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Association of American State Geologists 95th annual meeting

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Association of American State Geologists 95th annual meeting
Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center, Lincoln
June 16, 2003
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

What a great pleasure to welcome you to the 95th annual meeting of the Association of American State Geologists. I truly hope you enjoy your stay the next few days here in Lincoln, our state's capitol and Nebraska's second-largest city.

Mark mentioned that I'm from Texas. My family started there, our first family home in the United States, when my maternal great-grandfather immigrated to this country from Germany, to escape military conscription -- just as the Civil War broke out here. With remarkably bad timing, he landed at the port of Galveston just in time to be rounded up and sworn, under gunpoint, into the Confederacy.

After the Civil War Great-grandfather accumulated land in Central Texas, where he lived, and on the High Plains, where no one wanted to live! It always makes me grin to see part of Great-grandfather's Central Texas farm on the news from time to time these days -- that part grew up to be a ranch when President George W. Bush purchased it from my

cousins in February of 2000!

Mark also mentioned I am familiar with the High Plains, or Ogallala, Aquifer, this tremendous resource that had its beginnings millions of years ago and lies under most of Nebraska, plus parts of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, South Dakota and Wyoming. In large part because of this, Nebraska, our powerhouse of an agricultural state, is able to irrigate more than 8 million acres of cropland.

As is the case everywhere, water is tremendously important in Nebraska. Very recently the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources here at the University of Nebraska conducted more than 30 listening sessions across our state to hear what's on people's minds that we need to address as we update our strategic plan. In every session, from east to west, from north to south, water quantity and water quality surfaced as the issue of great importance to Nebraskans.

This concern is not surprising, and not even necessarily new. Because I very much enjoy history, I was interested to discover a little tidbit relating to water and university history. Lewis E. Hicks, an early University of Nebraska professor of geology and allied sciences, back in 1887 wrote our first agricultural experiment station bulletin. It was titled "Irrigation in

Nebraska."

Wrote Professor Hicks: "I am convinced that the wealth and resources of western Nebraska will be largely increased and its development greatly quickened by an intelligent and perservering use of the pure and copious streams of water flowing over it."

As we know today, the water beneath the land in the form of aquifers is an incredibly rich and valued resource, which must be managed with the greatest of care.

Here in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we know the strong and important relationship between natural resources and agriculture. The work of our scientists in these two key areas produces a wonderful and important synergy of great value to the Institute, to the university, and to Nebraska. And we are continually looking for collaborations and partnerships in these areas.

Again, welcome to Nebraska. May each of you have a wonderfully renewing and enriching conference.