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## NACEB Luncheon

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NACEB LUNCHEON

June 22, 2001

John C. Owens

NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

I hope you all had the opportunity to see the first issue of *University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Connect* newsletter. It contains a quote that strikes me as so powerful that I can't imagine there is a single extension-specialist or educator in this state who wouldn't walk around with a big grin on their faces because of this wonderful comment.

The quote? "*Extension people have changed my life.*"

Six simple words, but what an eloquent testimonial. The speaker is a Nebraska-beef-producer who has participated in Extension's grazing management education and developed the tools to be a grass farmer.

"*Extension people have changed my life.*"

What a tremendous tribute to the work Extension does in this state. It affirms what we are about, and shows the importance of what we do.

That story is only one small-example of Extension's work in Nebraska, of course. Look at the survey of 58 randomly selected 4-H alumni who took part in 4-H public speaking programs, reported in the second NU

Cooperative Extension *Connect* newsletter. That survey shows improved self-confidence and self-expression skills are major benefits of participation in this 4-H program. Another story in that newsletter was about Parents Forever, a research-based program to help parents understand the impact of divorce on their children and to help children cope with family changes. And in the same issue was a story on the Farmers and Ranchers College that Extension is part of in south central Nebraska. One young woman reported that information gained in the Farmers and Ranchers College was vital for her and her husband to continue farming this year. And, participants surveyed after their participation in the College – incidentally, they had a 75 percent after-the-meeting survey return, which is quite a return on any survey – estimated the average-value of the crop workshops was 6 cents per bushel on an estimated 27 million bushels of corn – \$1.62 million collectively – and \$19 for each of 15,000 head of cattle – \$285,000 collectively.

I use these examples for two principle reasons today. First, they illustrate the value of Extension, and while I know I don't need to convince people in this room of the value of Extension, I do think it is good for all of us now and then to focus on what we have accomplished, as well as on what we need to accomplish. So often we're caught up in all there is to do and

we don't take enough time to celebrate work well done.

The second reason is that these examples illustrate one of the major challenges we face today, both in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and in NU Cooperative Extension. It's a challenge I hope you will help us with – and that is the challenge of telling our story. We appreciate you using any opportunities you might have to tell people how Extension and the Institute can and do benefit them, their communities, and the state.

Today I am going to talk primarily about Extension, but please know that we value your support and insights for the entire Institute, and I welcome your comments concerning other areas of IANR, as well as Extension.

As I travel Nebraska I occasionally run into people who tell me that extension must change, but when I ask how, they cannot always give me specifics. I've encountered people who seem to think extension has outlived its usefulness, and some of them are in decision making roles. This is particularly distressing to me because I, personally, think Cooperative Extension is the best out-of-classroom learning experience yet devised, and I am a firm believer Extension is a vital, much-needed component of any land-grant university.

Sometimes I wonder if people just aren't aware of how Extension

“already” has changed. I know I would certainly agree with them that Extension “must change” and “must evolve” as the needs of our constituents change and evolve, and I’m sure you think that same way. I think it’s possible that one of the ways Extension has changed in Nebraska may contribute to people’s misunderstanding of the importance of Extension in their lives, and that change relates to “some-of-the-ways” Extension now delivers education.

NU Cooperative Extension made a conscious choice to teach “other” information and education providers – crop consultants would be one example – who then “extend the education” they receive to still others, as one of Extension’s efforts to more “widely-distribute” information. The challenge here is that people who “don’t receive” their information from hands-on contact with Extension may “not be aware” of Extension’s role in providing knowledge “they” can put to work in their lives. Telling Extension’s story is vital, then, to increasing that awareness.

Because Extension is making “many differences” throughout Nebraska, it’s important that people “know” about those differences for a couple of reasons. “First,” we want people who can use our programs “to be aware of them” so they can participate. We are in the land-grant university business,

and we are here to take the resources of the university to people, to serve, and to be of use to this state. Second, we need supporters and decision-makers to be aware of the benefits Extension provides Nebraska so we have the support to continue to meet the state's evolving needs.

Developing new constituent audiences is a challenge we face, and we welcome your insights in this area as we strive to meet the challenge. We know that as Nebraska's needs and population change and evolve, Extension must evolve its program offerings and expand its constituents to meet those needs. We must do this, of course, while continuing to meet the needs of our traditional constituents, which we certainly are dedicated to do.

Another challenge that faces us I just mentioned briefly, and that is setting program priorities to best meet Nebraska's needs. We look to you for help in that; we need your insights, your vision, your willingness to look at things in new ways to help us find new ways to contribute to Nebraska and its residents, to be sensitive to nontraditional clientele, to provide the research-based, unbiased knowledge people can use in making the decisions that affect their lives, and the lives of those around them.

For 12 years at New Mexico State University I was Dean and Chief Administrative Officer of the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service, the

New Mexico Agricultural Experiment Station, and the College of Home Economics. I am a strong-believer in Extension because I believe 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, to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of the University to the residents of the state. I see public service as a land-grant university responsibility, and consider both the concept of service and the act of serving highly honorable.

I think it is vital that our constituents help set the direction of Experiment station research and Extension education programs, and I am convinced that land-grant universities that disenfranchise their local partners are on the road to a meaningless, irrelevant existence. We welcome your input and insights. Ideas build on each other, and NACEB has a perspective we need and value.

Helen Keller once said that "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." I'd modify that somewhat to say that I know many people in this room have already done so much – just think of all we can then do, together!

In the Institute we see ourselves as partners with Nebraska. I look

forward to a positive, productive partnership with NACEB. We always want to keep the lines of communication open between you and the Institute, and we look to you to tell us about the needs and concerns of your communities so we can do our best to meet those needs and concerns. We value your time and your talents as you share them with us. Thank you for all you do.

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