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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 Woeppel 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.

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 multiyear 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. 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 heardor-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 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 emergingtechnologies 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. Basic studies in plant-and-animal molecular biology 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 develop products that have less effect on the environment. Nebraska

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

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 everchanging 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 dynamiccollaboration 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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