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A Report on Priorities for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, as Identified by Stakeholders at a November 11, 1998, Symposium

Richard K. Perrin

Co-chair, [NN21 Food Systems in 2020 Action Team](#)

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During 1998 the NN21 Food Systems in 2020 Action Team at the University of Nebraska sponsored two symposiums to stimulate thinking and discussion about the nature of the food system that will evolve by the year 2020, and the potential role of the University of Nebraska in shaping that system and educating people to participate effectively in it.

The first symposium, "The Food System for 2020: Nebraska's Opportunities", was held on January 14, with approximately 185 in attendance. The program (attached as Appendix 1) was intended to bring to bear some of the best thinking in the country about how the agricultural and food systems might change. The second symposium, "Insuring Opportunity in Food Systems: The Role of the Land Grant University", was held on November 11. Its purpose was to provide an opportunity to identify priority opportunities for UNL to better serve needs for education and research in the food system of 2020. The program is summarized below.

Insuring Opportunity in Food Systems: The Role of the Land Grant University

Nov 11, 1998, Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln, NE

8:30 Keynote Speaker: Karl Stauber, President, Northwest Area Foundation, Minneapolis "Agriculture and Communities -- Are They Still Related?"

9:15 Keynote Speaker: Natalie D. Hahn, Deputy Director, United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF) "Fruit of the Spirit"

10:30 Structural Changes and Opportunities in Crop Agriculture, with Panelists:

Tom Larson, crop-livestock producer, St. Edwards, Nebraska

Jim Girardin, grain and seed producer and Arrow Seeds, Broken Bow, Nebraska

Rebecca Kruger, Innovative Grain Technologies, Lincoln, Nebraska

Dermot Coyne, George Holmes Professor of Horticulture, UNL

1:00 Structural Changes and Opportunities in Animal Agriculture, with Panelists:

Dan Hodges, pork producer, Julian, Nebraska

Alan Janzen, beef producer, Circle 5 Feedyard and Ranch, Henderson, Nebraska

Muriel Barrett, free-range chicken producer/processor, Sutherland, Nebraska

Terry Klopfenstein, Kermit Wagner Professor of Animal Science, UNL

2:30-4:00 Breakout discussions: The Role of the Land Grant University

Approximately 125 persons attended this second symposium, of whom about 30% were UNL faculty and administrators, 25% were agricultural producers, 20% were stakeholders who did not identify their employment, 10% were representatives of organizations and interest groups, 8% were in agribusiness, and 5% were employed by other government agencies. Of these attendees, twenty six stakeholders remained at the end of the symposium to write down the priority program areas they had identified. These priorities have been grouped into similar categories that are summarized in [Table 1](#). [Table 2](#) lists the specific comments that stakeholders offered, grouped by priority area.

The most frequently identified priorities were to develop research and education programs that would **foster new products and production systems that would meet the needs of the market, and add value to products, especially those of small to moderate sized operations**. In addition many stakeholders suggested priority methods UNL might use in choosing among programs in the future, such as putting **more emphasis on social and human development relative to production and profitability**, and **maintaining closer contact with constituents**.

The Food Systems in 2020 Action Team hopes that these insights and preferences will be useful to faculty and administrators at UNL and to stakeholders who work with them in continuing to shape the nature of the University's research, teaching and extension education programs.

Table 1. Summary of priorities identified by 27 stakeholders at the NN21 symposium, Nov. 11, 1998.

Priority	Number of times cited
Priorities related to both educational and research programs	
1. Foster new products/systems	2
1a. Products and education for niche markets - global, domestic, direct	7
1b. Foster diverse and integrated management systems	1
1c. Develop systems/programs for small/moderate sized farms and processors	7
1d. Foster on-farm value-added products	5
1f. Develop low-input/low-capital systems	4
2. More emphasis on social and human development, less on profitability	13
3. Maintain closer contact with people for research and extension planning	11

4. Analyze and educate regarding contracting and options alternatives	1
Priorities related to resident and extension education programs	
5. Teach more entrepreneurial/managerial skills	7
6. Teach marketing skills, including direct marketing	2
7. More international education	2
8. More education for young farmers	2
9. More education for aging farmers	1
10. More distance learning	2
11. Re-orient extension educators as facilitators, not prescribers	1
12. Educate on safety of biotechnology	1
13. Develop programs oriented toward selection of preferred futures	1
14. Establish more internships	1
Priorities related to research programs	
15. Foster more biodiversity	1
16. Study food safety regulations	1
17. Research the benefits of regulating monopolies	1

Table 2. Stakeholders' priority statements, by priority area as identified in Table 1

Priorities related to both educational and research programs
1. Foster new products/systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• more diverse and integrated management systems• encourage systems thinking
1a. Products and education for niche markets - global, domestic, direct
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ market access for small farmers - direct markets○ research opportunities for specialty crops for niche markets○ research to get more value added from present grains, processing them where produced○ research on chemical protectants - pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals
1b. Foster diverse and integrated management systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ provide variety of alternatives/systems for different size operations
1c. Develop systems/programs for small/moderate farms and processors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ sell alternate livestock production systems, based on smaller size operations○ research should be size neutral○ enhance the competitiveness of moderate-size farming○ develop research which impacts medium-sized meat processor
1d. Foster on-farm value-added products
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ support production for higher value markets - lean natural beef, etc.○ more research in the area of value added processes
1f. Develop low-input/low-capital systems

- more research on low capital, management intensive operations
- research on size-neutral lower investment management intensive systems

2. More emphasis on social and human development, less on profitability

- consider quality of life and social aspects of ag research and extension
- Stronger responsibility focusing on the actual "people", not just economic gain
- human development in rural areas, leadership development in all areas
- leadership and people issues are of more concern than production issues
- build networks and local support groups
- education and research that defines quality of life and moves toward improving it
- more research work on rural social issues, not just funding ag production research

3. Maintain closer contact with people for research and extension

- a process for researching farmers' needs
- consolidation and centralization isn't effective for extension - it removes access
- need communication link for stakeholders, to help develop correct research questions
- maintain a presence in each county
- listen to farmers and ranchers - build research programs around their needs

4. Research and educate regarding contracting and options alternatives

Priorities related to resident and extension education programs

5. Teach more entrepreneurial/managerial skills

- emphasis on farmers as entrepreneurs
- extension should train entrepreneurs and provide assistance in alternative marketing
- support for entrepreneurship, including beginning family farms and start-up businesses
- train entrepreneurs

- concentrate on small entrepreneurial economics rather than production techniques
6. Teach marketing skills, including direct marketing
 - more concentration on direct marketing
 - provide education in marketing skills
 7. More international education
 - more international education of students
 - provide more international focus- expanding knowledge and opening new market opportunities
 8. More education for young farmers
 - educate youth and young producers from community
 - work with young farmers in the community
 9. More education for aging farmers
 10. More distance learning
 - distance learning at the student's own pace
 - run education on a channel of TV that is more accessible
 11. Re-orient extension educators as facilitators, not prescribers
 12. Educate on safety of biotechnology
 13. Develop programs oriented toward selection of preferred futures
 14. Establish more internships
- Priorities related to research programs**
15. Foster more biodiversity
 16. Study food safety regulations
 17. Research the benefits of regulating monopolies

Gering Civic Center Gering, Nebraska

- [November 12, 1998](#)
- [November 13, 1998](#)

- View the [List of Participants](#) in the Panhandle Conversations "Individualism and Western pragmatism are Panhandle strengths, but can also be weaknesses now that we need to be more interdependent and work together across boundaries." -- a participant

November 12, 1998

6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

33 [participants](#)

Dennis Baack welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Ellen Russell, Patricia Kennedy, and Dennis provided an overview of Nebraska Network 21.

Initial conversations took place in five small groups around the issues listed below.

1. Re-evaluate the NN21 vision for the year 2020 and get feedback.
2. See if we are on track with current NN21 activities and experiments.
3. Examine what higher education needs to do differently.
4. Explore new ways in which education, government, and communities might collaborate in the future.

Steve Bosserman and Ed Nelson facilitated the wrap up, as each group summarized its conversation.

November 13, 1998

8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

42 [participants](#)

After brief introductions and an overview, new small groups were formed. The conversations began with a recap of what people talked about the night before, then pursued in depth each of the four issues.

Toward the end of the session, a reporter from each group summarized the discussion from his/her group. In addition, each participant was asked to complete a worksheet with his/her individual responses to the four issues.

Comments from groups and individuals are listed below.

1. Re-evaluate the vision for the year 2020 and get your feedback.

(Vision: Affordable, accessible, lifelong learning for all Nebraskans.)

- Can education be both affordable and accessible? If we're committed to access, then affordability becomes a problem. Will senior citizens have access if they don't have computers at home?
- Access is important, especially in the Panhandle.
- Technology is essential.
- Traditional campus experience is necessary for 18-22 year olds.
- Social development should be added to the vision.
- Lifelong learning a good goal.
- Basically the vision is on track.
- How can we train people for jobs that don't exist?
- Non-traditional students and adult learners will be important.
- Looking at education 20 years into the future -- virtual reality education. Kids might not have to leave home to get the best professors and classes.
- We need to learn to deal with change, and work with tools not discovered yet.
- Technology can enhance, but people skills still need to be developed.
- Community social development is also a critical component. People need to understand how to work and live together regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Look at ways to incorporate our emerging technology in our communities.
- Do, and did, we have representation from the total population? Strategy Team seems to be mostly educators from higher education.
- Vision is still applicable -- is it achievable, attainable, and sustainable?
- Vision needs to be flexible for changing needs.
- Be sure to include input from all segments of community.
- Address a seamless education from K through 12 and beyond. Delivery of education will constantly change.
- Explore college vs. lifelong retraining and skill certification.
- Great start.
- Can government and education satisfy all individual wants and needs?
- Not very well publicized to the general public.
- Can it be affordable no matter where? With the rapid change can a new system be put in place every (X) years for just a few (Y) students? What are the minimums for X and Y?
- The vision is excellent, concise and current.
- Embrace rural lifestyle.
- Twenty-two years to 2020 -- four generations of technology.

2. See if we are on track with current NN21 activities and experiments. (Especially the seven target learning areas of diversity, distance education, faculty

rewards, human capital development, sustainable communities, curriculum, and food systems.)

- More youth involvement/emphasis is needed (elementary and middle school too).
- Need to focus on gifted and talented.
- Don't forget the elderly. Do we need experiments like the UNL Sage Program?
- Health care must be an important component.
- Why don't we access teaching talents and resources from out of state?
- Reevaluate 4-year degree vs. skills certificate.
- Use skills and expertise of senior citizens.
- People reported that the Chautauqua was a very well done project.
- Summer Chautauqua was high energy and unlike usual conferences. Saw forward thinking, constant interaction, and cooperative activity.
- Sell the valuable lifestyle that we have in Nebraska.
- Age 18-22, go to school. Age 25-65, school goes to individual.
- Allow for learning activities for all stages of life.
- Cross-state/cross-county lines to meet shortages.
- Needs to be more awareness of NN21. Don't think many people outside of the loop know what's going on.
- Need business, community and education at all phases. We are reliant on each other.
- The Chautauqua was outstanding, difficult to even describe. We in Scottsbluff are anxious to have Jeff Razz and the Diversity Project next Thursday.
- Need for education for minority population.
- Keep up regional meetings.
- Must be able to change and adjust as everything else changes. (Difficult to predict the future 20 years out.)
- Teach people to deal with change?
- Could we have a model of linkage of higher education in Panhandle?
- Distance education available but not utilized due to poor marketing; need more satellite uplinks and downlinks.
- Some instructors will not deal with distance learning unless rewarded.
- Distance learning is very important in Western Nebraska. Technology is there but who foots the bill?
- Nice to see Lincoln come this direction for a change.