

May 2008

## The Leading Object: May 2008

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## Perspectives

*"There is a good reason they call these ceremonies 'commencement exercises.' Graduation is not the end; it's the beginning."*



**John C. Owens**  
NU Vice President and  
Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

That quote by Utah Senator Orrin Hatch comes to mind as another May brings another graduation at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis.

This month we watched another class of well-prepared, talented, enthusiastic students march across a stage and become graduates before our eyes.

We are proud of them, and all they will become. We are happy for them, and for the excitement and dedication with which they've prepared and are stepping into the future.

We will miss them when classes begin in the fall.

We are delighted by every single student studying with us, and doubly delighted our student numbers are increasing. In April we applauded CASNR's increasing departmental enrollments with a Celebration of Success in the Nebraska East Union.

There we honored CASNR for leading all UNL colleges in increased undergraduate enrollment this school year and we recognized individual academic units for their increases in students.

CASNR showed its largest enrollment increase in the last three decades in fall 2007. Enrollment rose 11.7 percent — 152 students above the previous year. Spring semester 2008 CASNR led with an 11.5 percent increase — 143 students.

This is tremendous. Robust enrollment heightens the visibility and emphasizes the importance of agriculture and natural resources at the University.

It is wonderful to see our new programs doing so well, and our traditional majors beginning to regain the strength they once had.

Of course this is good for CASNR, and because it's good for CASNR, it's also continued on page 2

# The Leading Object

*The Morrill Act of 1862 established a Land Grant University in each state where The Leading Object would be instruction in agriculture and related fields.*



May 2008

## IANR seeks to enhance relationships in other parts of the world

Developing and strengthening ties with universities, colleagues, and students in other countries can make a difference for CASNR, IANR, UNL, and Nebraska, said Susan Fritz, IANR associate vice chancellor.

Sharing knowledge, culture, world views, and ideas can lead to better understandings and relationships, Fritz said. She serves as the international agriculture director and point person for IANR's international opportunities.

Currently IANR is looking to establish and enhance relationships with universities in China, Mexico, and Central and South America, Fritz said. She noted UNL is developing relationships in China, and IANR identifies immigration and NAFTA as key reasons to strengthen ties with schools in this hemisphere.

These efforts are in addition to the great relationships various IANR faculty have with international colleagues and universities, Fritz stressed, and in no way replace them.

"What we're looking at are sustained relationships between institutions that transcend an individual's connections — predictable, consistent relationships where we can start to see an imprint over time," Fritz said.

This is in keeping with IANR's heritage of working with universities interested in agriculture and food production potential in such countries as Columbia, Turkey, and Costa Rica since the 1950s.



**A group of Costa Rican and IANR officials stands in front of the León Cortés Extension Office of the Ministry of Agriculture. From left: Marietta Ureña, Yayo Vicente, and Minister Javier Flores of Costa Rica, and from IANR Susan Fritz, Rolando Flores, John Owens, and Steve Waller.**

Several IANR administrators visited Costa Rica in April (see accompanying story) and were headed to China in May. UNL is working out details with Zhejiang University, one of the top three agricultural colleges in China, for graduate education and faculty exchanges here.

UNL is the second U.S. university to reach such an agreement with Zhejiang, following North Carolina State University.

"We are prominent internationally," known for agricultural and natural resources research and education, Fritz said, adding all of IANR, UNL, and Nebraska can take pride in that.

Building sustained international relationships can only enhance opportunities for students, faculty, and Nebraska, she added.

— Cheryl Alberts

good for research and extension education, statewide. The three are so closely entwined within IANR that what raises one boat raises all, and what lowers one boat lowers all.

What we can feel absolutely best about in these numbers, of course, and in the bright, talented, new alumni, is that increased enrollment in CASNR is good for students and good for Nebraska, where historically 70 percent of our graduates take their first jobs out of college in the state.

Students who study with us get a broad education that prepares them for a variety of careers, as well as wonderful opportunities to study abroad, to hone their leadership skills and build their commitment to community involvement, to work right alongside faculty who are leaders in their field, to form friendships and gain mentors who will follow their

successes with great delight.

At April's Celebration for Success, Dean Steve Waller reported that early enrollment numbers are looking positive for fall 2008, as well. Thank you to everyone in CASNR who has worked so hard to recruit, and to our stakeholders across Nebraska, whose interest in helping potential students learn more about the college has been especially helpful.

Dr. Gale Buchanan, USDA Under Secretary For Research, Education And Economics, was in town to speak at UNL's Research Fair the day of our Celebration of Success, and joined us in the East Union.

He spoke of a new paradigm in agriculture as we add energy to food and fiber and other parts of the traditional agricultural paradigm. He said he sees the work we in IANR and colleagues at other land-grant

universities around our nation are doing as "the hope and best chance we have for a sustainable future."

I think of the Under Secretary's quote also, as I watch our students graduate.

"The hope and best chance we have for a sustainable future" — known to us by such names as Thomas, Melissa, Anna, Roberto, and a long and wonderful list of other names of other students who dream great dreams. We hope they all come true.

Another May. Another graduation. Another new beginning.

We get a new beginning every day. We choose to make the most of it.



## IANR makes global connections in Costa Rica

Looking to strengthen its global connections, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources administrators visited Costa Rica recently to promote faculty and student exchange programs.

John Owens, NU vice president and Harlan vice chancellor of IANR, led a small IANR contingent composed of Susan Fritz, associate vice chancellor; Steve Waller, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources dean; and Rolando Flores, head of the Department of Food Science and Technology.

The purpose of the trip was to strengthen the links between UNL, IANR, and several organizations in Costa Rica, Flores said.

The contingent first visited EARTH University, an agricultural university IANR

had a role in starting in the 1980s. The IANR officials discussed the possibility of exchange programs between students and faculty to do collaborative work in development and research, Flores said.

"We're looking for possibilities to go there, take courses and be exposed to different types of agriculture in different cultures," Flores said. "This is an important experience to try to bring to our students."

The next stop was a trip to CATIE, Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center, established in the 1940s.

"It started as a research center for all of the Americas," Flores said.

The IANR representatives met with CATIE faculty, staff, and administrators.

They also visited the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), a specialized organization for agriculture and rural development. A year ago UNL signed a collaborative agreement with the Inter-American Institute and officials from there have visited UNL twice.

The IANR delegation also met with the Costa Rican minister of agriculture, Javier Flores, who is Rolando Flores' brother. Members also visited extension personnel and met with farmers.

"We got a small snapshot of Costa Rican agriculture," Flores said.

— Lori McGinnis

## IANR plays role in starting EARTH University

The School of Agriculture of the Humid Tropical Region (EARTH University) is a successful international agricultural university located in the Atlantic lowlands of Costa Rica. If you trace its establishment back to its roots, you'll find the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources there.

This U.S. Agency for International Development selected three U.S. universities — California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, UNL, and, for a time, Rutgers University — to provide the technical assistance needed to help establish EARTH University in the mid-1980s. EARTH stands for Escuela De Agricultura De La Region Tropical Humeda.

Several UNL faculty, including Rick Foster, a former professor in agricultural leadership, education and communication and current vice president of the Kellogg Foundation; Glen Vollmar, emeritus, then dean and director of International Programs; and Earl Ellington, emeritus, then animal science professor and associate dean of the College of Agriculture, were among the UNL representatives working on the project.

UNL and Cal Poly resource people helped shape the entire university, including setting the first mission and vision statements, establishing the initial "learning-by-doing" curriculum and evaluation system, and assisting with student and faculty development.

continued on page 3

### Need to meet with the

**Vice President/Vice Chancellor?**  
Drop-ins each Friday from 3-5 p.m.\*  
**John C. Owens**

NU Vice President for  
Agriculture and Natural Resources  
and Harlan Vice Chancellor of IANR

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\*Occasionally Dr. Owens will be called away on University business.

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103 ACB, 0918; via e-mail (lmcginnis2@unl.edu) or via fax (402-472-0025).

## Ag Engineering graduate running successful pet food business

Rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas, and other small pets are eating better thanks to John Miller.

Miller, a 1971 agricultural engineering graduate at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, is the founder and president of Oxbow Animal Health in Murdock. The successful company has been making premium pet food for small animals since 1993.

Miller started Oxbow in his garage in Murdock, moved it to his parents' larger garage in Elmwood, then returned to Murdock, where the business is centered in the barn at his farm. The barn, built in 1901, has been renovated and houses offices for an approximately 50-person staff.

The business has grown tremendously since its inception and now ships products throughout the United States and to foreign countries, Miller said.

"We were really lucky to have the right idea at the right time," he said. "The market was ready for innovative products."

Having a successful business was far from Miller's mind when he was a student at UNL between 1967 and 1971. His UNL experience helped teach him leadership, he said. He was a member of Farmhouse Fraternity, where the members had a reputation of being more aggressive leaders, he said. His experiences gained from his fellowship in the Nebraska LEAD program contributed greatly to his innovative ideas, he said.

The leadership skills he honed at UNL contributed to his desire to be independent and think outside the norm. After he graduated he worked as a petroleum engineer for Amoco then returned to his family farm in Elmwood a couple of years later to work.

He decided against growing corn and soybeans. Since they were traded on the Chicago Board of Trade, Miller said he could have no control over their prices. Since alfalfa was not a traded commodity, he could have more control over it, he said.

"I've always been really independent," he said. "That's one of the reasons I came to the farm and the reason I raised alfalfa instead of corn and soybeans."

Miller started the Oxbow Hay Co. in 1980, learning to grow premium-quality alfalfa that he sold to dairies and horse owners.

He grew adept at marketing his alfalfa and decided he wanted to add value to his product.

"I started thinking about the pet food market," he said. Realizing the types of available food for small animals like rabbits and guinea pigs was limited, "I knew I could do a better job." He made his first bag of packaged alfalfa hay in 1993.

Miller said the education he received in ag engineering was instrumental in his ability to visualize and create the custom hay stuffing machines that now package 2,000 tons of hay per year into 15-ounce and 40-ounce bags.

His product ideas got a boost because at the time people were placing higher value on these types of animals as pets and were beginning to take these pets to veterinarians. Miller marketed his product to vets who promoted it around the world. He showed his product at trade shows and conferences.

Miller formed a Web site in 1994 before most businesses had them and began to sell his product online.

Through the years since then Miller has added on production and warehousing facilities to his operations and expanded his line of pet food. He now has 25 different products for a variety of carnivores and herbivores. The company recently changed its name to Oxbow Animal Health, a move that better defines the professional image and direction of the company's mission, he said.

Oxbow brands itself as the premium small animal food company. It was the first to package and market timothy grass hay, which now is a staple food for small animals.

Oxbow now distributes its product to 26 countries. In 2006 the Small Business Administration cited Oxbow as the national exporter of the year.

– Lori McGinnis



John Miller

## IANR plays role in starting EARTH University *(continued from page 2)*

The concept for EARTH University began with a feasibility study sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, Foster said. When the study validated both the need and the potential for such a new university dedicated to sustainable agriculture in the humid tropics, the U.S. A.I.D., a division of the U.S. State Department, awarded \$120 million to start the regional university. Kellogg Foundation also provided bridge funding to get it started, and has subsequently invested almost \$20 million over the past 20 years.

U.S.A.I.D. was interested in economic stability in Central America during a time of widespread unrest in the region. UNL applied for support university status with Cal Poly and Rutgers and was selected because of its international experience, high standing in the land-grant university community, and its practice of hands-on classroom learning, Foster said.

"Nebraska was well represented in the entire formation of EARTH," Foster said.

"Our job was to assist in building a regional college of agriculture from the ground up," said Ellington, who retired in 2002.

"It was indeed an interesting and worthy project with numerous benefits, including growth opportunities for us such as bringing globalization experiences back to our UNL classrooms."

A site for the school was found on a cattle ranch and banana plantation, faculty members were hired, a curriculum developed, and students selected, Ellington said.

The development work occurred over five years and required several visits to Costa Rica, said Vollmar, who retired in 2000.

The goal at EARTH was to develop leaders and entrepreneurs who emphasized growing crops, conservation, and reforestation in one of the most fragile environments in the world, Vollmar said. It was a grand experiment that is still working, he said.

"We got involved because it was an agricultural school and Nebraska has a strong agricultural college," Vollmar said.

EARTH now is a thriving university that has graduated more than 1,200 students since the mid-1980s. Foster, Vollmar, and Ellington all say it is a memorable accomplishment — one of which UNL should be proud.

– Lori McGinnis

## Marston selected as new director of NEREC

Twig Marston assumed his role this month as the new director of the Northeast Research and Extension Center in Norfolk.

Marston previously served as a full-time professor and extension beef specialist at Kansas State University, positions he held for 12 years. Prior to that he was a KSU extension livestock specialist in Garden City, Kan.

Marston has a bachelor's of science degree in animal science and industry and a master's degree in animal breeding and genetics, both from KSU. He earned a doctorate in animal nutrition from Oklahoma State University.

His other career experience includes working in commercial agriculture in a family partnership for 10 years, running a Nebraska ranch for three years, and providing technical support at Hubbard Milling Co. in Minnesota.

Marston said his goal at NEREC will be to enhance support for UNL extension and research.

"My main thing is service, helping the people in that area," he said.

Marston succeeded Dennis Bauer, who as interim director filled in for the retired John Witkowski.

"Twig already is quite familiar with Nebraska agriculture, especially our huge livestock industry," said John Owens, NU vice president and Harlan vice chancellor of IANR. "He will have positive impacts on our research and extension activities for the benefit of Nebraska communities, families, and business."



Twig Marston

## Azzam speaks at inaugural ceremony

Azzeddine Azzam, professor of agricultural economics, was the commencement speaker at the inaugural doctoral commencement ceremony May 9.

This year doctoral candidates received a hood and a diploma in one ceremony. The ceremony changed from a doctoral hooding to a commencement ceremony, said Ellen Weissinger, dean of graduate studies. In previous years hoods and diplomas were awarded separately.

Azzam was selected because of his long association with graduate studies at UNL and for being this year's winner of UNL's Excellence in Graduate Education, the top award in graduate mentoring.

Azzam also served as chair of the graduate committee in agricultural economics.

## IANR contributes significant material to iTunes U

iTunes U is the latest way to deliver educational information to the masses, and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is leading the way.

IANR's Communications and Information Technology had a significant role in getting the University of Nebraska-Lincoln represented on iTunes U, a part of iTunes. On iTunes U, colleges and universities can make audio and video files that are available for anyone to download.

Mark Hendricks, multimedia information specialist, and Mike Kamm, electronic media specialist, represented CIT's involvement in developing UNL's presence on iTunes U. UNL is the 38<sup>th</sup> post-secondary school to be represented on the program. Other schools include MIT, Stanford, and Yale.

## Vet team places second at national competition

A two-student team of University of Nebraska-Lincoln veterinary and biomedical sciences students took second place at a national competition recently. It's just a sign of the big things to come for UNL's new Professional Program in Veterinary Medicine, a partnership with Iowa State University.

Sara Schuessler of Bellevue and Jennifer Glaesemann of Fairbury finished

behind a team from Cornell University in the freshmen anatomy competition at the 2008 Student American Veterinary Medical Association's competition at Alabama's Tuskegee University in March.

"This is a noteworthy achievement because it highlights early success of this new innovative program between Iowa State and UNL," said John Kammermann, assistant professor in the Department of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences.

## CASNR presents alumni awards

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources' Alumni Association has presented achievement awards to Keith Olsen and Greg Ibach.

Olsen, president of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, received the Achievement Award. Ibach, Nebraska Department of Agriculture director, received the Service Award.

The awards recognize college graduates for service to the college, the alumni association, or Nebraska agriculture and natural resources.

## New ARDC positions announced

Mark Schroeder has been named the acting director and general farm manager of the Agricultural Research and Development Center. He currently serves as associate director and general farm manager.

Ruby Urban has accepted the position as ARDC acting assistant director and assistant business center manager.