynote speaker Julianna Arnett from USDA provided participants with a high-level overview of how USDA supports F2S programs across the country.

Slides

Recording

# TEAM SUMMARIES

## BANNER COUNTY SCHOOL

Banner County Public Schools (BCPS) is a Pre-K-12 district serving 150 students in Harrisburg, NE. A predominately agricultural area of the state, 75% of BCPS staff are engaged in farming or ranching. The BCPS farm to school team has developed a strong local beef and pork sourcing program, as well as engaging students in hands-on learning through indoor tower gardens and other opportunities.

### **At the Institute, this team will:**

"Establish a school garden to support educational programming for students across all grade levels and to extend opportunities for student-to-student interaction among elementary, middle school, and high school students."

"Our secondary goal is to explore food production and processing as an economic option as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) cross-content collaboration with Family Consumer Science, Plant Science, and Business/Entrepreneurship."

## BURWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Burwell Public Schools is a K-12 district, serving 291 students, with a 47% participation in the free-and-reduced lunch program. Their team was the recipient of a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant in 2020, which helped them develop a strong team and make progress on their farm to school efforts.

### **Their plan for the institute includes:**

"[Developing] a Farm to School Action Plan that will provide the framework for building a culture where locally sourced foods are served in the cafeteria with Farm to School curriculum and hands-on activities for students K-12. The plan will explore new relationships with local agricultural producers for food procurement, student garden and greenhouse opportunities, recipe development, and taste testing events for students. Students will gain valuable habits in making healthy food choices that will decrease their risks for developing heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Students will explore agricultural careers that will directly affect the future of economic development in Burwell, Nebraska."

## GERING HIGH SCHOOL

Gering Public Schools is a K-12 district located in the Western Panhandle of Nebraska, serving 2,100 students. Their team is excited to expand on their existing farm to school programs at the Institute. Currently, the Gering team has a strong local sourcing effort working with area producers like the Meadowlark Hearth. There are also five hydroponic grow towers being used in science classrooms that provide learning opportunities for students.

**At the Institute, the Gering team has the following project plans in mind:**

"Gering High School Ag program will build a greenhouse by the end of 2021. The Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (Carole and Tina) will be available to offer suggestions and advice from their community garden experience. The overall goal is to share the harvest in two main areas, as a means of ongoing support for the GHS Ag Program and in partnership with local food pantries to serve the food insecurity of the community."

"Students will start growing some foods to be served in the school cafeteria. Nutrition education provided by the Culinary classroom or Nebraska Extension could be displayed in the cafeteria with the harvested produce."

## HUMBOLDT TABLE ROCK STEINAUER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Humboldt Table Rock Steinauer School District is a Pre-K-12 district serving 311 students. Their farm to school program is off to a strong start with a greenhouse that provides tomatoes and cucumbers to the school lunch program, and field trips to local farms for student learning opportunities.

**At the Institute this team will:**

1. Create an expanded school garden
2. Create educational experiences for students utilizing produce

"By expanding our school garden, we believe that we can provide additional opportunities for students of all ages to work and learn in the garden as an outdoor classroom that will help students learn how to raise vegetables and provide fresh produce for our school meal program."

"By utilizing the produce grown in our garden to create educational experiences, we can incorporate important food related topics into our curriculum including nutrition, food safety, food preparation, and food preservation. As the number of families who have their own gardens has decreased, along with the availability of family and consumer science courses, students are not as frequently exposed to information regarding the importance of vegetables in their diet, food safety, or food preparation and preservation methods."

## OVERTON SCHOOL

Overton Public Schools is a Pre-K-12 school district serving 298 students. With a greenhouse onsite, and a second being planned, plus grow towers in several classrooms, the Overton farm to school team has created great opportunities for hands-on student learning.

**At the Institute, this team:**

"Hope to gain more ideas for involving all grades of students in the greenhouse, not just those students who are in high school and take a plant science course. So, our first goal is to have every grade, Pre-K-12th grade, involved in the greenhouse at least twice per school year."

"Our second hope is that we can grow food to be used in the cafeteria so that students have ownership of their lunch and the ability to grow their own food. We need ideas on scheduling in the greenhouse as well as food that can be grown in a greenhouse setting. This second goal is to have student-grown produce as part of the lunch program once a month."

## PIUS X

Pius X is a private high school in Lincoln, serving 1150 students. Pius' farm to school team has had success sourcing local food for their school lunch program, working closely with Green School Farms to identify seasonally available produce.

### **At the Institute, this team will:**

"Re-establish a school garden that will foster student interest in learning how food is produced, including possibly adding a hydroponic garden. We seek to increase participation in all aspects of planning, growing, and preparing meals via the landscaping club and home economics classes. We would love to see if we can extend it to luncheons for others in the school such as staff or administration."

"A second goal is to leverage our current efforts to source locally by more actively promoting the benefits of local and healthy eating to our student body, staff, and families. This will involve promotional activities such as posters, table tents, social media, tours, newsletters, and website articles, to name a few."

## SOUTHERN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Southern Public Schools is a Pre-K-12 district in Wymore, NE serving 376 students. The farm to school efforts at Southern include strong partnership development including securing several sources of funding from local businesses and institutions and development of agricultural classes for student learning.

### **At the Institute, this team:**

"We want to teach about food production and what agriculturists do for our community and school to students who don't know a lot about the agricultural world. We also just want to make sure that we are educated properly so that we teach the next generation about where their food comes from."

## UMÓ<sup>N</sup>HO<sup>N</sup> NATION PUBLIC SCHOOLS

UNPS is a K-12 district, serving 450 students. The UNPS team has developed numerous farm to school initiatives, focusing on culturally-relevant programming for the students, all of whom are registered members of the Omaha Tribe. Recently, the Omaha Tribe donated seven acres of land to the UNPS farm to school team to assist with their efforts to teach students about food productions and healthy eating.

### **At the Institute, the UNPS will focus on:**

"Start up funding for the UNPS F2S Program for seeds [and] implements, and training for the UNPS F2S Committee to gain an understanding of the various components for a successful F2S program. The UNPS F2S Program would provide accessible healthy food to an impoverished Tribal community for both students and their families in Macy, Nebraska. This program would also support the core UNL values of diversity, equity, and inclusion that is so badly needed at this university along with establishing a positive relationship between UNL and a tribal community here in Nebraska."



# SPEAKERS

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



MONDAY

### BETSY ROSENBLUTH

Betsy is Project Director of Vermont FEED, a nationally recognized farm to school program of two partnering organizations: the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) and Shelburne Farms. Betsy also coordinates the Vermont Farm to School Network and the Northeast Farm to School Collaborative and serves on the Advisory Board of the National Farm to School Network. Prior to Shelburne Farms, Betsy was Director of Projects at the Orton Family Foundation. Betsy holds an M.S. in Community Economic Development.



TUESDAY

### KENDAL CHAVEZ

Kendal Chavez is the Farm to School Specialist at the New Mexico Public Education Department and works with 58 rural, urban, and tribal school and school district entities. With partners, she has worked to develop strategic infrastructure to deepen the impact of local purchasing programs in New Mexico schools through a people-first approach focused on the most disenfranchised in the farm to school system: small-scale farmers and student nutrition practitioners. She is currently the Food and Hunger Coordinator for the Office of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. Kendal's passion for school food started in 2011 as a service member in the inaugural class of FoodCorps, where she worked in classrooms, school cafeterias, and later as the New Mexico Fellow.



WEDNESDAY

### RAQUEL VIGIL

Raquel Vigil is an educator, consultant, and curriculum designer specializing in creative education, food curricula, and land-based pedagogies. She is interested in pedagogy that sets up deep inquiry, critical thinking, and imagination. Raquel is the Senior Curriculum Specialist at the Edible Schoolyard Project and co-designer of Edible Education at home. Before joining Edible Schoolyard, she founded an Urban Agriculture Career Technical Education Program at Mission High School in San Francisco, where she taught for seven years. Raquel holds a master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University.





THURSDAY

## KIMBERLY DONNA

Kimberly Della Donna is a “Culinary Nutritionist”, a classically trained chef with a focus on nutrition. As the Farm to School Director for Georgia Organics, Kimberly oversees a statewide agricultural economic development and nutrition education program that collaborates with state agencies and stakeholders to align and promote Farm to School and Farm to Early Care initiatives. Kimberly is the chair of the Georgia Farm to School Alliance, a network that joins statewide agencies working in food, farming and nutrition to coalesce resources and support for Farm to School, and to create a dialogue for building statewide programming. She also serves as the Georgia Organics representative for our Core Partner role with the National Farm to School Network.



FRIDAY

## JULIANNA ARNETT

JuliAnna Arnett is a Local & Regional Food Systems Senior Marketing Specialist at the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service.

## SESSION SPEAKERS



**ANDREA ALMA**

USDA Farm to School



**JULIE BREWER**

USDA Food & Nutrition Services



**JUSTIN CARTER**

Center for Rural Affairs



**JEFF COLE**

Beyond School Bells



**BETH CORYMB**

Meadowlark Hearth



**GARY FEHR**

Green School Farms



**GREG FRIPP**

Whispering Roots



**JUSTIN JONES**

Lone Tree Foods/Jones Ecofarm



**CHERYL KENNEDY**

USDA Food & Nutrition Services



**CARYN KUSLEIKA**

Midwest Dairy



**TERESA MARDEZEN**

Farm Credit Services



**PAMELA MUERI**

Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln



**BETH NACKE**

Nebraska Extension



**MITCH RIPPE**

Nebraska Cattleman's



**SHARON SCHAEFER**

Evolution of the Lunch Lady



**MEGAHAN SCHAFER**

Nebraska Farm Bureau



**NATALIE SEHI**

Nebraska Extension



**JAIMEE TROBOUGH**

The Big Garden



**NANCY WILLIAMS**

No More Empty Pots



**DONNIE WOLTERS**

NE Department of Education



**JEFF YOST**

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# ATTENDEES

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