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Nebraska Pork Producers Association

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Nebraska Pork Producers Association
January 20, 2001
Grand Island, Nebraska
John C. Owens

Good morning. And thank you for asking me to be with you today. It's certainly a pleasure to be in Grand Island. I'm really looking forward to traveling the entire state of Nebraska in the next few months, asking people, as I am asking you today, to talk with me about the needs you identify as work for the University of Nebraska and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. I hope I'll have the opportunity to visit with many of you. I want to know what's on your mind and what you think the University and the Institute should be doing.

I was asked to visit with you today about the Institute, our role and structure, as well as about my role as vice chancellor of IANR and vice president of the University. I also was asked to discuss the University's view of agriculture and its importance to the state, and the relationships I see between the Institute and Nebraska's residents and agricultural producers.

So, I'm really glad you asked me to be here!

First and foremost, let me affirm what you already know: The University of Nebraska and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources belong to you and to your neighbors and to everyone else in Nebraska. We are the land-grant university of Nebraska, and land-grant universities exist to serve the people of each state, both on campus and in each state's communities and counties.

"The leading object" – a phrase written into the Morrill Act of 1862 that created the land-grant universities and a phrase of which I'm particularly fond – "The leading object" for land-grant universities, then and now, is to work with the people the university serves, and to take the resources of the university across the state. The Institute is a partner with Nebraska in our priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people, and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through 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. So.

Is agriculture important in the state? Absolutely! One in four

Nebraska jobs is related in some way to agriculture.

Is agriculture important to the University? Absolutely! That importance is reflected in my job. I am serving as vice chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, reporting to the chancellor, who heads the flagship campus. The fact that the Institute is headed by the vice chancellor signifies the importance of agriculture and natural resources within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

My appointment as a vice president of the University of Nebraska -system with responsibilities at the system level for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources – makes me a member of the University of Nebraska's president's council, and clearly reflects the importance of agriculture in Nebraska. Because the intent of the framers of the legislation which created IANR was to establish equal status of the UNL Chancellor and the IANR Vice Chancellor in matters relating to agriculture and natural resources, in 1992 the Regents added the title of Vice President to the Institute's Vice Chancellor's responsibilities.

Nebraska was especially far-sighted over 25 years ago when you created the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the only

comprehensive program with an agriculture, natural resources, and human resources mission in our state. Perhaps some of you were part of the Institute's creation. For those of you who don't know the story, here's a brief rundown:

In 1973 the Nebraska Legislature, recognizing the tremendous importance of agriculture and natural resources to the economy and THE culture of Nebraska, passed LB149, which led to the Institute's formation in 1974. Impetus for that legislation came, I'm told, from a coalition of activists concerned that agriculture wasn't receiving the focus it needed from the university.

In addition to the Institute's headquarters on the University's east campus in Lincoln, IANR personnel work at the University of Nebraska's five research and extension centers across the state; at University of Nebraska-affiliated lifelong-learning sites at Grand Island, Norfolk, North Platte, and Scottsbluff, and in Nebraska's counties. We have a unique statewide mission that we take especially seriously.

IANR is an umbrella for several divisions that serve the state. Our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources prepares professional leaders in the areas of food, agricultural sciences,

agribusiness, and natural resources, through its undergraduate and graduate programs. We're proud of the fact that, while we constantly hear about a "brain drain" in our state, over 70 percent of the students who responded to a College survey stayed in Nebraska after graduation.

Perhaps you've worked with our Agricultural Research Division, which sponsors research in agriculture; food; natural resources and environmental sciences; family and consumer sciences; and service activities such as veterinary diagnostics and new product development. We place high priority on economically and socially important problems related to our areas of expertise.

Our Cooperative Extension Division delivers unbiased, research-based education and information to residents all across Nebraska. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension focuses its programming in five priority areas: agricultural profitability and sustainability; children, youth and families; food safety and quality; health and wellness; and strengthening Nebraska communities. Thirty-eight percent of all Nebraska youth between the ages of 5-19 are enrolled in Cooperative Extension's 4-H program in Nebraska. That's 129,365 children, and includes 33 percent of Nebraska's minority youth. About 1/3 of those

children live in cities with populations of 50,000 or more.

Research and service provided by our Conservation and Survey Division revolve around the state's diverse water resources, and the Conservation and Survey Division provides data collection, research and service, such as state geological, water and soil surveys, and much more. Conservation and Survey Division's Center for Advanced Land Management Information Technologies focuses on research, service, teaching, and training in remote sensing, geographic information systems, digital image processing, and automated mapping.

Our International Programs Division strives to enhance the global perspectives of Nebraska students, faculty, and citizens to contribute to international development and trade.

We in the Institute administer the research and Cooperative Extension programs of the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences. The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis reports to me in my role as University of Nebraska vice president for agriculture and natural resources, and is linked closely to the Institute.

I cannot fully tell you about IANR if I do not tell you about our vision. That vision is to be – and I quote – "the premier provider of

educational, research, and outreach programs essential for shaping Nebraska's future as a leader in the 21st century in the areas of food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources. IANR is dedicated to providing the highest quality programs that are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially responsible and scientifically appropriate."

And what is my role – and the role of IANR Associate Vice Chancellor Edna McBreen and Assistant Vice Chancellor Alan Moeller, two extremely dedicated administrators I hope you've had the chance to meet – in all this? Well, having been here about three weeks now, I'm still figuring that out! But I can tell you this:

Edna, Alan, and I work with many individuals and groups, such as yours, to provide direction, assistance, guidance, and stewardship for the Institute. We also work to tell the story of agriculture.

I see it as my job, working with my colleagues, to guide the development and articulation of the Institute's vision by encouraging programs and services consistent with it. I think it's vital to promote high standards of performance and accomplishments among our faculty, staff, and students. I know we must communicate our priorities and standards

while being open to faculty, staff, and constituents' concerns.

I have a number of administrative and management responsibilities, of course, and it's my job to lead planning efforts in order to set both THE short-term and long-term goals of IANR. I feel extremely fortunate that, because of the far-sightedness of Irv Omtvedt, who I now follow into this job and who worked so effectively with countless others on strategic planning, we now have a strategic plan in place as a guide for the Institute.

When you ask me about the relationship between the Institute and Nebraska residents and Nebraska agriculture producers, I must tell you that I consider a good, collaborative relationship between the Institute, the University, and the citizens of Nebraska an absolute necessity if we are to fulfill our land-grant university mission. I am a firm believer that those land-grant universities that disenfranchise their local partners are on the road to a meaningless, irrelevant existence. I also think our constituents must ALWAYS be part of the process of helping set the direction of experiment station research and extension education programs. And I think any land-grant university unwise enough to diminish its service commitment to everyday, ordinary people in order to

pursue prestige or exclusivity is in really big trouble! – PURSUE HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS

Fortunately for me, as head of the Institute, I am working with people who share my views. Input to determine IANR's priority programs and operational needs outlined in the Institute's strategic plan was solicited at some 25 listening sessions across the state. More than 700 stakeholders, students, faculty, and staff contributed their views.

I am pleased that the input of so many people was solicited before the Institute's strategic plan was finalized. I think gathering such a significant amount of input is a major investment in the future.

I also think it demonstrates the Institute's dedication to meeting the needs of Nebraska. It emphasizes the importance we in the Institute place on our local partners all across the state. It also demonstrates a clear understanding of our land-grant university mission.

It's important in the days ahead that those of us who work in land-grant universities meet the needs and maintain the support of those with whom we've traditionally worked while embracing new needs and new audiences. We must identify and meet Nebraska's needs – something land-grant universities are positioned to do better than any other type of institution. We must further the understanding between

our new and our traditional audiences, and we must respond to the concerns of each.

I feel extremely fortunate to have arrived at the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources to be part of such exciting and challenging times in research, teaching, and extension education. So much is being done, and yet there is so much more to do. I certainly look forward to being part of all of this with high anticipation and a great deal of enthusiasm. And I especially look forward to working with you.

Thank you!