

## The Battle on the AG Field is Won in the Classroom

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It always seems strange to me that we call our semester that starts in January here at NTCC the "spring" semester. Yet our weather has been in a constant state of flux between winter, fall and spring since December. In 2017 the persimmon seed prediction of heaps of snow has yet to come true and from our chickens to the insects to flowers and forage ~ nature is definitely struggling to determine what its normal course of action should be.

### ***Climate Change dictates new farm rules***

Unfortunately, this new roller coaster of weather patterns is just another step in our experiencing Climate Change up close and personal. While I do not believe that this

means that we are on a dramatic march to a future of starvation and failed ecosystems, I do understand that we cannot continue to do the same things that we have always done and expect different results. Sometimes in life where you have found proven methods of success – it can be extremely difficult to let go. New ways of farming are often tough to learn, accept or implement for those of us that have fought so hard just to survive in an agriculture industry that defies so many.

### ***Sustainable Living***

NTCC Ag Program does not just teach those new sustainable practices, we LIVE them. While definitely not an easy task, the operation of our 250 acre farm allows us to demonstrate and research the trials that all area farmers are experiencing. At the same time, we exist to provide a living lab for our college students. For the past 5+ years our Ag program and farm has been transitioning to a more sustainable farming operation. Most of you driving past our campus on farm to market road 1735 in Mount Pleasant since 2010 might have noticed the addition of the futuristic looking Whatley Agriculture Complex



and solar array. Perhaps you thought that this high-tech facility was the finest part of our program. In this case as in agriculture, sometimes you have to dig a little deeper to see what the true facts are. The story that started with the near impossible task of constructing a solar powered, rain water harvesting LEED certified green platinum facility was just the beginning. Thankfully, I have been blessed to be commissioned to "tell the rest of the story".

### ***Lessons from the farm***

New techniques and even some very old ones have been tried, adopted or rejected on our farm to better meet the demand of our current climate and markets and increase overall sustainability. Companion cropping, diversity mixes, co-grazing, no-till gardening, compost tea and many more techniques are now common practices in our arsenal of weapons we are using to reach our goal of sustainability. Unlike some businesses who find that unique sweet spot that they paten and profit from – we are first and foremost here to instruct and gladly share the good, the bad and even the ugly lessons from our farm.

### ***How could you join-up with us?***

The most direct path to join us is to enlist and register for classes at NTCC. We currently offer a variety of face to face college credit courses that will have you directly involved in our operations and provide degree seeking students' opportunities to do so. We also offer continuing education workshops like the **Backyard Homestead Workshop** that will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> in a successful series of workshops for farmers to be taught in the past 3 years. This course is a 3-week Friday's only course taught on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. Participants can expect to learn sustainable practices with meat goats, backyard chicken flocks, gardens and pastures for small farming operations. Class time is 8 am to noon each Friday and will be hands-on learning from lecture in the classroom to implementation in the greenhouse, gardens and fields. Registration for the course is now open and is just \$25 per Friday class or \$60 if you take them all! If you need more information on each class, how to register and more call Rene' McCracken at 903-434-8267. You can also keep track of us by following us on Facebook at [NTCC Ag Department](#).