

A two-semester technical program to train irrigation service personnel launches next month at the University of Nebraska-Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) in Curtis.

“The Irrigation Technician Certificate Program will educate students for service technician positions in the expanding center-pivot irrigation industry,” said Dr. Brad Ramsdale, who heads the agronomy and irrigation components of NCTA’s Ag Production Systems (APS) Division.

“The curriculum is specifically designed to provide students with the necessary skills in electricity, welding, safety, pumping dynamics and communications,” he said.

NCTA faculty and adjunct faculty from the irrigation industry will teach the courses.

Fall classes will feature core courses in electricity with applications to the irrigation industry. A major feature of the spring curriculum is the Mechanized Irrigation Systems course that focuses on the latest control systems used on center-pivots.

Rural landscapes across central and western Nebraska have become dotted with new center-pivot systems in the last few years, particularly as dry land crop ground is developed for irrigation, and as surface, furrow-irrigated farms are converted to the more-efficient sprinkler packages.

Nebraska has over 8.5 million acres of irrigated crop land and is a leader in center-pivot and irrigation components, says Ramsdale, and the top four pivot manufacturers internationally are based in Nebraska.

While each has its own internal training program, industry leaders applaud NCTA’s initiative for an in-depth, hands-on educational program. Partnerships are underway with some companies providing equipment, instructors, scholarships or financial resources to enhance the NCTA program.

Ken Goodall, Reinke’s western U.S. sales director, said the Deshler-based manufacturer will match local dealer sponsorships, up to \$1,000 per student. In return for the college financing and certificate, students will pledge to come back and work three years as dealership technicians.

“There is a dire need for irrigation technicians right now, with the populace growing and more need for food all the time,” Goodall said. “With population estimates to exceed nine billion people before 2050, American farmers need to grow more food, on the same acres, and they rely on mechanized irrigation to do that.”

Registrations are accepted now, with classes starting Aug. 26.