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## Nebraska Network 21 (NN21) Visionary Food Systems Curricula Action Team

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## **Nebraska Network 21 (NN21) Visionary Food Systems Curricula Action Team**

Article published in *Agricultural Education Magazine* 73:2 (September-October 2000).

### Public and Private Partnerships

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What started as two initiatives involving public and private entities in Nebraska has resulted in the development of the Governor's Task Force on Agriculture and Natural Resources Education.

Both initiatives were funded by grants from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan. One went to The Reinventing Agriculture Education for the Year 2020 Project which was coordinated by the Nebraska Department of Education. The other went to the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to establish the Nebraska Network21 (NN21), a group of people working together to creatively meet the learning needs of Nebraskans in the 21st century.

Among seven action teams appointed by NN21 was the Visionary Food Systems Curricula Action Team. This action team convened a Summit on Reinventing Agriculture and Natural Resources Education on Feb. 10, 1998. More than 100 Nebraskans attended. They represented the interests of agricultural production, secondary education, extension education, agribusiness, government and post secondary education.

Those attending the summit recognized the changing social and economic conditions in which agriculture operates and further recommended that such a gathering should continue in order to:

-Provide continuous and ongoing interaction between those involved and interested in agriculture and natural resources education.

-Promote collaboration with other disciplines where appropriate and form partnerships

for educational delivery with other entities having similar interests and goals.

-Encourage use of technology to a greater extent and to extend resources and expertise to learners.

In an effort to keep the idea moving forward, 26 participants in the Summit volunteered for follow-up action and formed a Steering Committee. They appointed an Annual Meeting Committee, a Legislative Committee and a Finance Committee.

Based on recommendations, the Steering Committee adopted the mission and goals below.

### **Mission**

To provide the leadership to integrate agricultural literacy into the lives of all Nebraskans from pre-kindergarten throughout life and to stimulate the preparation of a more diverse, competitive and productive workforce for our agriculture and natural resources systems to enhance the well-being of the state and its citizens.

### **Goals**

1. Facilitate dialogue between diverse stakeholders involved in agriculture and natural resources.

2. Gather and disseminate information and provide quality education through a wide variety of delivery methods that are relevant to current and future needs of people as well as agriculture and natural resources.

3. Advocate for systems, partnerships and alliances that enhance educational programs, opportunities and activities in agriculture and natural resources.

The Annual Meeting Committee organized Summit II which was held Nov. 19, 1998 in Lincoln. Summit II speakers focused on the need for a trained workforce to expedite economic development and demonstration of seamless education programs to take advantage of expertise and technology in agriculture and natural resources education. The more than 100 persons who attended Summit II reaffirmed the mission and purposes of this effort and urged action. Based on a Finance Committee report, those activities would be financed by grants, contributions, state funds, in-kind contributions and volunteers.

The Legislative Committee proposed a group that would maintain broad-based support

for lifelong learning in and about agriculture and natural resources and set a goal for establishing a state task force for this purpose. The idea was presented to Gov. Mike Johanns who subsequently appointed the Governor’s Task Force on Agriculture and Natural Resources Education.

The dedication of Task Force members has followed a path of defining vision to address their mission and purposes. This began with a briefing of the background work leading up to the formation and naming of the Task Force. Also included in this briefing was an overview of the current state of agricultural and natural resources education in Nebraska. At each step of the process, interaction between Task Force members occurred and led, through their feedback, to the next step. Through this interaction and feedback procedure, subsequent meetings led the Task Force to develop a public relations plan for agriculture and natural resources education, as well as a plan of action to develop essential learnings for K-12 which relate directly to Nebraska Science Standards. These learnings would be extensions to the current 7-12 curriculum frameworks developed by the Nebraska Department of Education and the UNL Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication. Presently, plans are being developed to secure funding for these efforts through grants and legislative appropriations.

In his address to the Task Force on May 18, 2000, Gov. Mike Johanns said “I see this Task Force being able to play an important role in at least three key areas: (1) Making the general public more aware of agriculture and the importance of sound agricultural policy; (2) Educating children and young people about agriculture and the opportunities for them in this industry; and (3) Providing correct and complete information to the public about current issues that may be controversial or cause for public concern or confusion.”

### **What has been learned thus far?**

1. It was critical to the success of this effort to early-on carefully select a representative cross section of stakeholders in agriculture and natural resource education.
2. During the process it was very important to allow for stakeholder discussion and interaction to determine subsequent actions.

3. The appointment of a facilitator to coordinate the dissemination of meeting action, follow-up on committee recommendations, set upcoming agendas and generally serve the role of an administrative assistant was critical.
4. Achieving the status of a Governor’s Task Force established credibility which allowed immediate recognition to all audiences.

### **The Future**

The formation of the Governor’s Task Force on Agriculture and Natural Resources Education represents the collaboration of many partners interested in the promotion of agricultural literacy and assurance of a diverse, competitive and productive workforce for our agriculture and natural resource systems. It will serve as a central “clearinghouse” through which emerging information can be efficiently distributed to stakeholder groups as well as the public, and through which stakeholder groups can direct concerns for the improvement of agricultural and natural resource literacy. This collaboration of partners brings together ideas, perspectives and resources to address issues that obviously would not be possible as single entities.

It is anticipated that in the future the role of the Task Force will become more formalized. Along with the role of information distribution, it will serve as a support mechanism to change in the agricultural and natural resource literacy movement. The support provided through such a partnership will provide a greater degree of confidence in stakeholder groups and individuals, and a greater credibility with the general public.

For more information and continuing updates on progress and activities, the Task Force has established a web site at this [http://www.unl.edu/aglec\\_govtfagr/index.html](http://www.unl.edu/aglec_govtfagr/index.html) address.

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