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Hearing on L8569

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Hearing on LB569 #570
Nebraska Statehouse, Lincoln
March 10, 2003
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

Chairman
Senator Wehrbein and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is John Owens, and I am University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

I thank Senator Schrock and all the senators "co-sponsoring" LB569 for their "recognition" of the importance of agriculture in Nebraska, where one in four jobs "depends" on this vital industry. Their support for the work done by the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources to "continually strengthen" Nebraska agriculture is "deeply gratifying" and "greatly appreciated."

Protests "we have heard" over our budget cuts in the past year "validate" the importance of "the work" of our faculty and staff to Nebraska. A great deal of constituent "frustration" has been expressed about converting the South Central Research and Extension Center to a field laboratory/research farm, and we share that frustration. Were the economy robust and the University budget not cut so deeply, the Center "would remain" as it previously was. As we all "consider" the proposed university cuts "announced today", cuts that are "only" a portion of "what" finally will be required to meet all of the budget proposals . . . before us, . . .

before us, I think the significant ramifications of Nebraska's budget crisis become increasingly clear. We have said consistently that we've made the choices we've made because the alternative choices before us are even worse. That was the case with the South Central Research and Extension Center in round three of budget cutting. Round four now brings us to those even worse-case scenarios.

In the Institute we have made vertical cuts because we think across-the-board cuts will weaken some programs to the point from which they might never recover. For us, South Central was a $661,707 cut in state-aided dollars in our budget, with 19 FTE impacted. We are realizing that amount through $485,375 no longer paid in salaries, $92,221 no longer paid in benefits, $69,111 that once supported operations, and $15,000 in eliminated utility costs.

We are maintaining as much of the Clay Center program as possible, given our newly limited resources, but we must do so in ways different than before. We are talking with officials at the USDA Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center to retain office space in the building where the South Central center was located. This space will be for the farm manager and technicians who remain to work at the farm, and for Institute faculty when present there to conduct research and extension education programs at the field laboratory.

All tenured faculty who were part of the South Central Research and -

Extension Center will continue to conduct research at the field laboratory. Other faculty based in Lincoln and working in wheat breeding, corn breeding, agronomy, and plant pathology have conducted research at the Clay Center research farm for several years, and that work continues. We are advertising for a water resources specialist who will have a very clear responsibility to work with the state's largest irrigated corn production area, south central Nebraska. And, we are working on ways to continue productive relationships with agricultural producers and crop consultants in the south central part of Nebraska.

The first three rounds of budget cuts have reduced the Institute's ability to provide veterinary extension education programs. We are looking at enhancing and expanding the potential of the Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center as a learning site for extension education for practitioners of veterinary medicine. Practicing veterinarians from Nebraska, as well as veterinarians from surrounding states, will find increased educational in-service opportunities available to them through the center. Our plan is to place an extension educator at the center whose focus will be to facilitate, as well as to teach, and to provide increased, in-depth learning opportunities for Nebraska veterinarians. Two open positions we hope to fill, in addition to this extension educator position, will become part of an educational team comprised of extension veterinary specialists from the university. This outreach program will

help meet the educational interests of Nebraska's veterinary medical community.

It was announced earlier today that one of the proposed cuts to meet the budget cuts required of the university in Round Four of budget cutting is terminating the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's current contract with Kansas State University for veterinary medical education. That contract program involves the rotation of KSU veterinary medicine students through the Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center at Clay Center. We are discussing the center's future role in the KSU College of Veterinary Medicine Program with representatives from KSU, and we will be happy to see those rotations continue. In addition to KSU students, veterinary medicine students from other institutions, such as Iowa State, Oklahoma State, Illinois, Minnesota, and others also have rotated through the Center. We expect that to continue.

There is nothing we can cut that will not cause hurt and frustration somewhere. We in the Institute and at the university greatly appreciate your support and your understanding of the situation we face. Thank you.