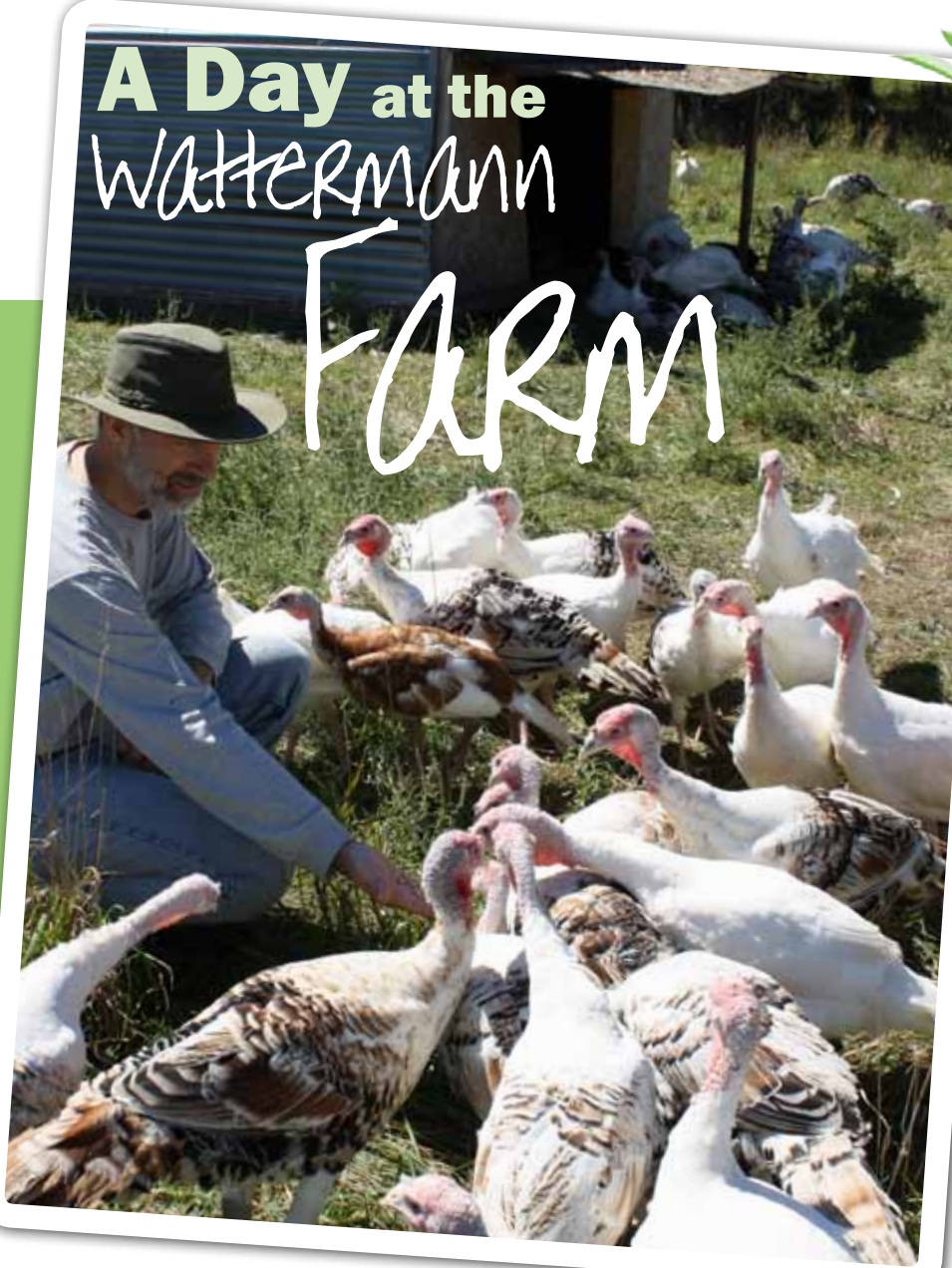


October/November 2010

# A Day at the Wattermann Farm



NEBRASKA  
Sustainable Agriculture Society

## Features

- | A Day at the Wattermann Farm
- 4 Feeling a Connection to the Land
- 7 Sponsorship Packages & Exhibitor/Sponsor Form

## Regulars

- 2 Classified Ads
- 5 Director's Note
- 4 OCIA
- || Membership Form

By Rita Brhel, newsletter editor

I knew today would be a treat as I drove up the winding lane back to a secluded farmstead. There were belted dairy cows on one side and a flock of young turkeys on the other. Back in the trees lounged a flock of hair sheep. Closer to the house was a flock of laying hens and a garden. Randy Wattermann and his children were busy cutting firewood for the upcoming winter, while mother Trina busied herself in the kitchen. Fortunately, Randy Wattermann was able to take a break to visit with me about his family farm.



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## Announcement: 2011 NSAS CONFERENCE IS COMING SOON!

- Join us for the 2011 NSAS Conference February 18th and 19th in Columbus. The keynote will be Chuck Hassebrook, executive director of the Center for Rural Affairs. Nominations for the NSAS annual awards are due by November 1st. The awards are "Beginning Farmer", Agriculture Educator Award, and Farm Family of the Year. Visit [nebsusag.org/conference.shtml](http://nebsusag.org/conference.shtml), for up to the minute news and additions to the Healthy Farms conference. We are also seeking donations for the annual auctions. We will have the live auction on Friday night and the silent auction on Saturday. These are both great opportunities to support NSAS!



**RITA:** To begin with, can you tell us about how the farm came to be?

**RANDY:** Trina and I moved here 12 years ago from Northern California. My dad is from Holt County, and my great-great-grandfather homesteaded not too far from where our farm is located, so there's a genealogical link. We also wanted to move out here because it's a better place to raise our eight children.

Our friend Dale Hipps of Lyons moved out here first, and then we decided to come, too. I have the blessing of a job where I can work anywhere – my background is agricultural economics and banking, and I sell software to banks over the phone.

I am also a distributor for Nebraska for Fertrell products – organic, natural soil amendments, fertilizers, and livestock feed supplements. And I sell ground, organic poultry feed that we mix and grind here at the farm.

**RITA:** So, did you have any experience in agriculture growing up?

**RANDY:** I grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, but even there, we had FFA. The only thing was that our judging contests centered around horticulture, not livestock and crops. But I did it all – the judging contests, public speaking, the state farmer. And I worked in retail & wholesale nurseries in high school and college.

At home, in our backyard in Los Angeles, we had chickens for eggs, turkeys that we butchered, and we raised rabbits. So, coming to Nebraska and starting up a farm wasn't a complete culture shock.

We've enjoyed it and have never looked back.

**RITA:** Tell us about the farm.

**RANDY:** The farm is 27 acres, and the main goals are to raise as much of our own food as we can, and to serve as an educational tool for our children. Growing and selling food to others comes after this.

It is a diversified farm, a farm of generations ago. We milk our cows by hand. We save their steers for beef. We raise our Katahdin sheep for the lamb. We raise hogs, usually Berkshire purchased from another former NSAS Board member Victor Novak, for pork. We have laying hens for the eggs, guineas, heritage turkeys, and a garden. The turkeys are the only enterprise that we plan for a purposeful surplus, to sell to others, but we often have other sur-

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Submit your classified ad to appear in the next issue! Contact [healthyfarms@gmail.com](mailto:healthyfarms@gmail.com) for more information.

plus to sell as well. While we do a little selling directly, we try to funnel all that we can through the Nebraska Food Coop.

It's worked out well. It can be hard to fit in, but Wattermann is not a familiar completely foreign name around here. But yet they know me as "that crazy Californian," so what we've got going on here isn't that much of a surprise.

**RITA: Tell us about your involvement in NSAS.**

**RANDY:** We've been involved in the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society for years, and I used to sit on the Board of Directors. Since 2005, I've been working mostly on the Nebraska Food Coop.

NSAS is a wonderful networking resource. I point it out to anyone starting out looking at organic or natural.

It's also a great incubator. The Nebraska Food Coop, Buy Fresh Buy Local, Slow Food – these organizations started out with NSAS, and are still here.

**RITA: So, what do you foresee for the future?**

**RANDY:** We hope to safely launch our children on their own paths, first of all, with the help of the farm.

We plan to continue learning about grazing as best as we can on a small acreage.

And I'd like to experiment with additional poultry specialties like ducks. I helped start up a small poultry processing unit 4 miles from here to sell within the state of Nebraska, and am a part of its Nebraska Poultry Growers Nonstock Cooperative. To be successful, we all must find our niche, and our niche is taking advantage of that facility nearby and of the Nebraska Food Coop.

It would be fun someday to do full-time farming instead of selling software, but you never know when to make that jump or if you should.

**RITA: What advice do you have for the beginning producer?**

**RANDY:** Be patient. Read lots. Explore lots of what other people around you are doing. Network and build relationships. Ask questions. Don't get frustrated. Don't jump into huge amounts of debt to do it. Don't try to do it all at once.

There's not one great big pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. There are lots of different pots of gold. Don't get stressed out about what another person is doing that's different than you. Figure out your niche.

**RITA: What else are you hoping to teach your children?**



**RANDY:** Day-to-day chores provides for good character development. There are also limitless entrepreneurial opportunities. My 9-year-old is growing broilers, and it makes for a great homeschool project learning how much they cost, how much they eat and what that costs, how much they sell for, and figuring out the profit or loss at the end of the year. So he bought 25 birds and sold them on the Nebraska Food Coop and made some money.

The older children learn to put records in a [computer] spreadsheet. One of my teens sells specialty summer squash and is learning to keep track of labor, because if you're spending tons of hours on something, that makes a difference on how profitable it is. Or, you make the decision that you're OK with less profit because you get more enjoyment out of it. But you shouldn't be doing one thing or the other because you're flying blind and not keeping track of the purpose or the goal.

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# Feeling a Connection to the Land



time – but what Flynn Sokolov wanted them to get from the class more than a love for spinning was a feeling of connection with the animals that grow the fiber they were putting on the spinning wheel and the land that fed those animals. That connection – that’s the secret to world peace, she said.

“I have had a lot of time to ponder this and I think I understand – and I think people with animals understand this more – it’s about connection: feeling a connection between yourself and the land,” Flynn Sokolov said as the wool roving in her hand magically turned into a yarn skein.

Flynn Sokolov herself doesn’t own a farm or fiber animals, and she’s right that that feeling of a connection is even stronger in people who do. Suzy Hassler owns a goat dairy near Sutton, Neb., and whether hand- or machine- milking – though, more so with hand- milking – she feels that connection to the land through working with her goats and then using the milk in her cooking and homemade soap business.

David Langley, a bison producer from Durham, N.C., echoes what most farmers, whether livestock or crop producers, whether conventional or sustainable, say about this connection.

“Our family has always had a strong connection with the land,” he said. “Our feeling is that we have a responsibility not just to the land itself, but also to our ancestors and the way the land provided for them. So we all felt the land here was worth protecting.”

Charlie Greenbacker of Durham, Conn., likens this feeling of connection with one’s heritage – a feeling of familiarity tied to an ancestral background of farming.

*By Rita Brhel, newsletter editor*

If everyone sat down to a spinning wheel just 15 minutes a day, there would be world peace. So said Gandhi, according to Stephanie Flynn Sokolov.

Flynn Sokolov is a Boulder, Colo., woman who taught a beginning spinning class at the 2010 Scotts Bluff Valley Fiber Festival in Mitchell, Neb., in September. She’s been spinning for 15 years and weaving for eight years.

“I didn’t choose to spin,” Flynn Sokolov said. “I felt like I had no choice, like it chose me. It was meant to be.”

The class’s participants varied in their backgrounds – from sheep producers seeking a second enjoyment from their animals to city folk looking for a new pas-



"I never lived and worked on the farm, and since I have no appreciation for the joy that comes out of such hard work, I do not desire becoming a farmer," he said. "But I do remember visiting the farm as a young boy, with a feeling of wonder as I petted the cows and looked over the vast expanse of land. And with my entire family around me, and seeing how my father still longed for this place, I knew that this land really was our home."

Some may also call that feeling of connection to the land as an appreciation for agriculture. Colin McCrate of Seattle, Wash., who identifies himself as an urban farmer, advocates for city dwellers to try out gardening, poultry, goats, or other traditionally farm-oriented tenets as city ordinances allow.

"It offers a real pastoral connection, a real farm feeling," he said.

Lois Mateus and Tim Peters, who own Tallgrass Farm outside Louisville, Ky., say that appreciation – that feeling of connection – is the driving factor for development of their farm.

"My psyche is deeply rooted in the natural and cultural history of Kentucky farming," said Mateus whose purchase of Tallgrass Farm with husband Peters marked her return to farming since childhood. "Tallgrass Farm has become my locus. The natural rhythms — the color, texture, feel, even the smells — the connection with the land has always been in my blood. I love the space, the seasons, feeling the weather before it gets here. I remember watching my father search the sky at the end of the day and evening for what tomorrow's weather, and thus his work, would be like."

Because of this connection, she strives to not only to make a living off of Tallgrass Farm but to be the best steward of the land as possible.

"It is my desire to continue to restore and revive this land and then to leave it, better than we found it, preserved in perpetuity from development and sprawl. Both of us revere nature and champion individuality and farm spirit," Mateus said. "We recognize that one cannot legislate aesthetics and stewardship of the land, or mess with a farmer's independence, but we know it is right for us to save and protect this farm. We try not to intrude on nature. Parts of Tallgrass Farm are still wild, and with our conservation easement, always will be. That's the heartbeat of the place."

For Peters, this love of the land is directly related to stewardship.

"Our work here is slow and steady, a thoughtful development of conservation and how wildlife benefits agriculture," he said. "Tallgrass Farm is a model of what can be done to reclaim poor rocky soil covered with cedars. Stewardship is essential and one has to make personal choices that are environmentally and interpersonally beneficial."

Peters adds how this feeling of connection has spilled over into other parts of their lives – an investment in a major project in Louisville that will eventually champion locally grown food.

Robin Kerber of Accord, N.Y., came to the same kind of conclusion while watching culinary students work with local foods during class one day: "The consensus was clear: local food is simply great. But it wasn't just the food that made the night unforgettable. It was the feeling that we were working as a unified group, rather than as individuals. By the end of the evening, most would have to agree that life feels more meaningful when you understand the connection between land, food, and community."



## Director's Note



Planning is well underway for the annual NSAS Conference. We are pleased and fortunate to have Nebraska's own Chuck Hassebrook as a keynote, as well as Abe Collins of New Soil Security to be a keynote. I believe their insight and expertise will enhance the role of sustainable farming in Nebraska and provide a boost for beginning and transitioning farmers, as well as strengthen the resolve of current sustainable farming! We are also excited to have R.P. Smith, the Cowboy Poet, provide the entertainment for the All-Nebraska Dinner and Auction during the conference. Another new feature that we will have is the FAQ. This will be an event at the conference featuring sustainable farmers from across the state. Farmers Answering Questions will be open to the public to showcase how sustainable agriculture can play a role in revitalizing rural America and more! Farmers will be able to promote their farms, sell any products they have, and of course network. Anyone interested, please send me contact me. We are also in need of donations for the silent and live auctions.

(continued on p.6...)

## Weeds in Crops & Forage Improvement A Serious Issue

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(... continued from p.5)

Last year, we had a great turnout and several really good donations. If you have any donations, please send me an email.

We are also excited to announce the dates for the next Farm Beginnings Nebraska Program. The first course will be held December 11th at the ARDC near Mead, Nebraska. This will be the third class that NSAS has lead, and we are excited for the line-up of speakers and topics. This is a great program for anyone interested in getting in farming, in transitioning to a more sustainable operation, or for anyone interested in expanding their current operation. Topics include holistic management, budget planning, marketing, financing, networking and more! Email me at [farmbeginning-snebraska@gmail.com](mailto:farmbeginning-snebraska@gmail.com) for details.

Another exciting event that NSAS is helping with is the Western Sustainable Crop and Livestock Conference, "Revitalizing Rural Communities." It will again be in Ogallala, Nebraska, and will be on December 4th. It will feature our own Kevin Fulton as the keynote. There will also be exhibits and local foods. For information about sponsor and exhibitors, email me at [healthyfarms@gmail.com](mailto:healthyfarms@gmail.com). For information about the conference, email Liz Sarno at [esarno2@unl-notes.unl.edu](mailto:esarno2@unl-notes.unl.edu).

~ *William Powers,*  
*executive director of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society*

## Announcement: WESTERN CONFERENCE COMING SOON

- Western Sustainable Crop and Livestock Conference "Revitalizing Rural Communities" will be at the Platte River Inn (308-284-3623) in Ogallala - Saturday - December 4, 2010. Keynote: Kevin Fulton will discuss his grass-finish beef operation and his efforts to help beginning farmers. Workshops so far; Multi species grazing - Doug Anderson; Web Marketing Connie Hancock; Berry Production; Rural Health what changes are coming down from DC, Tom Rauner; Alternative Crop Production, Possibilities and Markets, Dipak Santra; Grass-Beef Workshop, Kevin Fulton Exhibitor and Sponsor Opportunities are available and information can be found in the newsletter and by contacting William Powers at [healthyfarms@gmail.com](mailto:healthyfarms@gmail.com) or 402.525.7794 Check out the Platte River Inn website: <http://platteriverinn.com/>. There is a limited number of rooms reserved at \$72.99/night (2 queen beds in a room) for the conference. Other questions please contact Liz Sarno, 402-309-0944, [esarno2@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:esarno2@unlnotes.unl.edu)



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***For inclusion in conference materials please return form with payment by November 24th, 2010.***



# OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

## OCIA NE #1 Board of Directors

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## Controlling Noxious Weeds Is Up To Everyone - How Organic Farmers Can Comply With State Law

Liz Sarno, Extension Educator, Organic Project Coordinator

All land owners are responsible for controlling noxious weeds whether you live in town or on a farm. What are your options when you cannot or are unwilling to use herbicides to control noxious weeds? I am not referring to the farmer who has a weedy field with lots of fox tail and button weeds. Those weeds are not noxious although they can hurt a farmer's yield and profit. When I am referring to are Canada Thistle, Purple Loosestrife, Saltcedar, NS Spotted Knapweed. These are invasive and aggressively spread.

What course of action can you take if you are a certified organic market gardener or farmer and are selling products organically? For example, you have a field of wheat loaded with Canada thistle. How are you going to comply with the Noxious Weed Control Act and control the Canada thistles? Yes, you do need to comply as it is the law but you also have to comply with organic regulations as well. In order to sell your crops as certified organic you are inspected yearly. The inspection reviews your farm records and fields to verify that you have adhered to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) Standards. NOP land requirement states that harvested crops being sold as organic must have had no prohibited substance for a period of 3 years immediately preceding harvest of the crop. So what can you do to control the noxious weeds and avoid losing income from sales of certified crops? In addition, lose your certification and have the expense of transitioning again.

On one hand you must follow the rules of the NOP but on the other hand every landowner or property manager must follow the Nebraska Noxious Weed Act. State laws must be adhered to and being organic is not an excuse for noncompliance. There is no reason not to comply with all state and federal laws. Luckily there are many steps organic farmers can take to avoid using prohibited substances.

The first step is to **communicate** with your county weed control supervisor. Let them know you are aware that you have noxious weeds and are willing to work with them to develop a plan for control. Remember, if your county weed supervisor has contacted you about noxious weeds on your farm ground or roadsides, they are doing their job which is to enforce the Noxious Weed Act. It is possible for you and your county weed supervisor to develop a reasonable plan to control noxious weeds on your farm. Many county weed supervisors are more than willing to work with you to come up with a creative plan for control. Keep in mind your plan may need to include several methods of control: biological control using insects, increase crop rotations, adding cover and green manure crops, grazing livestock, mechanical and possibly hiring weed walkers to hand-rogue weeds. If your county weed supervisor is not able to help you develop a plan there are other resource persons. You can contact the University of Nebraska or the State Department of Agriculture for persons to help you develop a plan.

Organic farming in general requires more labor and fewer inputs. Unfortunately, noxious weeds will show up the same time as many other farming operations need to be done. To do a good job at organic farming intensive management is necessary to control weeds at each step of your farming operation. Your plan should incorporate a combination of practices to control weeds. Weed control starts from selecting clean, weed-free seed for planting and continues all the way through harvest. Good cultural practices such as field bed preparation, cultivation and timeliness are extremely important for weed control.

Understanding how the plant reproduces will help you decide the best method of control. Sometimes adjustments have to be made on the spot. When cultivating through a patch of Canada thistles take

not to cut through them and spread the roots through the field. For example, Canada thistle is a perennial that reproduces from roots and seeds. If Canada thistle is a problem in your row crops then a strategy for control may be to plant the field into alfalfa for three years.

Once you have identified the best way to handle the noxious weed you can develop a plan to control it. You may have to increase the number of crops in your rotation or you can try mechanical control by mowing, chopping out by hand or various types of tillage. At UNL, we have started to experiment with using a flamer to control Canada thistles and plan to evaluate flaming on leafy spurge.

Bringing in livestock can be tricky. If you over-graze a pasture, you can actually make it easier for certain weed seeds to get established. However, developing an intensive system of grazing such as "Mob Grazing" can improve and restore balance to pastures and help encourage the native grasses to compete with noxious weeds. You may not own livestock but this is a great way to collaborate with a farmer looking for pasture ground. Find someone who is willing to graze cattle to manage weeds or hire a professional grazer. In some cases goats have been proven to do an excellent job in controlling certain weeds especially on rough terrain where mechanical control would not be possible.



**Goats, if managed properly, can be useful for certain weed control**

Biological controls take patience. It may be years before you see any results. Again it is so important to understand the life cycle of the weed you are trying to control so you're not implementing contradictory practices. Identify natural enemies that cause stress on weed populations will encourage native plants to compete. If you plan to use insects you need to work with an entomologist to calculate numbers needing to be released, location, etc.

UNL has four research farms with certified organic ground conduction research on cover crops, organic winter wheat varieties, flaming and crimping. On January 8, 2011, UNL Extension will sponsor a workshop with Randy Anderson, USDA-ARS weed ecologist from Brookings, South Dakota. Randy will discuss a weed management approach that is based on disrupting weed population dynamics with cultural tactics. In conventional agriculture, this approach has reduced herbicide use 50% while still managing weeds effectively. A prototype organic rotation will be presented. For more details, contact Liz Sarno, cell: 402-309-0944 or <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/web/organic/events>.

So, if noxious weeds are a problem on your farm get started this fall after harvest come up with a plan for control and communicate with your

county weed control supervisor how you intend to implement. For additional resources: UNL CropWatch: Organics: <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/web/organic/home> and ATTRA Organic IPM Field Guide: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=148> and ATTRA Thistle Control Alternatives: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/thistlecontrol.html>

For help in developing an organic weed management strategy, contact, Liz Sarno, Extension Educator and Organic Project Coordinator at: Office: 402-584-3837, Cell: 402-309-0944 or Email: [esarno2@unl.edu](mailto:esarno2@unl.edu)



## **Plan to Attend the 2011 OCIA Annual General Membership Meeting**

Join us at the Nebraska City Lied Lodge during the week of February 9-11, 2011. Details will be forthcoming.

The evening sessions will feature top-notch presentators speaking on issues pertinent to sustainable and/or organic farmers and consumers that choose to buy and eat local foods.

We will be sourcing local, organic meats. If you will have pork, beef or poultry available, please contact Tami at 402-474-0113.

The Organic Crop Improvement Association was established in 1985. It is a non-profit international association of organic farmers, processors, traders, and manufacturers who have joined forces to promote partnerships, provide information to help growers improve crops and soil, build environmental stewardship, and provide certification services.

**OCIA Nebraska #1  
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**Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society**  
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- **Laura Demmel**
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**Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society**

*Membership Form*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

- Choose Membership Level:
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Student/Supporter
  - \_\_\_\_\_ \$45 Member
  - \_\_\_\_\_ \$60 Sustainer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Steward
  - \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 Benefactor
  - \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Corporate Membership

Please mail this form and payment (make checks payable to NSAS) to:

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