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Extension Retirees Luncheon

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EXTENSION RETIREES LUNCHEON
TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2001
JOHN C. OWENS
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here with you today. It is always a pleasure to visit with the people who have made the work we do in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources their work, and I want to thank each of you for the years and the gifts you gave Nebraska and the University as a representative of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. I am a strong supporter of extension because I have long believed that Cooperative Extension is the best "out of the classroom" educational opportunity ever devised.

I'm beginning my fifth month as University of Nebraska vice president for agriculture and natural resources and Harlan vice chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources here in Lincoln, and I know that as the "new guy on the block," it's only natural that people want to know my plans for the Institute, and each of the parts of the Institute that makes the whole. It's a common question.

The thing is, I've always been leery of people who arrive on a new job talking as if they have all the answers before they've even asked the right questions,

so I try hard not to be one of those people. I'm spending my first months in Nebraska doing as much listening as I can, to hear what our constituents across the state believe Nebraska needs, and the way we in the Institute can help. I'd like your views on that, too.

One thing I do tell everyone concerning my plans for the Institute, however, is this: any plans I work on for IANR will be based firmly on our land-grant ^{univ.} mission. I am a great admirer of Justin Smith Morrill, author of the 1862 Morrill Act creating land-grant universities, and of President Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into being on July 2, 1862. I like to quote the Morrill Act whenever I can, because I think it is ^{good} to remind ourselves why those of us in these land-grant universities are here. I am particularly fond of the phrase "***the leading object***," as in: "*the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes^v in the several pursuits and professions of life.*"

The leading object of land-grant universities, true when they were first established and just as true today, is to ^{work} with ^{the} people we serve, and to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of the University to the citizens of the state.

I see public-service as a land-grant university responsibility. I consider both the concept of service and the act of serving highly honorable. That is one of the reasons I am such a believer in extension.

But EXTENSION EDUCATION IS NOT JUST PUBLIC SERVICE IT'S EDUCATION !!

I would imagine few people know better than the people in this room that extension is constantly-evolving, as the needs of those we serve evolve-and-change. Every now and then I run into people who seem to have in their minds as their picture of extension today that wonderful Norman Rockwell painting that hangs in the Clifford Hardin Nebraska Center for Continuing Education and shows a county-agent examining a child's calf. It's as if they think extension is static and has not changed for decades.

While I like to think the responsiveness to, and interest in, clients' needs and concerns exhibited in that painting are as much as ever a part of the work extension conducts today, we all know that some of the areas in which extension works now are extremely different. I thought I'd visit with you about several of those this afternoon as a brief update on some of the exciting-work extension currently is doing across Nebraska.

Probably a good place to start is with a brief rundown of the programmatic thrusts of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educators. As you know, our educators serve all 93 counties from 83 office locations. Almost all have

multiple responsibilities.

For instance, of our 140 full-time equivalent educators, we show 20 FTEs involved in 4-H youth development programming. Those 20 FTEs actually represent the combined efforts of approximately 120 people. The amount of time individuals spend on 4-H youth development ranges from a few days to full-time. That's just an example of how extension education programs are staffed, so when I talk about programmatic thrusts and FTEs, that needs to be clear. Grant-funded faculty who are fully employed on the activity they're listed on are the exception.

As I said, today extension has 20 FTEs working with 4-H development – nine with leadership/citizenship, six with science, and five with *Character Counts!*.

And I know you are familiar with *Character Counts!*, which teaches universally accepted values to children. In a statewide survey, 85 percent of teachers using *Character Counts!* reported an overall positive difference in the children they teach. The national program, developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, teaches six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

We have 19 extension educator FTEs working in the area of food safety, nutrition, and health, 1.5 of whom are grant funded; and 16 educator FTEs working in crop and pest management.

The full-time equivalent of nine educators – three of whom are grant funded – work in irrigation management and water quality. And in the area of farm and ranch economics, we have eight full-time equivalent extension educators.

We have the full-time equivalents of 13 educators working in the sustainable families area, 11 in parenting/child care, and two in financial management, while six grant-funded FTEs work with Building Nebraska Families.

Building Nebraska Families is a statewide program coordinated by Marilyn Fox, an extension educator located in Grand Island who, since 1999, has worked with this program funded by a grant from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The five educators who work with Marilyn on this program work intensively with individuals who are moving from welfare to work situations, helping them with such things as family management and life skills, self-esteem, problem solving, and goal setting. The people our educators work with are Employment-First participants, and extension educators help them look at what they need to do to get work, including such activities as goal setting. The ultimate goal is to help the participants get and maintain a job while helping build strong families.

and the Columbus/Schuyler area. We expect to add five more positions for this work this summer and fall.

These days extension has the full-time equivalent of 18 extension educators working in community resource development, including five in information technology, five in leadership, and eight in community development, one of whom is grant-funded.

I hope you're familiar with Technologies Across Nebraska, which extension is leading to create awareness and provide communities with education and support as they make decisions concerning their information technology future. More than 40 organizations, agencies, and educational systems are part of a Technologies Across Nebraska Partnership that works cooperatively to help communities create awareness of and access to information technology, and to develop the abilities to use it.

Extension educators across Nebraska are stepping up to help increase such awareness. Eight educators work half time in this area, leading educational programs and teaching Internet-based classes. Over the next two years we hope to add four more educators specifically skilled in information technologies and community education. Those four are part of the public service/engagement piece that is part of the systemwide University Rural Initiative. NU has launched this

multi-year Rural Initiative in response to the economic and social challenges facing rural Nebraska today. The Rural Initiative places University resources at the disposal of people and communities in rural Nebraska.

While we in the Institute already are at work on efforts to focus on rural economic viability and entrepreneurship through connectivity, as part of the Rural Initiative public service/engagement piece we hope to secure funding to place four new full-time University faculty at our research and extension centers across the state. They'd serve as resource providers, extension educators, and facilitators, and as "point persons" for rural economic development for communities and businesses. Small and medium-sized farms are considered part of the business community.

A fifth new faculty member in IANR in Lincoln would work with those at the research and extension centers. This person would focus on enhancing the viability of small and medium-sized farms and ranches, with emphasis on family farms.

Today extension has the full-time equivalent of five educators working in horticulture, 10 in livestock, six in range, pasture and forage management, five in student recruitment, and five in extended education.

You may have heard the phrase "extension is the front door to the university"; helping with student recruitment definitely helps open the university's front door to invite new generations into the University of Nebraska. Right now 21 people serve

as extension recruitment contacts across the state, devoting about 25 percent of their time to recruiting. For nearly four years now extension has partnered with UNL admissions to pique students' and their parents' interest in UNL. Their activities include such things as college nights for students in the counties, and counselor-nights where high school counselors are invited to an evening meal to learn more about UNL. We've found many-counselors in the state are not UNL grads and so are not-necessarily-familiar with this campus or the multitude of academic opportunities we offer our students.

These educators participating in recruiting also have brought busloads of students from their parts of the state to visit both city and east campus so students can learn more about their interest areas. We think we're starting to see the results of such visits now.

Another activity the educators work with is a Summer Send-off for the UNL-bound students in their area, plus invited high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors who come and learn more about UNL.

In addition, extension has partnered with UNL Admissions to place a person in Admissions who serves as a liaison between extension personnel and admissions, and UNL Admissions has two people working out of two of our research and extension centers – one at Northeast and one in the Panhandle.

Our educators working-with-recruitment also work with UNL alumni, inviting their participation in various events for high school students and in identifying potential UNL students.

Another new statewide project is the IANR Precision Agriculture Initiative. Extension Educator Dave Varner, located in Dodge County, has a half-time appointment as coordinator for that initiative. Dave has been in this position since September, and it's his job to facilitate regular-communication among the approximately 20 IANR teaching, research, and extension faculty involved in precision agriculture activities.

As you know, educators have lots of experience putting programs together. We expect Dave to know what's happening at the university in precision agriculture, and what's-needed at the grassroots level. He serves as the IANR liaison with the Nebraska Agriculture Technologies Association (NeATA), which is a nonprofit organization of about 125 producers, agribusiness representatives, and university personnel who share precision agriculture ideas through the Association. I understand that the first NeATA conference in Kearney just last February drew 166 people, which I think shows a great deal of interest in this area.

Right now Dave is working with others on developing a Precision Agriculture Initiative Web site that will provide visitors with a virtual precision ag center.

Dave says that a precision agriculture producers' listserv is seeing a lot of activity. Sometimes our faculty use it as a sounding board, he says, and the producers who participate ask great questions."

These are just a few examples that illustrate that, as always, extension is continuing to do those things it does best – meeting the changing needs of our clients, providing people with knowledge they can use, and being of service to the State of Nebraska.

Thank you again for all the years each of you gave to Nebraska and to our great Land-Grant University in performing your extension education mission. And thank you again for inviting me to be here with you today. I appreciate this opportunity to visit with you.

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