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11-6-2003

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John Owens
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jowens2@unl.edu

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Owens, John, "Agriculture at the Crossroads" (2003). *John Owens: Speeches & Appearances.* Paper 67.
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THANK YOU!

Agriculture at the Crossroads
UNL East Campus Union
November 6, 2003
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

What a pleasure it is to have this opportunity to welcome you all to this "thirteenth" annual Agriculture at the Crossroads Conference, "sponsored" by the Nebraska AgRelations Council and the Department of Agricultural Economics "here" in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

I am "excited" about today's program looking at "Policy Challenges Facing the Livestock Industry." What a timely and important topic! And what a wealth of speakers, including several of Nebraska's legislators. We have Congressman Tom Osborne JOHN HANSEN "delivering" the keynote address on "A Cooperative Approach to the Challenges Facing Nebraska Agriculture," while Speaker of the Legislature Curt Bromm will provide "insights" on "State Legislative Initiatives Affecting the Livestock Industry." It is great to have Congressman Osborne and State Senator Bromm among the many

fine speakers scheduled today. I thank all the people who have helped put this conference together for your fine and dedicated work. It is greatly appreciated.

I hope you all saw the Associated Press story the end of October that reported Nebraska led the nation in beef production in September, a record month for the nation as 2.31 billion pounds of beef was distributed to grocery stores, restaurants, and other outlets. Such stories highlight the importance of the livestock industry to Nebraska, where Nebraska farmers and ranchers sell $6 billion or more of livestock and livestock-products annually. Our Public Policy Specialist Roy Frederick told us earlier this year in one of his policy briefs that that's equivalent to $3,500 in sales for every man, woman, and child in the state. With figures like that, it's hard to believe that anyone can ever question the importance of agriculture in Nebraska! Yet that occurs.

When I am asked if agriculture continues to be as important in Nebraska today, and will be in the future, I smile and respond, "only if you eat."

Of course agriculture is important in Nebraska, and will be in

the future! Natural resources are important! Food and water are vital to survival! Only a short-sighted or misguided nation would take lightly the resources needed to feed its citizens should it one day find food-imports held hostage either through war, terrorism, or economic boycott.

Nebraska's farms and ranches cover 46.4 million acres of the state, which is 96 percent of Nebraska's total land area. There are nearly 23 million acres of rangeland and pasture in Nebraska, half in the Sandhills.

When you drive from the western edge of Lincoln out to the Wyoming border, up past Chimney Rock and Scottsbluff, what do you see? Agriculture. Natural resources. Miles and miles of fertile acres dotted with rivers and streams. While only a small percentage of Americans are involved in production agriculture today, the importance of this profession can never be overestimated. Not as long as people need to eat!

We in the Institute constantly are working to help strengthen Nebraska agriculture through research, teaching, and extension education. Because the livestock industry is today's topic, I'd like in

the next few minutes to provide just a small sampling of the good work done in the Institute to benefit the livestock industry and Nebraska.

Well, actually, I'd like to provide more than just a small sampling, because I am so proud of and enthusiastic for the work we do in the Institute, but time does not permit!

I hope you all saw the many media reports that ran last month about the exciting research done here on the use of a new vaccine and bacterial feed additive to reduce E. *coli* in cattle. The tremendous play this story received underscores the importance of the E. *coli* issue to both the livestock industry and consumers.

For the past two summers, our scientists tested the effectiveness of the vaccine and bacterial feed additive E. *coli* control methods under typical feedlot conditions. They found the new vaccine and bacterial feed additive each significantly reduced E. *coli* 0157:H7 in feedlot cattle, and using both may offer added protection. What good news this is for beef producers eager for science-based tools to help reduce the prevalence of this dangerous bacteria that causes foodborne illness and ground beef recalls.

Our interest in E. *coli* is long-term and ongoing, and our researchers are working on several fronts in the E. *coli* battle. Our scientist's research has revealed much about 0157:H7's genetic structure, and one of our teams devised a simple way to test pens of feedlot cattle for E. *coli* without handling individual animals. In 1998 the Unicameral passed LB 1206 which provided $250,000 annually for five years to support the university's E. *coli* research. That funding ended in 2002, but the research it supported helped our scientists earn more than $2.6 million in grants to continue the E. *coli* work.

When North America's leading experts on E. *coli* 0157:H7 shared their findings and discussed future research needs at the Second Governor's Conference on Ensuring Meat Safety here in Lincoln in April, IANR scientists were the conference organizers. They also were among those leading experts making presentations.

Also in the news this year has been the new calving system our scientists have developed and tested to help Sandhills ranchers reduce calf scours. The Sandhills Calving System groups cow-calf pairs by calf-age to keep older and younger calves in separate pastures to prevent the spread of germs that cause calf scours.

THIS NEW SYSTEM reduces labor and medication expenses as well as scour-related deaths, illness, and performance losses, AS WELL AS the need for antibiotics to treat sick calves. One rancher estimated savings of $40,000 to $50,000 annually since implementing the system, based on more calves to sell, improved calf performance, and significantly lower treatment costs.

We're very pleased that in *Meat and Poultry* magazine's last annual ranking of the nation's leading universities serving the meat and poultry industry, the magazine ranked us fourth, up from sixth the year before. They cited our Food Processing Center and work by THE UNIV'S. food and animal scientists as real strengths, and we agree.

Here in the Institute we say agriculture covers everything from the farm gate to the restaurant plate, and that certainly shines-through in our livestock work. From research on best management practices to new products to increase consumer demand and provide nutrition information, our scientists are at work researching and providing knowledge the industry can use.

We're enthused about several new, higher-value beef products that are creating excitement in the industry and helping

boost consumer [redacted] for beef. The science behind these new cuts comes from our research, and that is of real value to both the industry and consumers. Our meat scientists studied more than 5,500 muscles in the beef chuck and round and identified higher value potential in muscles traditionally used for ground beef and roasts. The best known of the new products is the flat iron steak, but others are coming along.

Much knowledge gained from research is shared with our constituents in a variety of ways throughout the year, one of which is our televised "Market Journal" program, also available on the Web. Among "Market Journal" topics this year have been a USDA pilot program intended to help livestock producers manage price risk; livestock and heat; the country of origin labeling law; potential pasture problems; range and ranching strategies; and more.

I am so pleased to be able to highlight just these few brief glimpses of the exciting and important work the Institute is doing for agriculture and Nebraska. It is our privilege and pleasure to work with our constituents to meet both present and future needs as we fulfill our land-grant university mission.

Thank you for allowing me to welcome you this morning. I know an excellent program lies ahead, and it is a delight to see you all here to take part. Thank you.