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Testimony to Appropriations Committee (Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture)

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TESTIMONY TO APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE
FY 2001-2003
BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST
March 5, 2001

Chairman Wehrbein and members of the appropriations committee. My name is John Owens, and I am the University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. at UN-LINCOLN,

I am pleased to be able to visit with you today as the new guy on the block at the University of Nebraska. Some of you I have met at various events since my arrival at the University of Nebraska on January 2, others of you I have not, and I look forward to our meeting and getting acquainted. My wife, Virginia, and I are pleased to be in Nebraska and have found the people to be extremely warm and hospitable, and the weather to be less so. I am told the weather will get better, however. Already, I have found that Nebraskans are genuinely concerned about the well being of their University.

My purpose this afternoon is "to address" the budget request of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis. (NCTA) The Board of Regents "has designated" to the Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources

the administrative responsibility for operation of the programs of NCTA, a two-year degree granting campus of the University of Nebraska. The daily administration of the College is in the capable hands of Dr. Don Woodburn, Dean of the College. Through Dean Woodburn's vision and leadership, the College has been raised to a new level of quality and performance. NCTA is closely tied to the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and both organizations benefit through this relationship.

I want to begin my testimony by thanking the committee for the excellent level of support being recommended for NCTA, as well as for the total University. We appreciate your support of NCTA during these critical times as it continues to evolve and reshape its academic offerings and direction.

My colleagues tell me that this committee has consistently supported the college in recent years and that your support has made a significant difference in the quality of this unique and important associate degree granting college. You, and others, have understood the need to provide a solid, future-oriented, higher-education-experience to students who seek an Associates degree for entry into their career fields. Other students at the NCTA study in highly-technical, hands-on programs that transfer easily into baccalaureate degree programs at other universities.

This college is embracing technology and making those adjustments necessary to prepare its graduates for the significant changes taking place in agriculture and those businesses that support it. The college is raising the bar on academic rigor and preparation. NCTA serves some real needs for Nebraska: (1) providing highly technical degree programs that will lead our students to fill important technology-oriented niches in agriculture and agribusiness; (2) providing continuing education programs that keep technical personnel in agribusiness, as well as farmers and ranchers up-to-date on the ever-changing technical aspects of agriculture; and (3) moving into a collaborative position of providing the people of the Curtis region of Nebraska with access to extension education, outreach, and research programs available through NCTA as a key institution within the University of Nebraska.

The level of support recommended by the committee for the operational budget will allow the college to accomplish many of its objectives over the next biennium. One area of concern is the rising costs of utilities experienced this year. This committee has understood that concern by funding the NCTA utility deficit request. However, what is still unknown is what will happen to the utility budget during the next biennium if the additional projected cost of $58,000 incurred this year continues.

With a base utility budget of approximately $186,500, an additional cost of $58,452 would be devastating to such a small budget.

The capital-construction-budget recommended by the committee will likewise allow NCTA to accomplish some of its infrastructure and land acquisition needs. If there were any flexibility left in the appropriations process, the next highest priority among the unfunded requests would be the purchase of the adjoining Larson lots at $35,000. The Larson lots are important access-properties which immediately adjoin both the Everett Stencel Livestock Teaching Center and the Farm/Maintenance shop on the east side of the NCTA campus.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee and for your continued support for the programs at NCTA. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you might have.