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Nebraska Agribusiness Club

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NEBRASKA AGRIBUSINESS CLUB
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and Harlan IANR Vice Chancellor
May 7, 2001

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you today.

I've now completed four months as University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and I welcome "every-opportunity" that comes my way to meet and talk with Nebraska's residents. I'm particularly happy to be here with you; I appreciate your interest in agriculture, and Ed Woepfel tells me that many members of this group are very supportive of the Institute, and worked hard to create IANR in the '70s.

Thank you for that. I think that everyone who "helped-create" the Institute more than 25 years ago was a person of vision who helped "provide" Nebraska with a great gift. I hope you know that "we" in the Institute are "very-conscious" that great gifts carry great

responsibilities, and we take those responsibilities especially-seriously as we "strive" to be good, helpful, trusted partners with the citizens of this state.

Please be assured that I see it as "my-responsibility" to champion the cause of agriculture, natural resources, and human resources for "all" of Nebraska.

Because I am new to the state, I have spent a great deal of the past several months "listening", seeking to learn as much as possible about Nebraska and its needs. I look forward to talking with you today to learn more.

I want to know "what" you think "are-the-greatest-challenges" facing agriculture, natural resources, and people in Nebraska in the coming years. I want to know what "your dreams" are for Nebraska. I want to know how "you think" the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources can be of assistance in helping Nebraska meet its needs and realize its dreams.

I find "one" of the things people often ask me when I meet them is "what" my plans are for the Institute. I need to make it "very-clear" that I did not come to Nebraska feeling as if I were a physician with a

prescription for IANR, the university, and the state. Personally, I am always "leery" of out-of-state "experts" who come in and start talking about what needs to be done "before" they ever do the listening necessary to find out. That's why I am spending a great deal of time in my first months traveling Nebraska, talking with and listening-to as many of our constituents as possible.

One thing I can tell you is that my plans and goals for the Institute will be based on my "very firm" belief in the land-grant university mission. I am a great admirer of 19th Century Vermont Senator Justin Smith Morrill, whose Morrill Act of 1862 created land-grant universities, and of Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into law July 2, 1862. I consider the Morrill Act one of the most far-sighted and far-reaching pieces of legislation ever passed by the United States Congress.

I can assure you that I believe we must always include our clients in the process of "helping" set the direction of our research and extension education

programs, and we must remember that people are looking to us to be of service to Nebraska. Working with people in this room and others across the state to develop them, I also can assure you that my goals for IANR will be "framed" by our land-grant university mission, the leading object of which, from the time these land-grant institutions were established to today, is "to work" with the people the university serves, and to take the resources of the university to the citizens of the state. The Institute is "a partner" with Nebraska in our priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people, and communities.

Because we in the Institute see ourselves as "partners" with Nebraska and understand the importance of agriculture in this state, we are concerned with what we perceive as Nebraska's dual economy, where urban areas prosper economically "while rural counties" economies suffer. We believe that what happens in rural Nebraska is important to this state; "it matters."

In fact, the entire University realizes "the

importance["] of rural Nebraska and has launched a multi-year Rural Initiative to place University resources at the disposal ["]of-people-and-communities["] in rural areas of the state. This initiative ["]steps up["] and ["]expands["] efforts ["]already-under-way["] throughout all campuses of the university to provide rural Nebraska with specific programs, services, and assistance in the areas of business development-and-entrepreneurship, e-commerce for small businesses, expansion of distance education, telehealth and telemedicine, and value-added agriculture focused on rural Nebraska needs. I hope you will ["]join us["] in our efforts to work with rural communities to find ways they can ["]survive and thrive["] throughout the state.

Perhaps you've ["]heard or read["] about the Rural Initiative in the news, and you've probably also ["]heard-or-read["] about the academic program investment priorities President Dennis Smith charged each campus with developing. Stories on various campuses' priorities have appeared in the news in the past month or so. Today I'd like to talk with you a bit about

the Institute's academic program investment priorities.

In doing that, I think it "good" to acknowledge that the word "priorities" can be emotionally loaded, in that it "sometimes" causes anxiety for people "because" the first-thing we all tend to look for on any such designated list is "our ^{OWN} specific interest. I want to be "clear" that the Institute's priorities are areas we "think" should be enhanced by acquiring new-resources to address stakeholders' identified needs. This does not "for a moment" imply that programs not on this list are not important.

In the Institute we chose to list program areas as priorities, "rather" than individual, specific programs, because we think listing priority areas provides us with "the flexibility" needed to move specific programs in and out as needs arise.

Agricultural Profitability is, of course, "on" our priority list. The Institute has a long-standing goal of helping Nebraska's agricultural producers achieve maximum profits from their management. We think it

important "to focus" efforts on adapting "emerging-technologies" such as advanced information technologies, geographic information systems, computer-based decision-support tools, and others to help develop alternative enterprises, and to improve production, efficiency, and profitability of livestock, crop, and ornamental "plant-production-systems". We hope "to-help" find ways "to-expand-opportunities" in global and domestic marketing, as well as in market development.

Biotechnology and Molecular Biology represents "another" of our priorities. Basic studies in gene expression and regulation, proteomics, which characterizes all the proteins in an organism and relates those proteins to the genes. ^{AND} Basic studies in "plant-and-animal" molecular biology ~~and~~ will provide "knowledge" to engineer plants and animals having desirable strengths. Technologies being developed through "research" in molecular biology provide tools that can benefit food production, food quality, plant, animal, and human health, as well as ^{TOOLS TO} develop products that have "less effect" on the environment. Nebraska

agriculture and value-added industries "clearly" need such improved technologies to remain viable.

Community Development is a priority for us. Rural Nebraska "lags behind" the rest of Nebraska and much of the United States in "a number" of social and economic indicators. To help both rural and urban communities "remain-strong" or to help them "regain strength," the Institute and University as a whole need to make "substantial-investments" in research and education in Nebraska communities and in the agricultural base that supports some of those communities.

Strengthening communities encompasses both economic and sociological efforts, such as entrepreneurial assistance and training, a host of technology and training "issues" related to acquiring and using emerging technologies, youth and leadership development programs, and helping Nebraskans prepare for an ever-changing workforce in which "today's-skills" may not match tomorrow's opportunities.

Another of our academic program investment priority areas is **Ecosystem Science**. Improved natural resources-

management and protecting environmental quality are
"major-themes" in the IANR strategic plan, and Nebraska's
unique geological history and its variability in
climate have created "a-natural-laboratory" on a scale
"ideally-suited" for ecosystem science. We think dynamic-
collaboration amongst scientists from a wide range of
disciplines spanning "both" the basic and applied
biophysical sciences and the social sciences is needed
to address key issues important to Nebraska, to the
Great Plains, and to the world. We hope to enhance
"existing-efforts" on global climate change, ecosystem
health and restoration of compromised-environments,
multi-functional landscapes, cropping system
diversification, and monitoring GMOs, and invasive
species.

I'm sure it's no surprise to anyone that **Food
Safety** "is-a-priority-area" for the Institute. We all
know food safety "is critical" to the health and well-
being of people living both within and outside our
state borders. While the U.S. food supply is
considered among the best and safest in the world,

"recurring-incidents" of food-borne illnesses continue.

The Institute "hosts" major multidisciplinary efforts to improve food supply safety - efforts that span the entire food-processing chain, from Nebraska farms and ranches to the restaurant plate or to consumers' tables. While productive, multidisciplinary programs have been initiated, we need "further resources" to adequately address "complex-problems" such as food-borne pathogens and safety-of-foods produced from genetically-enhanced-crops. We consider developing management techniques "to improve" pre-and post-harvest "food-safety" essential, and developing "analytical-procedures" to measure allergens and "transgenic-proteins" in grains to be a "national-need."

A Service Learning Program in Agriculture and Natural Resources is a priority with us, also. We are committed to preparing students for our changing society, and through the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources we plan to expand our emphasis on community and professional "service-learning" in agriculture and natural resources.

Service learning gets students "involved" in communities and partners' needs and "helps" prepare them to assume future leadership roles in a variety of agricultural and natural resources areas. It isn't enough for universities to just "train-students" in their chosen fields; we also must help them continue to develop their character, conscience, citizenship, tolerance, civility, and individual-and-social responsibility.

Value-added processing of agricultural commodities is another priority for us. Nebraska produces "vast-quantities" of commodities that can be converted into food, feed, energy, or industrial-products "before" leaving our state. We think that "increasing" value-added-processing of agricultural-commodities in Nebraska will "improve" the demand for our commodities, increase farm profitability, provide jobs, and help revitalize rural Nebraska. We also think the Institute plays "a key role" in value-added processing of agricultural commodities for food, energy, and industrial purposes.

Another of our priorities is **water resources and hydrologic system sciences**. The College of Arts and Sciences and the Institute will work together to strengthen programs that decrease water use, minimize contamination of ground and surface waters, restore water quality, characterize and monitor water resources, provide understanding of the interrelationships involved in multiple uses of water resources, provide policy analyses, and provide a better understanding of the basic physical, chemical, and biological factors "that-govern" the quality of naturally-occurring "fresh water."

And, of course, in addition to the priorities I've just mentioned, other IANR priorities are represented in the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, and we share "other" university-priorities with "city-campus" colleges such as Arts and Sciences and Engineering-and-Technology, working across disciplines to address Nebraska's concerns and to help "build" Nebraska's dreams. We are pleased to have a significant-number of joint program priorities with

other colleges; this cooperation "demonstrates" the
Institute's "interest" in interdisciplinary - programs on
the cutting edge of science ~~AND~~ TECHNOLOGY,

Thank you again for inviting me to be here with you
today. I "look-forward" to future conversations with
you.

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