

Northeast Community College Proposal for an Agricultural Communication AAS

1. Program Description

- A. Institution proposing the program: Northeast Community College
- B. Name of program/credential: Agricultural Communication, AAS
- C. Other programs offered in this field by Northeast: Communication (AA), Media Arts (AAS), Agronomy (AAS), Animal Science (AAS), Diversified Agriculture (AAS), Ag Transfer (AA/AS), Precision Ag (AAS), Urban Ag (AAS), Mechanized Ag (AAS), Natural Resources (AS), Agribusiness (AAS), Business (AAS)
- D. CIP code: 01.0802 Agricultural communication/journalism
- E. Science, Technology, Agriculture, Math, and Humanities Division
- F. Norfolk campus, most of the classes are available online or virtually, but the student will need to be on campus for at least a portion of the program to complete the degree
- G. Date approved: Proposed date to begin the program: Fall 2026
- H. Description and purpose: The interdisciplinary agricultural communication program is designed to equip students to effectively convey information about agriculture, food, and natural resources utilizing multiple outlets. This program blends coursework in broadcasting, business, communication, and agricultural sciences to prepare students for careers in media, marketing, public outreach, content creation, or community engagement. Graduates will be prepared to work for agricultural organizations, government agencies, media outlets, non-profit organizations, private companies or to start their own communication-related business. 60-64 credit hours.

Learning Outcomes.

- Risk management – Assess, manage, and communicate risk in an agricultural enterprise
- Profitability – Measure profitability based on factors contributing to the enterprise
- Safety – Apply and communicate effective safety measures and procedures within a variety of agricultural settings
- Professionalism and communication – Display professional behaviors and effectively communicate in written and oral formats
- Environmental stewardship and natural resource management – Evaluate management options and apply stewardship principles for the preservation and care of natural resources

2. Evidence of Need and Demand

A. Need for the program

Eleven agricultural communication professionals in northeast Nebraska (and surrounding areas) were contacted to assess the need for the proposed program. They were asked to review proposed coursework, indicate if they believed an AAS degree would be regarded as a valid credential for employment, and identify trends in the agricultural communication landscape that could impact educational needs.

All eleven respondents answered affirmatively that an AAS degree would qualify applicants for openings at their workplace. Five of the 11 held management roles and were involved in hiring decisions. All five indicated they would hire people with an AAS degree. Two of them added, unprompted, that they see advantages in the hands-on aspects of a community college degree. Almost all agricultural communication programs in the U.S. lead to bachelor's degrees (some offer master's degrees as well). The general sentiment was that someone with a bachelor's degree would be viewed advantageously for management roles or for positions requiring a greater level of specialization – such as crisis communication or international agriculture. However, most job roles identified in northeast Nebraska could be performed by someone with an AAS.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates media and communication workers, all others (SOC: 27-3099) will experience 8% growth rate in job openings nationally. O*Net Online lists the outlook for Media and Communication Workers (all other; 27-3099.00) as “bright”, with rapid growth in job openings given as the reason for that designation. The average wage for Nebraska was listed at \$41,710 in April 2025. When the same site was revisited in July 2025, the Nebraska data was unavailable but the average worker in Iowa earned \$47,310 with a national average of \$71,770. Source : <https://www.onetonline.org/link/localwages/27-3099.00?st=NE>.

In 2023, 9.4% of media and communication workers, all other, were self-employed. That portion is expected to grow to 10.8% by 2033. There are opportunities for graduates in this field to become entrepreneurs or do freelance/remote work. Source: <https://data.bls.gov/projections/nationalMatrix?queryParams=27-3099&ioType=o>. Career paths with remote or entrepreneurial opportunities increase options for graduates who intend to live and work in rural communities such as those in northeast Nebraska.

In Lightcast, SOC codes (27-XXXX) for relevant jobs were selected including media and communication workers (all other - 3099, audio & video tech - 4011, news analyst, reporter and journalism - 3023, and public relations -3031). From June 2021 through June 2025 two hundred eighteen different employers posted 2476 unique jobs within a 120-mile radius of Norfolk, Nebraska. Out of those jobs, 1,546 listed a required education level of associate's degree, high school, or else no education level was listed. This averaged out to just over 32 postings per month. One thousand two hundred forty-seven jobs listed a bachelor's or graduate degree as a requirement. The median wage for postings in this time frame was \$47,500. The data did not allow parsing to break out the advertised salary range for only the jobs requiring an associate's degree. Stakeholders were very clear that ag communication graduates are not only getting jobs in ag-related businesses but are successfully working in communication jobs unrelated to agriculture. There are no SOC codes directly related to ag communications, therefore the 27-XXXX search was

determined to be the next best option to estimate potential job openings for which ag communication AAS graduates would be qualified to apply.

B. Demand for the program

Between 2020/2021 and 2024, the land grant universities in South Dakota and Iowa reported significantly increased ag communication/journalism enrollment from 50 to 70 and 70 to 107, respectively. That averages out to be 18 (SDSU) to 27 (ISU) graduates/year. Source:

<https://www.agweek.com/lifestyle/education/from-farm-to-front-page-south-dakota-state-universitys-ag-communications-degree-expands>. Iowa State revamped their ag communication pathway in 2023 toward interdisciplinary curriculum. Source:

<https://www.cals.iastate.edu/news/2023/new-iowa-state-agricultural-communication-major-approved-fall-2023-semester>. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (personal communication, June 2025) graduates 10-15 ag communication students annually. We could not identify any ag communication graduates from Wayne State College for the past three academic years. Based on the growth in neighboring states and slightly lower number of BS/BA graduates in Nebraska, there appears to be unmet demand for ag communication degrees in northeast Nebraska.

During the stakeholder needs assessment, respondents in media outlets emphasized that agricultural knowledge and background are viewed favorably when hiring new staff, but they may not hold specialized titles like farm director or farm editor. They will need to handle assignments on topics outside of agriculture as well as ag-related ones. These new hires will need enough baseline skills and knowledge to quickly develop a high degree of proficiency in the modality of that particular business (print, audio, video, web, etc.)

Jobs with ag businesses/agencies/organizations are a mirror image in that they require a high degree of agricultural knowledge but will be more generalized in the software and equipment utilized for content creation. Graduates in these roles will work across many modalities but produce content on mostly agricultural topics. The coursework in this proposed program was selected to provide a broad base of knowledge in ag content as well as different modalities combined with the opportunity to utilize elective credits for a deeper dive into an area of interest.

Stakeholders with media outlets and with ag businesses frequently mentioned marketing and sales skills and knowledge. That input led to the inclusion of many of the business courses listed in the proposed curriculum.

- a. Expected # of students in Years 1-5. This program is anticipated to attract 6-8 new students in Year 1 and grow to 12-15 by Year 5.
- b. Number of students to make the program viable: Since no specialized courses, infrastructure or faculty time are needed for the program as proposed, it could operate with very few students. If any specialized courses are developed in the future, at least eight students would be required to make that course viable.

Students will also have versatility in the job market. Stakeholders with agricultural communication degrees noted that they have worked for agencies, firms or businesses that were not agriculture

focused. In other words, the “ag” portion of this program will not limit options for graduates to rural areas or to agricultural media/businesses.

3. Adequacy of Resources

The proposed program was built utilizing existing courses, instructors, and infrastructure at Northeast.

A. Faculty and Staff Resources.

- a. A program director or faculty member from agriculture, media arts, and business will work with the first year advising team to develop a plan for advising ag communication students in year one and assigning them to faculty advisors for year two. Training will be needed for the selected advisors, but we believe the advising load can be absorbed by existing personnel. The courses selected for this program would not require any new full-time faculty. If demand is high enough to require additional sections of any required classes, these new sections would be assigned as overload to full-time faculty or adjunct faculty per the discretion of the program director or dean.
- b. A faculty/staff advisor for an Ag Communicators of Tomorrow chapter would be needed.

B. Physical facilities.

- a. The proposed program will be part of the Science, Technology, Ag, Math, and Humanities division. The ag program director and humanities program director will both include the ag communications data in their annual program reviews and report back to the division dean. The data will be provided to the Health, Public Services, and Business division dean for their administrative assessment.
- b. No additional physical facilities are anticipated. Northeast has existing agriculture classrooms and labs, broadcast media classrooms and labs, and business classrooms. The ag communication students will attend classes alongside students in those three areas, utilizing existing course capacity more fully.
- c. There are no plans to renovate, construct or lease additional facilities to meet the needs of this program.

C. Instructional Equipment and Informational Resources

- a. Computers. No additional computers or computer laboratories are needed.
- b. Data services. No additional data services are needed.
- c. Telecommunication connectivity. No additional connectivity is needed.

D. Budget projections

Expenses

The agricultural communications program will utilize existing faculty, courses, and facilities. Around Year 3, we estimate the program will have enough students to begin exceeding course capacity for one lab course, necessitating an additional section (1 credit). In Years 4 and 5, additional courses (4 credits) will require an additional section. Years 4 and 5 estimate paying for five credits of faculty

overload or adjunct faculty. The estimated adjunct or faculty overload pay is calculated at \$1040/credit in 2026-27 with a 3% increase each year. For all other courses, the existing capacity and faculty load will support the added students from this program. There is also a small cost if an Ag Communicators of Tomorrow club is established, with the faculty advisor receiving a \$500 stipend each year and the ag department budgeting \$400 in Year 1 for startup money for the club.

The estimated expenses for the new program are \$900 in Year 1, \$500 in Year 2, \$1570 in Year 3, \$4912 in Year 4 and \$6180 in Year 5. The total estimated expenses are \$13,063.

Table 1. Projected Expenses – Agricultural Communications Program

	Year 1 2026-27	Year 2 2027-28	Year 3 2028-29	Year 4 2029-30	Year 5 2030-31	Category Subtotal
Faculty*	\$500	\$500	\$1570	\$4912	\$6180	\$12,663
Professional						\$0
Graduate assistants						N/A
Support staff						\$0
Operating						
General operating (ACT club startup money)	\$400					\$400
Equipment						\$0
Library or IT resources						\$0
New or updated space						\$0
Annual Subtotal	\$900	\$500	\$1570	\$4912	\$6180	
Total Expenses						\$13,063

*Estimated adjunct pay or faculty overload for 1-5 credits of additional sections of required classes once the program grows to where the number of students exceeds current course capacity

Revenues

We estimate 6-8 new students in Year 1 and 12-15 by Year 5 with each student completing 15 credits of coursework per semester and 60 total credits by graduation. We anticipate that students switching to this major or transferring in will offset any that do not persist from their freshman year to sophomore year. The calculations assume graduates finish in two years and do not adjust for those that take 150-200% of normal time to complete.

Table 2. Revenue Sources for Projects Expenses – Agricultural Communications Program

	Year 1 2026-27	Year 2 2027-28	Year 3 2028-29	Year 4 2029-30	Year 5 2030-31	Total

Reallocation of existing resources						\$0
Required new public funds						\$0
Tuition and fees – freshman*	6 students \$23,580	8 students \$31,440	9 students \$35,370	10 students \$39,300	12 students \$47,160	\$176,850
Tuition and fees – sophomores*		6 students \$23,580	8 students \$31,440	9 students \$35,370	10 students \$39,300	\$129,690
Total Revenues						\$306,540

* Resident tuition for 2025-26 is \$110/credit + fees \$21/credit for a total of \$131/credit. For simplicity, future years are estimated at the same rate.

4. Avoidance of Unnecessary Duplication

- a. Similar programs offered in Nebraska include:
 - i. University of Nebraska-Lincoln (BS in Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Communication Option)
 - ii. Wayne State College (BA or BS Agricultural Communication and Leadership)
 - iii. No AAS, A.S., or A.A. programs in Nebraska were identified
- b. Similar programs offered within states that are members of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact
 - i. North Dakota State University (BS Agricultural Communication)
 - ii. South Dakota State University (BS Agricultural Leadership, Education, Communication and Science, Agricultural Communication Specialization)
 - iii. University of Minnesota (BS Agricultural Education, Communication and Marketing; MS Agricultural Education and Communication)
 - iv. Southwest Minnesota State University (BS Agricultural Communication and Leadership)
 - v. Kansas State University (BS Agricultural and Natural Resources Communications; MS Agricultural Education and Communication)
 - vi. Iowa State University (BS Agricultural Communication)
 - vii. University of Missouri (BS Agricultural Education Communications and Leadership)
 - viii. Missouri State University (BS Agricultural Communications)
 - ix. Southeast Missouri State University (BS Agribusiness: Ag Communications)
 - x. Northwest Missouri State University (BS Agricultural Media)
 - xi. University of Wisconsin-Madison (BS, MS, Ph.D. Life Sciences Communication)
 - xii. University of Wisconsin River Falls (BS Ag Marketing Communications)
 - xiii. University of Illinois (BS Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications: Agricultural Communication concentration)

- xiv. Illinois State University (BS Agricultural Communication and Leadership)
 - xv. Michigan – none found
 - xvi. Purdue University (BS Agricultural Communication)
 - xvii. Ohio State University (BS, MS, Agricultural Communication)
- c. N/A

5. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education

- a. Meeting the needs of students. This major has broad appeal to employers and provides a wide range of professional job opportunities for graduates. An AAS program reduces the student's time to receive a credential compared to other offerings in Nebraska and states adjacent to northeast Nebraska, which are BS or BA degrees. Based on conversations with potential employers, the coursework outlined in the proposed AAS degree would adequately prepare students for employment in this field. An AAS program will make the 2+2 pathway with Wayne State College more discoverable (as well as a 2+2 with UNL which is currently under discussion). Students benefit through the reduced cost of attending a community college even if they change pathways to transfer on for a bachelor's degree before seeking employment. We do not anticipate the AAS program competing with the bachelor's degree programs already offered in Nebraska and instead see potential to attract more students to this field by offering a low-cost option to get a credential that qualifies them for employment.
- b. Meeting the needs of the state. Based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics growth data cited above (8% increase in jobs for media and communication workers) and the growth in ag communication enrollment seen in South Dakota and Iowa, there appears to be a need to increase the workforce in this field for Nebraska. This major has the potential to prepare graduates to take leadership roles in their local communities as well as work in the communications field. Rural communities frequently highlight the need for a younger generation of residents to step into leadership roles such as volunteer boards, elected office, or planning community events. Ag communication programs frequently include the word "leadership" in the degree and include coursework that develops skills that can be utilized for the benefit of local communities as well as for employers.
- c. Meeting needs by building exemplary institutions. This program will be innovative due to its interdisciplinary nature. The combined coursework in media arts, agriculture and business will also be efficient to deliver as no new infrastructure, faculty or courses are needed.
- d. Meeting educational needs through partnership and collaboration. The proposed program will be a model within Northeast for developing interdisciplinary programs. It will also provide an avenue to build partnerships with industry representatives who host interns and participate in advisory committee(s). Northeast will also continue to develop or update articulation agreements with area colleges and universities for agricultural communication. The AAS program will be a cost-effective pathway for

students to directly enter the ag communication workforce. We firmly believe the addition of an ag communication AAS will not compete with our four-year partners. It is our experience that having an established AAS program (such as already exists for agronomy or animal science) makes the corresponding transfer pathway more discoverable and ultimately viable for students who may have needed to hone their academic abilities or experience an internship before gaining the confidence to pursue a bachelor's degree.

- e. Facilities planning to meet educational needs. Northeast provides accessible, safe, well-maintained spaces for students to learn, live and thrive. Ag communication students will have opportunities to learn on the Acklie Family College Farm and utilize broadcasting and media equipment and software they will encounter in their future career.
6. Advisory Committee Review. The February 2025 Ag Advisory Committee meeting included discussion of potential programs to add in the future. Ag Communication was endorsed by the committee with ensuing discussion emphasizing the need for good communication skills among their employees, even those outside of their marketing, publicity or communications jobs.
7. Course Syllabus. The proposed course sequence for an Ag Communication AAS is attached.
8. Other Documentation.
9. Approval signatures
 - a. Faculty/staff
 - b. Dean
 - c. Vice-President of Educational Services

Appendix 1 – Agricultural Communication AAS Program of Study

Agricultural Communication AAS

The interdisciplinary agricultural communication program is designed to equip students to effectively convey information about agriculture, food, and natural resources utilizing multiple outlets. This program blends coursework in broadcasting, business, communication, and agricultural sciences to prepare students for careers in media, marketing, public outreach, content creation, or community engagement. Graduates will be prepared to work for agricultural organizations, government agencies, media outlets, non-profit organizations, businesses or to start their own communication-related business.

FRESHMAN YEAR

First Semester

- BRDC 1010 Introduction to Mass Media.....3
- JOUR 1200 Writing for Print & Digital Media3
- AGRI 1105 Issues in Agriculture.....1
- AGRI 1500 Microcomputer Apps in Ag3
- CINE 1700 Post Production I3
- ENGL 1010 English Composition I3

16 credits

Second semester

- AGRI 1005 Precision Ag Systems3
- AGRI 1410 Intro to Ag Economics3
- COMM 1110 Public Speaking3
- AGRI 1310 Ag Marketing System or BSAD 2520 Principles of Marketing3
- MATH 2170 Applied Stats3

15 credits

Summer options (select one)

- AGRI 1300 Cooperative Internship.....3
- AGRI 2020 Crops & Irrigation (online)3
- AGRI 2040 Livestock Production3
- AGRI 1115 Issues in Ag II (must be taken in preceding semester) + AGRI 2115 Global Opportunities in Agricultural Leadership Studies4

3-4 credits

SOPHOMORE YEAR

First semester

- CINE 1000 Camera and Lighting I2
- CINE 1010 Camera and Lighting I Lab.....1
- Select one4
 - AGRI 1131/1132 Plant Science + lab
 - AGRI 1030/1040 Soil Science +lab
 - HORT 1010 Horticulture Science
- AGRI 1010 Animal Science3
- AGRI 1340 Animal Science lab1
- AGRI 1600 Drone Operations1
- AGRI 1610 Drone Operations Lab1

13 credits

Second semester

- AGRI 1420 Interpersonal Skills3
- Elective course(s)*.....4-6
- BSAD 2530 Advanced Marketing.....3
- AGRI 2880 Principles of Ag Selling or BSAD 2130 Salesmanship2-3
- AGRI 2890 Capstone.....1

13-16 credits

Total: 60-64 credits

*Select from AGRI, HORT, BRDC, CINE, AUDR, GCAD, BSAD, INFO or natural science.