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ABN Summer Meeting

John Owens

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, jowens2@unl.edu

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ABN Summer Meeting  
Tuesday, August 2, 2005  
ARDC  
John Owens  
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

We in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources are so pleased you’re here with us today at our Agricultural Research and Development Center. We hope you enjoy the day as much as we enjoy having you here. Thank you for coming. Thanks, also, to everyone who has been involved in putting this day together. Your work is very much appreciated.

I’m extremely pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you, because we in the Institute need your help and your insights in several areas. One of these areas is keeping the lines of communication open and free-flowing between the Institute and you, as well as other many constituents across Nebraska. We want to know what’s on your mind. We want to honestly and forthrightly discuss ideas and concerns, and come to a clear understanding of where we are and what we all face on behalf of
agriculture and natural resources in Nebraska. It takes all of us, working together, to keep our industry strong.

I have four topics I particularly want to visit about with you today. I also want us to have time for discussion following my remarks, so I'm going to jump directly into my topics.

My first topic, what the Institute is doing for Nebraska, always is a treat to talk about. Recently someone asked me what we're doing for Nebraska's beef industry – a very fair question. Your land-grant university belongs to you, and you always should feel free to ask us what we're doing for Nebraska. We appreciate the opportunity to reply.

I decided what we do benefitting the beef industry provides such a good-illustration of our work for Nebraska that I'm going to focus today on beef, although we could just as readily provide examples of Institute work in many other areas. I brought along a handout showing some examples of beef-related items in the Institute's 2005 impacts report, and I'll mention a few of them – and other items – here. For instance:
Institute research shows developing "replacement-heifers" to lighter-than-traditional weights significantly reduces feed costs without hurting reproductive-performance.

Our biological systems engineers are developing a research-based computer-tool that should help communities, planners, and producers make better-informed decisions about where to locate livestock operations in order to reduce odor-related conflicts and improve environmental quality. We hope it will be available for use by individuals next year.

Our veterinary-scientists designed and successfully tested a "calving-system" that greatly reduces scours outbreaks by managing cow-calf pairs and pregnant-cows to minimize calf contact with diarrhea-causing organisms.

We’re proud two of our faculty are part of a research-team awarded the 2004 International Meat Secretariat Prize for Meat Science and Technology. It’s the first U.S. team ever to win this international award. Their work is responsible for development of the flat iron steak and other beef-cuts that have increased
demand and, I’m told, added at least $50 in value per animal over the past five years, AND THIS IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF COMMODITY BOARD INVESTMENTS IN RESEARCH “PAYING OFF”!

Last week we hosted a national review team. They were on campus looking at the proposed cooperative agreement between the Institute and Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine to provide veterinary medicine education for Nebraska students. “One of the key reasons we’re so excited about this proposed cooperative-agreement is that we think it will produce more food-animal veterinarians, a critical need for our livestock industry. This is a very real example of our commitment to the industry now, and in the future.

I could provide so many, many more examples demonstrating practical-benefit the Institute provides Nebraska ... such as our E. coli work, and the work accomplished here on feeding wet byproducts. That’s a great-example of how the Institute benefits Nebraska and for those of you who don’t know the story – it’s a terrific example of how our work with Nebraska’s commodity groups pays-off for the state, because the
Nebraska Corn Board helped fund IANR’s ethanol byproducts research.

During the 1990s, because of pioneering work done in the Institute, wet byproducts went from an unfamiliar material to a "major" Nebraska-feed-source. Today, it’s estimated roughly two-thirds of Nebraska feeder-cattle are fed rations that include wet byproducts.

In 2000, one of our ag economists analyzed the economic-benefit of this research, and found feeding byproducts wet instead of drying them provided a $212 million net cumulative benefit to Nebraska from 1992-through 1999. Recently he estimated the cumulative benefit doubled to about $400 million by 2004.

That’s just one more example of how Institute work is contributing to the Nebraska economy and Nebraskans. Time doesn’t permit more, so I’ll move on to my second-topic today, which is recruitment. We need your insights, your ideas, and your help on this one.
In my opinion, the University of Nebraska has one of the strongest traditional agricultural programs in the country. Yet undergraduate enrollments in our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources have dropped for the past eight years. In 1997 we had 1,545 students studying in our college. Last fall it was 1,222. We're down over 300 students in eight years.

Last fall CASNR's undergraduate enrollment was about 7 percent of the total UNL undergraduate enrollment. For comparison, I'll note that in 2004 Kansas State's ag college had 9.7 percent of their university's enrollment. This spring Iowa State's ag college had 12 percent of their university's total enrollment. We're not exactly comparing apples-and-apples here, because each of these schools doesn't offer exactly the same programs, but this gives you an idea of where other schools are.

In our business, 10-11 percent of the total university undergraduate enrollment is considered very, very good. We want to see CASNR get there. I think that can happen. I also think, as much
as this pains traditionalists, that “changing-demographics” means
requires growth innovation and new programs built on our
traditional strengths “to attract those” who have not previously
been our traditional students. The university is moving to a
tuition incentive program. Attracting non-traditional students will
help grow our student numbers and allow us to continue to fully
meet the needs of our traditional students. There is no “either-or”
between traditional and non-traditional students and traditional
and non-traditional majors – they are totally complementary one
to the other. We build on our traditional programs to attract new
students. In turn, tuition dollars from new programs help
support and keep our traditional programs strong, and folks –
that’s important to all of us involved in agriculture in Nebraska.

Three to four percent growth for CASNR, over time, is both
a necessity and, very likely, an optimum, when we look at the
percentage of students enrolled in agricultural colleges at other
universities in the nation. To have 300 more students, as we did
eight years ago, would be tremendous. To grow even beyond
that is, a goal to shoot for. We’re going to need all the help and
innovation we can muster to gain those numbers.

Chancellor Perlman has made it clear that at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln individual academic departments that do a
good job getting-and-keeping students will be financially
rewarded. And that recruiting success will be one determining
factor for departments to, in-the-future, regain funding they’ll
lose this year. More on that funding loss when I talk about
budget.

The key point here is: Chancellor Perlman is linking enrollments and funding. The corollary is: In the Institute, research, teaching, and extension education are closely
entwined. What raises one, raises all. What diminishes one, diminishes all.

Three departments in which we see both the past and future
of agriculture – animal science, agronomy and horticulture, and
agricultural economics – seem especially key to me in the
college’s growth. In the past eight years animal science dropped
from 226 to 166 enrolled. Agronomy enrollments dropped from 131 to 55. Horticulture – you know it’s now the department of agronomy and horticulture – actually has seen a rise in enrollments from 1997 to 2004. Agribusiness went from 229 to 167. Agricultural economics went from 56 to 45. How do we raise these numbers? How do we make clear all the career opportunities our traditional majors can springboard CASNR graduates such that they might have fulfilling and rewarding lives? Don’t be afraid! Mark Lagomarcino and A Card Banquet. No future, but the future of the Institute depends on your input.

We need your help, as agricultural representatives and leaders, to talk positively about the importance and value of agriculture and natural resources, and the variety of careers both provide, not just in production agriculture, but also in related careers as well. I cannot tell you how dismayed I am whenever I hear a farmer or rancher say they told their children to take up another profession because they couldn’t see a future for them in farming or ranching. That child, then, went away from agriculture altogether.
What about food science? What about agribusiness? What about horticulture and entomology and animal science and water science and soil science and fisheries and wildlife and the myriad of other possibilities that exist for students to be part of the industry they love, even if they aren’t living-and-working directly on the land?

If kids want to do something else, they certainly should do something else – but we need them to at least know and to think about all they can learn and do CASNR. We’re a natural for students interested in science, technology, food, business, and people.

In the Institute, we know – and we say – agriculture encompasses everything from the farm gate to the restaurant plate. It’s obvious to us way too many people don’t know that. With no personal link to farms and ranches, they have little or no understanding of the importance and issues of what we do. We have a tremendous story to tell. We need your help telling it.

Changing demographics also will influence future
enrollments. A report from the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education says the number of Hispanics in Nebraska high schools is about to increase dramatically. Traditionally, a significantly lower percentage of Hispanic students, compared with Anglo students, pursue higher education. We need to convince these students our university education has benefits they won’t find elsewhere, both inside and outside the classroom.

My third topic today is budget – and I surely wish we didn’t have to talk about this again.

It is extremely disappointing, after several years of budget cutting due to our state’s financial crisis, to find this year, when the state economy has rebounded, that we still are looking at further cuts. The Legislature appropriated an excellent budget to the university this year, and we thank them so much for that. Unfortunately, we face further cuts because of tuition shortfalls due to falling enrollments across all of UNL.

The first cut is a temporary 2 percent this year, with a
permanent 1.66 percent next year. In the Institute, this year’s temporary 2 percent is tentatively estimated at $1.5 million. Plus, just a few days ago UNL completed a budget cut from its tuition shortfall last year (Fall 04) costing IANR $864,000.

Institute budget issues are further complicated by the fact that while we have ended our agreement with Kansas State University for veterinary medicine education, we are honoring our commitment to the Nebraska students who were enrolled in that program when the agreement ended. That means for three years we will cash-flow funding for all Nebraska students still at KSU. We’ll also, starting this fall, do the same for our first veterinary medicine class starting under our new agreement with Iowa State University. We hope in 2006 to have the Nebraska portion of that program up and going, which would mean Nebraska will share in veterinary medicine tuition-dollars from the fall 2006 class. However, a 2006 start-up may be too optimistic, and we may be implementing the new program in veterinary medicine for the Fall 2007 class. We will know more when we receive the
"full report" from the American Veterinary Medical Association’s review team which was in both Lincoln and Ames last week for site reviews.

To meet our budgeting challenges, we will (1) make cuts, and (2) hold positions open much longer than usual to cash-flow as much as possible. I know holding positions open longer is extremely-frustrating for department heads, directors, faculty, and constituents who want to see the positions filled. It is extremely-frustrating for those of us in administration, also. It is, however, the responsible thing-to-do, to get us through these tight times. Some positions we must fill soon, such as those that fulfill our obligations to the new veterinary medicine program. Others we will hold until we can afford to release them.

Candidly, the easiest thing we could have done on this veterinary medicine program would have been to continue a traditional contract with Kansas State, or to enter into a new, traditional contract with Iowa State University. Yet to make the best-uses of the resources available to us on behalf of Nebraska
and to both strengthen ties with food animal veterinarians so important to Nebraska's livestock industry and to enhance internal and external research-funding opportunities, we have taken the long view in entering into this new cooperative agreement with Iowa State University. "Short-term," it is very tough for us financially; "long-term," it is the right thing to do to benefit Nebraska.

The last topic I want to talk about today has buzzed through our agricultural community — and our state — in the past few months, and that is the discussion surrounding the name of our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

I said earlier that this college's enrollment has declined for the past eight years. We hear stories — too many stories to simply ignore — about people who apparently have such skewed ideas of what the college name portrays that their minds are closed. Closed to the excellent opportunities available to students who study with us in CASNR.

We need to know what those people think so we can
develop strategies to combat people’s misconceptions. To find out, we need to ask questions. I sometimes think that when college Dean Steve Waller began this name discussion with the state, his openness to considering “all possibilities” – the mark of a true scientist, by the way – “translated” in some people’s minds into “the belief” that we were “heading-straight” to dropping the word agriculture from our college’s name.

That never was the point. It never will be “the-point” while I am Vice President and Vice Chancellor for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The point is that robust discussion and candid exploration – even, and sometimes especially, when people “vigorously-disagree” – often leads to answers yet unknown, to solutions not yet discovered. Asking questions and seeking answers is part of education. It’s a hallmark of both a land-grant university campus and a free society. I always will vigorously defend anyone’s right to raise and explore a question. Always. I will defend Dean Waller’s right to ask the question – and your right to ask him...
what he was *thinking* in asking the question! I just ask that
when you have such a question, you direct it straight to us, so
we can respond *directly* to you. We want to know your thinking.
We want you to know our challenges and our opportunities.

I thank you for your time. Having spoken of the importance
of discussion in the last few minutes, I’d now like to invite your
thoughts and questions. Thank you again for being with us
today.

Thank you.