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Governor's Ag Conference

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

As the "new guy" on the block at the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, I welcome every opportunity to meet and talk with Nebraska's residents. I hope to have the opportunity to talk with many of you here. I want to hear your views on the greatest challenges facing both agriculture and Nebraska in the coming years. I want to know how you think the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources can be of assistance.

I was asked to talk with you today about my goals as the "new" University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
Resources. To do that, I think I must begin by telling you that I am a true believer in the land-grant university mission, and a great admirer of the 19th Century Vermont Senator, Justin Smith Morrill, whose Morrill Act of 1862 "created" land-grant universities. I also am a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into law on 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.

In fact, I often quote the Morrill Act, and 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 in the several pursuits and professions in life."

"To promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes" - I can't tell you how many
times I've marveled at the vision behind that statement. In creating land-grant universities to deliver the knowledge of the university to those who need it, the Morrill Act democratized higher education.

As a firm believer in the land-grant university mission, I am absolutely convinced that those land-grant universities that disenfranchise their local partners are on the road to a meaningless, irrelevant existence. I think we always must include our clients in the process of helping set the direction of our research and extension education programs. And I think any land-grant university that pursues prestige or exclusivity to the detriment of service to every day, ordinary people is in big trouble.

That said, I can assure you that, working with people in this room and others across the state, 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.

Our product is "knowledge." We discover it through research and, once discovered, we "share" that new knowledge with the world. This is what land-grant universities do best. We provide solid, research-based "information" people can use to make choices and decisions in their lives.

We "transfer" that knowledge in our classrooms and in our teaching laboratories, along with the learning and living "skills" that help people apply knowledge and build on it so they can "participate" in lifelong learning, and so they can "be responsible" community, state, national, and world citizens. We also transfer that knowledge in another way when we "extend" knowledge to Nebraskans through our "statewide" extension education programs. Teaching, research, and extension are the "three" primary components of the land-grant university, and we in IANR stand firmly and squarely on them.
I need to be clear that I did not start my job January 2 with a belief that I am like a physician who has arrived at the University with a prescription for what the Institute, this University, and the State of Nebraska need to do. I'm always leery of out-of-state "experts" who do that when they arrive at a new job. There are people who come in and start talking about what needs to be done before they ever do the listening necessary to find out.

I came to Nebraska "knowing" that IANR and the University of Nebraska bring many strengths to our state. And I intend to do my "very best" to build on those strengths, and to develop others. I think it would be presumptuous of me, after only two months here, to pretend to talk with "precise knowledge" about all IANR needs to do, but you can be assured I am "working" to find out. Throughout the spring and summer I will be traveling across Nebraska, listening "carefully" to hear what you and others have to say about Nebraska's needs that you think the Institute can help
address. I want to know what you hope for Nebraska, and the dreams you believe IANR can help our state achieve.

When people ask me what I think IANR's part is in Nebraska's agriculture, I always respond that we are partners with it. We constantly seek ways to meet the needs of Nebraska agriculture, and to strengthen it. Issues facing agriculture today are complex; I wish I had easy answers, but I do not. What I do have is a true belief that it is important for both rural and urban Nebraskans that we find solutions to agriculture's concerns. After all, one in four Nebraska jobs is related to agriculture. What happens in rural Nebraska is important. It matters.

That importance of rural Nebraska to the state is a key reason the University has launched a multi-year Rural Initiative to place University resources at the disposal of people and communities in rural Nebraska.

I'm excited about this initiative because it 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.

This Initiative is in response to the economic and
social challenges facing rural Nebraska today. The
University is working with people in rural Nebraska and
Nebraska's various institutional resources to address
what seems to be a dual-track economy, with urban
counties 'prospering' while rural counties' economies
'suffer.' We are concerned that Nebraska's 'heritage of
rich' rural and small-town environments is in jeopardy.
We know very well that the university can't solve all
problems, but we have great faith in the tenacity,
resiliency, and determination of rural Nebraskans, and
we hope that, working with you, we all can do our part
to strengthen rural areas.

Right now we're doing our best at the University to
answer calls to help rural communities' businesses,
families, farms, ranches, and local institutions find
solutions — and we in IANR are in the midst of that, let me assure you — but we need to do more and to move faster than our already stretched-thin resources allow. You know, as I do, that there is much work to do.

To further what the university already is doing, the first specific program thrust of the University’s Rural Initiative is a public service/engagement piece included in the University’s budget request to the legislature for the next two years. Funding for that public service/engagement work is one of the University’s three priorities this biennium, in addition to needed funds for salaries and restoration of the university’s health insurance trust fund. If the legislature approves that public service/engagement request, it will fund three endeavors. The first focuses on rural economic viability and entrepreneurship through connectivity; the second on building on a proven-track record in health care; and the third on collaboration with K-12 education.

We in the Institute already are at work on efforts to focus on rural economic viability and —
entrepreneurship through connectivity. Additional funding requested in this year's biennium budget would place four new full-time University faculty at our Research and Extension Centers across the state to serve as resource providers, 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 will focus on enhancing the viability of small and medium-sized farms and ranches with emphasis on family farms.

Our "entrepreneurship through connectivity" endeavor would expand our existing Technologies Across Nebraska work, which is an outgrowth of a research study requested by Senators Bromm and Wickersham, in support of discussions taking place around the study resolution LR330 in the 2000 legislative session. It would add four new Cooperative Extension educators.
specifically skilled in the areas of information technologies and community education to eight extension educators whose responsibilities already have been shifted to work in this area. The goal is to help overcome the digital divide rural communities face by providing communities with opportunities to study advanced telecommunications options and determine and implement those that best meet their needs. We also would like to help grow knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for individuals and businesses to make the most of their communities' telecommunications connections. Existing and new staff will partner with agencies to provide a local leadership role in assisting communities.

To address the critical need for high quality, accessible health care in Nebraska's rural communities, the "building on a proven record in health care" endeavor would add six new physician residencies in Scottsbluff and North Platte, and two in the Lincoln Medical Educational Foundation. The University of Nebraska Medical Center has the most graduates of rural
residencies of any similar program in the nation; its Primary Care Rural Training Track offers students experiences "living" and "practicing" in rural areas.

Because we in the University think "enhanced collaboration between NU teacher-education colleges and K-12 schools is key in continuing to make "certain" that Nebraskans are "well-served" by their K-12 schools, the "third endeavor" of the public service/engagement proposal requests "funds to enhance existing collaborative efforts" and to add several programs, including such things as a mentoring program in which "Master Teachers" assist beginning teachers, and "support" for the School at the Center Program, working with 25 "rural" Nebraska communities to enhance "education quality."

The University is requesting $750,000 in each year of the biennium to address these rural Nebraska needs. As I said earlier, we "already" are at work on these issues, in the land-grant university tradition of being of service to our state, but our resources are stretched "so thin." We cannot begin to meet all the
requests for help NOW, the need is so great.

Senator Cap Dierks has introduced LB588 in this legislative session to create the Rural Initiative Act stating a legislative intent to appropriate funds to the university for this purpose and putting the Legislature on record as supporting university involvement in improving the economic and social viability of rural Nebraska.

I understand that one of the topics for this conference is retaining young farmers, and that is certainly a concern for us across Nebraska and at the University. In IANR we are concerned with helping young farmers and ranchers get started; we all know the realities that beginning farmers and ranchers face major financial obstacles today unless they have a farming/ranching relative willing to work with them, or other financial backing.

A little over a year ago now University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, which is a key part of IANR, started a Beginning Farmer Program designed to help potential producers decide if farming and ranching is
"right" for them. The program provides participants with cash flow and financing information so they can explore the realities of their situation before making financial investments.

The program coordinator also works with producers carrying financial burdens, and retiring producers doing "pre-estate" planning. In his first year he worked with about 200 families, nearly half of whom were "trying" to get started.

That tells me there are "young people who want" to farm. When we look at the statistics - in 1997 Nebraska had about 5,500 producers under age 35 and nearly 12,400 over age 65 - we know we must find ways this state can help young potential farmers and ranchers "grow" to take the places of those retiring, and to help keep Nebraska agriculture "strong."

Talking about young farmers and ranchers "always" seems to make me think, too, of those who have been at the business "a long time." For those of you here today who have been farming or ranching for 30, 40, or even 50 years, I want to say "thank you." Thank you for all
you’ve done over the years to feed this state, our nation, and the world, and thank you for your many contributions to your communities and to Nebraska.

I mentioned to you earlier that I see IANR as a partner with agriculture and a partner with Nebraska, and I'd like to end my talk this morning with just a few examples of some of the ways I think that partnership has helped and will help agriculture in this state for years to come.

I just spoke about those of you who have been farming or ranching for a long time. Well, if you've been a wheat farmer in Nebraska for more than 40 years, you very likely know that varieties developed through our wheat-breeding program provide Nebraska growers with improved wheats that perform well in the field and offer those quality characteristics millers and bakers demand. Nebraska-developed hard red winter wheat varieties are planted on roughly three-fourths of the state's wheat acres. These varieties have increased Nebraska's annual yields by 19 percent compared to the 1960s, and these improved varieties are worth roughly
$31 million to $37 million annually to Nebraska producers, based on increased yield alone. Consumers benefit, also. Yield improvement in these varieties means Nebraska wheat-growers can feed nearly 5 million more Americans a year than they did on the same acreage in the 1960s.

Forty years ago when we talked about maps we likely were thinking about finding the best roads from here to Denver, or Omaha, or Kansas City. Yet some of today's most interesting maps chart the molecular-world of genes, DNA, and chromosomes. An IANR soybean geneticist and colleagues created the first comprehensive genetic map of all 20 soybean chromosomes. The team developed one of the three populations used to construct the soybean map, which contains more than 1,800 genetic markers identifying critical-chromosome-segments. The genetic map speeds the plant breeding process by enabling scientists to target and harness specific genes responsible for key traits such as yield, disease resistance, or high protein content. The map also is helping scientists
better understand which genes govern specific traits.

In other research, capitalizing on cattle's "natural curiosity," our scientists devised a simple, effective, economical way to test pens of cattle for the bacterium, *E. coli* 0157:H7, without handling individual animals. They hang "pieces of rope" around a pen, which cattle soon chew or lick, leaving traces of the organisms they're carrying. Laboratory tests of the ropes detect *E. coli* 0157:H7. The team is "refining" the "rope test" as a research tool and using it to identify strategies producers can use to control the bacterium in feedlots. This work is part of ongoing IANR on-farm food safety research to control the dangerous bacterium on farms, ranches, and feedlots to reduce chances of it reaching consumers.

Another example: If European corn borers begin developing resistance to Bt corn, which produces an insecticide toxic to this major corn pest, our entomologists are likely to spot it first. An IANR scientist developed tests to detect changes in corn borer's susceptibility to Bt toxins. He uses it to
annually check corn borer populations throughout U.S. corn-growing regions. He has seen no changes in the six years since Bt corn has been registered, but he'll keep checking. His laboratory is responsible for assessing and keeping records on corn borer Bt susceptibility nationwide. The goal is to spot potential changes before resistance becomes widespread. The monitoring and early detection of potential susceptibility changes are vital to resistance management strategies designed to preserve Bt's effectiveness.

On another front, rapid, accurate tests developed by our food scientists are helping the food industry protect people with food allergies. An IANR team devised fast, accurate tests food processors can use in their production facilities to detect even minute traces of allergenic foods in processed foods or on equipment. Tests for egg, peanut, and milk have been commercialized by a Michigan company that markets the tests to the food industry under a university license agreement. Tests for other food allergens to help
protect allergic consumers are in the works.

One other thing I'd like you to know. We hear a great deal about a brain drain in this state as young people move away to take jobs. We're pleased in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, part of the Institute, to talk about a brain gain. Over 70 percent of the students who responded to a UNL Career Services survey stayed in this state after graduation, becoming contributing members of their communities.

We work hard in the Institute to be a good partner to Nebraska's agriculture, and a good partner to Nebraska, and I look forward with much anticipation and a great deal of enthusiasm to working with you in the future. Thank you.