

2006

AgLEC Advisory Council Meeting

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**AgLEC Advisory Council Meeting
East Campus Union
Wednesday, November 15, 2006
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor**

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today to discuss one of my favorite topics – education and the terrifically-talented young people who come to study with us in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, or CASNR, in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

When I made the decision to come to Nebraska from New Mexico nearly six years ago, the students and faculty I met while interviewing played a key role in my final decision to accept the position of Harlan Vice Chancellor in the Institute, and University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

We have a tremendous faculty, and our students are so impressive. It raises my spirits each semester to see them back on campus, eager and enthusiastic for all that lies before them. These students are our future – Nebraska's future. I am very

pleased to report to you that 75 percent of CASNR graduates remain in Nebraska after graduation. The students we educate go out into the world as contributing members of society, skilled for their professions, giving me confidence the future is in good hands.

I'm going to talk today about some of the exciting new majors and options we are offering in CASNR, and the why of them. You'll be hearing more about some of the programs shortly.

First off, let me share some wonderful news with you concerning our student body: For the second year in a row, CASNR's undergraduate enrollment increased. This is wonderful news. I'm sure you're well aware that for too many years before that, we watched CASNR student numbers decline, and that will not do. This year CASNR student enrollment is up 3.1 percent, to 1,303 students.

Graduate student enrollment in CASNR also is up, to 494 graduate students.

I'm also pleased to tell you undergraduate enrollment is up in the College of Education and Human Services and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis. That's good news for all of us.

Today, however, my focus is on CASNR, and new majors and options here. I know when Dean Steve Waller talks about the progress CASNR is making in recruitment, he notes that without the diversification of the CASNR portfolio – new courses and majors to attract diverse students – CASNR's enrollment would not be increasing. The Professional Golf Management program has made a significant difference in positioning CASNR as a growing college; Professional Golf Management now is one of CASNR's top five degree programs, with 97 students.

This year CASNR's incoming class was smaller than last year's, and Dean Waller notes the increased total enrollment is a reflection of the importance of the college's student retention programs. CASNR had more continuing students this fall than they had last year, which made the difference for them in

increased enrollments. Recruitment and retention both are key.

Dean Waller also cites the success of increased collaborations with stakeholders as paying recruitment dividends. While he says it's happening across many academic programs, it clearly is noticed in Animal Science, where Nebraska Cattlemen and Agriculture Builders of Nebraska have provided assistance.

So when people ask me why the new programs, my answer is simple: It's for the students. We have a tremendous, well-grounded scientific education to provide, an education that leads to fulfilling and lucrative careers. Our new majors allow us to provide that education to a broader, more diverse student population. That's a win for everyone.

I will tell you with pride that the people who built agricultural education in the Institute did it right. I will put our traditional agricultural programs up against any program in the country and be assured we will come off well. We offer tremendous education in these areas. They are the rock-solid foundation on which we build our new offerings.

Times have changed. As farms and ranches grow bigger, fewer people farm and ranch and fewer students return to the farm than once did. Not one of us has to like that, but we do have to deal with the reality of it. When we build on the strengths of our traditional programs to expand our offerings to students who don't see themselves interested in production agriculture but who are extremely interested in science, in food, in agribusiness, in plants, in animals, in natural resources topics, we meet the needs of today's society. Meeting the needs of our state is a key part of our land-grant university mission.

Our Professional Golf Management program grows out of the Institute's strong turf science work, and is a tremendous science-based program. When our new programs bring more new students to us, that helps keep our traditional programs strong as it grows our new programs. That's vital for us.

We have a new major in plant biology we expect to begin in fall 2007, which students can take either through CASNR or the College of Arts and Sciences. Students will be able to explore

plant biology at any developmental level, from the molecular to the managed or natural ecosystem, in a science-rich major unlike current plant-related majors.

CASNR has a joint program with the College of Education and Human Sciences in hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management. It grew out of interest expressed by representatives of the tourism and hospitality industries who came to us looking for help in finding qualified graduates. This major offers eight options. Ecotourism and parks and recreation are through CASNR, the others through CEHS. There are things about natural resources and agriculture in our state that we can capitalize on to promote tourism, Nebraska's third-largest revenue generator.

The landscape architecture major is a joint program between the College of Architecture and CASNR. There are more landscape architecture jobs available nationwide than there are people to fill them. Students get their degree from the College of Architecture; they take six CASNR courses in the first two years

of the five-year program.

Last spring we started an insect science major, which evolved from student interest. It offers four options – science, pest management, public health, and forensics. Television programs such as CSI have raised student interest in the forensics angle. As a matter of fact, we're looking at forensic science as a major, rather than an option in future.

We're also looking at a Food Technology for Companion Animals major, which may be in place by fall of 2007.

Among our new options are agricultural finance and banking, requested by the Nebraska Bankers Association because of what they see as a critical shortage of ag lenders in rural Nebraska. We also have new options in equine science, microbiology, and applied climate science. We're looking at a companion animals option that could begin in fall 2008 and allow students to receive their degrees in animal science with an emphasis on companion animal management, behavior, genetics and nutrition.

Nebraska has a rich tradition of producers diversifying and adding value to their products. That's what we're doing with our new majors and options, so our land-grant college remains responsive to today's – and tomorrow's – needs. Thank you.