

2006

Nebraska Association of County Extension Board Annual Meeting

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Nebraska Association of County Extension Board Annual Meeting
January 28, 2006
University of Nebraska at Kearney Student Union
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

Thank you for inviting me to be here today. I truly appreciate this opportunity to visit with you. I've been asked to tell you about "some" of the recent successes of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, to talk about opportunities for the Institute in Nebraska's future, and to talk, also, about extension's role in that.

Truth is, I could go on and on for hours about each of these topics. One of the greatest parts of my job is getting to talk about the many, many ways the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is at work benefitting Nebraskans. However, before the thought of my going on and on results in widespread panic throughout the entire room, let me assure you I will restrain myself and finish in the time allotted me - hopefully with a few minutes left for questions and comments. Hearing "what" you have to say is very important to me, and to all of us in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

I am a firm believer that land-grant universities that have lost touch with their constituents, who do not work in partnership with those constituents and listen to what they say, are land-grants that have lost their way.

Happily that is not the case here in Nebraska, where we think of ourselves as partners with Nebraska, and act accordingly. One of the reasons I am so pleased to be here today is because I appreciate the work you do as members of Nebraska's County Extension Boards. It is work that matters. It is work that is important to Nebraska now, and for the future.

You probably have heard me say this before, and I will go right on saying it well into the future, because I believe it so strongly: I think extension education is the best system ever yet devised outside the formal classroom for providing people with practical education they can immediately put to use in their lives. Extension provides knowledge based on university research seeking answers to people's very real concerns.

I think those of us in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources have some of the most exciting jobs around because that is the work we do. Research and education, both in the formal classroom and outside it, that springboard students to exciting careers and provide others important information of use in their lives and life decisions. We are Nebraska's food and water and sustainable environment people. We're the youth and family folks. We deal with the very basics of life - the basics none of us can live without. It is both our privilege and ^{our} responsibility to contribute to our great state. What could be more exhilarating than that?

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, we define agriculture as everything ^(or Ranch gate) from the farm gate to the restaurant plate. That includes production agriculture, food safety, new product development, resource management, water, nutraceuticals, pharmaceuticals, redox-biology, biochemistry and genomics and some of the most heavy-duty, mind-blowing science anyone could ever dream. For us it includes rural development and families, communities, youth development, nutrition, animal care, and more.

We provide a "tremendous education" for students who study with us, education that leads to lucrative, fulfilling careers. I consider that one of our great successes. This year I am so very pleased to tell you that after eight years of declining undergraduate enrollments in our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, last fall we celebrated an increase. The College's undergraduate enrollment rose 3.44 percent in fall 2005, up 42 students. The College had the largest percentage increase of any college at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doubly pleased to tell you that the college with the next largest percentage increase was the College of Education and Human Sciences, which saw its undergraduate enrollment increase 1.06 percent, or 25 students.

This is success we need to duplicate next year, and the year after that, and the year after that. The work we do is vital; our enrollments need to reflect its necessity to the state.



Let me tell you quickly about several other Nebraska successes, as well, because the successes of your land-grant university **are your** successes.

*Our scientists' pioneering research demonstrating the feasibility, benefits, and economic advantages of feeding ethanol byproducts wet instead of drying them first and shipping them to dry feed markets has provided an economic benefit to Nebraska of about \$400 million between 1992 and 2004.

*Extensive muscle profiling research done by our scientists laid the groundwork for the beef industry to develop new products, such as the popular flat iron steak, that have increased demand and added \$50 to \$70 in value *per head* in the past seven years.

More than 26 million cattle are fed and marketed in the U.S. each year. That represents \$1.3 *billion* to \$1.8 *billion* in added value annually. Beef is big business in Nebraska. We in the Institute are tending to Nebraska's business. The work our scientists do matters.

*Since 1993 extension's EDGE program – EDGE stands for Enhancing, Developing, and Growing Entrepreneurs – has helped nearly 2,000 Nebraskans [“]transform their ideas[”] into viable business opportunities, creating full-, and part-time jobs across our state. We all know what even a few [“]new jobs[”] mean in small communities – the value is great. A recent survey of EDGE participants showed that since participating in EDGE, 33 percent added employees. More than 70 percent increased [“]their business volume[”].

*In water-short southwest Nebraska in our Republican River Basin Irrigation Management Project extension [“]teaches[”] research-based strategies for conserving water. Program participants estimate the knowledge gained through this program is worth an average of about \$16,500 per operation, 


*Our 4-H program is tremendous. Nebraska has led the nation for the highest involvement percentage of youth enrolled in 4-H programs. Nebraska 4-H offers more than 150 projects that attract 4-H'ers of diverse backgrounds, including urban, rural, non-English speaking, and ages 5-19. Nebraska 4-H reaches approximately 118,000 youth and has over 16,000 youth and adult volunteers. This translates to about "one-third" of Nebraska's youth who are "age-eligible" to participate. Over 15 percent of those reached are ^{ethnic} minorities. Over half – 53 percent – are from towns "over" 10,000.

4-H projects "offer members" the opportunities to develop skills and foster interests in such areas as citizenship and civic education, plants and animals, healthy lifestyles, science and technology, and more. 4-H currently is developing a "new" entrepreneurship curriculum to foster the business skills needed for entrepreneurship in interested Nebraska youth. We think this of value "both" to the youth and to Nebraska's economic development. Currently teenagers with an interest in business

can learn business and life skills through 4-H's Business Sense curriculum, which includes how to write a business plan, determine customer needs, relate to customers, determine overhead costs, and set prices. 4-H'ers have used what they learn to turn interests, hobbies, or skills into part-time businesses. One teen used her new skills to start a business selling antique tractors over the Internet. In one year she sold eight tractors and made \$500 to \$1,000 per tractor.

*Food processing is Nebraska's largest manufacturing segment. Training and supporting prospective food processing entrepreneurs is important to Nebraska economic development, statewide. Our Food Processing Center's *From Recipe to Reality* seminars train and support new entrepreneurs in launching new food-related businesses, teaching participants key aspects of starting a food business. Those who complete the seminar can continue their training in the From Product to Profit phase of the program, which offers individual consultations with university food scientists and business consultants. In the past decade

more than 1,300 entrepreneurs have taken one or both seminars.

We have a new head of the Food Processing Center in Rolando Flores, who also will chair the Department of Food Science and Technology when he soon joins our faculty *on MARCH 1*.

These are just a few of the many, many successes I can proudly report as the benefits of your land-grant university at work for Nebraska. These are stories we need to tell – I always urge people to tell them loudly and proudly – to help educate those who don't always understand the importance of agriculture, natural resources, and family, youth, and community resources to our state and world.

I know a marketer who says greed, fear, and ease drive people to action. Will it make or save me money? Will it keep me, my family, and my community safer? Will it make my life easier?

The work done in the Institute provides a resounding "yes" answer to each of those questions. That's one of the many reasons there are tremendous opportunities for the Institute to not only contribute, but lead in helping build Nebraska's future.

You may have seen a news story recently that the University's Board of Regents has formed a Task Force on Outreach and Economic Development with Regent Chuck Hassebrook of Lyons as task force chair. That Task Force met for the first time last week and is a very real sign of the University's dedication to its role as an economic engine for Nebraska. The Rural Initiative, begun by then-President ^{Dennis} Smith, is another ^{Sandy Scofield} example.

Ninety-three percent of Nebraska's total land area is used for farming and ranching. We sit over a majority of the largest underground aquifer in the Western Hemisphere. We rank 10th in the nation in the number of streams and river miles in our state, and have approximately 2,000 natural lakes, mainly in the Sandhills. We rank 16th in the nation in total wetland acreage. Agriculture and natural resources must always be important to Nebraska. The Institute must always be about contributing to these key areas so important to the state through research, teaching and extension education.

When we look at the world today, we know the world's population is increasing. Water is a finite resource. Drought is very real - and very devastating - in many parts of the world. Rural areas and rural populations have serious concerns. So do urban areas and populations. We are a "connector" between the two, and that is important work.

Extension is and always must be an "essential piece" in that work. With the constantly expanding need for new knowledge to deal with a growing number of increasingly complex issues, the "need" for extension education is vital.

I've had people ask me if I think land-grant universities are as needed today as they were when they were first initiated. With the pace of today's world and the complexity of the issues facing us all, I think land-grant universities are even **more** needed. The need for what we do expands at ever-increasing speed. It moves in additional directions. It grows each day. That growth carries with it "tremendous responsibilities," tremendous opportunities, and tremendous challenges.

Because I think extension has reinvented itself, has grown and expanded its programming as our clients' diverse needs have expanded, more than any other organization I know, I am baffled¹⁾ each time I encounter people whose perception of extension is firmly - and I mean firmly! - "rooted" in the 1950s Norman Rockwell image of this esteemed third branch of our land-grant *university* system. Yet I cannot tell you how many times that happens.

When I encounter one of those folks with the Norman Rockwell image of extension, I assure them the dedication to clientele and mission seen in Rockwell's portrait of an extension agent visiting a family farm to check out a 4-H'ers calf is alive and well in 2005. That dedication and mission still drive our extension specialists and ^{over}educators to take the riches and resources of the university to where people ^{Live and work.} That may mean a workshop, a one-on-one meeting with a single mother trying to heighten her parenting, budgeting, and work skills to improve her family's life, or on the road with our new self-contained mobile technology classroom built to provide high-speed computing and technology education in communities across Nebraska.

Extension and the Institute need your help in telling the story of how we are at work in our state today, contributing to Nebraska's and the world's economy and to people's lives. I provided examples of a few ways that occurs earlier. As ^{EACH OF} member of a county extension board, you have eyewitness accounts of the same. We value your support in sharing those stories with others. We value hearing them from you, ourselves. We value your wise counsel on how we might best make those stories known, and how we might best work with you as partners with Nebraska. We want to know what you identify as the chief issues and concerns for our state. There is so much exciting work occurring. There is so much yet to do. We value each opportunity we have to work with you, and I thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I do believe we have a few minutes for comments and questions, and I would welcome that.

Thank you. *FOR ALL YOU DO FOR*

*NEBRASKA EXTENSION
+
FOR NEBRASKA!*