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

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Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture Budget Hearing
February 3, 2004
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

Good afternoon Senator Wehrbein and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am 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 am here to speak with you about the impact of further budget cuts to the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture – NCTA – at Curtis, Nebraska.

Governor Johanns' proposed budget plan will reduce NCTA's general fund appropriation by approximately $38,000. By itself, this amount might not seem large or greatly burdensome, but to the college, this is a huge amount! This is huge because the college has a small and extremely tight budget, and it becomes the fifth cut, on top of four NCTA cuts totaling $309,622 over the

last two years. ~~If the Governor's proposal to lessen the negative impact of these cuts by suspending the 1% depreciation assessment scheduled for FY05 is instituted, the amount would be reduced to approximately $22,000, still a highly significant reduction in an especially small budget at NCTA.~~

To put this cut into perspective, this amount is about equal to the level we will need to increase the library budget for the College in response to the recent Higher Learning Commission accreditation review committee report which identifies the meager budget for the library as a real deficiency at NCTA. Accreditation Team site visits in 2001 and 2003 identified the library, including its holdings, its services, and its budget as an area of "institutional need" as NCTA worked to meet "The Higher Learning Commission's" criteria for accreditation.

It is extremely difficult for very small institutions such as NCTA to face significant budget cuts, because even in good times

there is relatively "little" flexibility within a small college's budget. The impacts of the loss of $309,622 from the previous cuts have been especially hard on NCTA! Cuts of the magnitude taken certainly have "negatively affected" the way NCTA fulfills it mission.

As a result of the previous cuts, NCTA has become an academic year campus for most of its programs (seven faculty and three secretaries "reduced" from calendar year to academic year appointments), which means their salaries were reduced by 25%. The college had to "eliminate" the Ag Mechanics program (two faculty) and had to reduce the regular instructional programming in "all other majors" by eliminating two vacant faculty positions in Agribusiness Management and Agricultural Production. ~~Today, many more courses are taught by temporary "adjunct" faculty or by contract with instructors from Mid-Plains Community College.~~ In addition, one staff position has been eliminated.

The College's ability to provide adequate education for students has been damaged. And, because NCTA's mission is teaching, the most apparent impact is on instruction and class availability. Already, 16 NCTA classes have been cancelled or postponed ranging from Veterinary Technology courses in Animal Nutrition to management courses in Agribusiness to Water Management courses in Plant Sciences.

Not being able to offer these classes diminishes the ability of NCTA to provide a quality education to students studying for their degrees. The irony of a two-year agricultural college not able to provide a fundamental agronomic education is especially vivid.

In addition to the lack of class availability, increased teaching loads on those NCTA faculty who are remaining is a serious issue. The remaining faculty are carrying huge teaching loads, and they are still required to fulfill advising duties,

committee work, professional development, curricular improvements, and new student recruitment. In addition, most NCTA faculty are involved with student organizations and student activities.

Even with these "especially" serious challenges, NCTA will continue to be highly resourceful and efficient in meeting its mission. However, NCTA "cannot" preserve the quality of its instructional program if it continues to permanently cut its appropriated funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

"DAVID STOCK"

PRESIDENT - Agricultural BUILDERS OF NEBRASKA.

- WRITTEN TESTIMONY

~~PROPONENTS OF THE UNIV. of NEB. SYSTEM~~