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10-10-2002

APC Hearing

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APC Hearing – South Central Research and Extension Center
L.W. Chase Hall, Room 116
1:00-4:00 p.m.
Thursday, October 10, 2002
John C. Owens, NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

Members of the Academic Planning Committee, and others here today, I will appear before this committee today and tomorrow during the APC hearing process to speak about proposed vertical cuts in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources budget. Each time we will discuss a cut we in the Institute do not like ... a cut we would not make unless forced, as we are now, to do so. This is true of today's proposal to close the South Central Research and Extension Center at Clay Center.

In making this recommendation we have considered and debated many different scenarios in our struggle to do the least *long-term damage* to Nebraska and its future, seeking ways we can best meet as many of Nebraska's needs as possible within the reality of the university's reduced funding.

We must reduce our current year budget because permanent legislative cuts to our budget necessitate it. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's share of the total budget reduction imposed by August's special legislative session is \$7,513,953. The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is bearing \$2,028,767 of that

amount. In the past year the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resource's budget has been cut nearly \$4 million. *Funding for vital IANR programming across our state is permanently gone.*

In the last round of budget cuts we in the Institute felt it necessary to make vertical cuts, because we thought that to try to cut all programs across-the-board could weaken the Institute to a point from which it could never recover. Now we are forced to look at vertical cuts again. There are no budget cuts we can make, after three rounds of cutting, that will not adversely affect someone, or have someone thinking we should have cut something else instead. While we propose closing the South Central Research and Extension Center as a \$661,707 budget cut, we also are proposing steps to preserve at least some, but certainly not all, of the important work being conducted there. That work will continue in ways that are different from before the cuts were imposed on the university.

There is no question that the South Central Research and Extension Center is a productive program of value to Nebraska, and this proposed cut in no way reflects upon the good work conducted at South Central. We propose closing the Center not because we want to, but because, unlike some other IANR programs, which are totally unique in Nebraska, the South Central Research and Extension Center is part of a Research and Extension Center System across our state tied to the core academic programs on campus.

Nebraska's model of locating tenured faculty at our research and extension centers outside the main campus in Lincoln is unmatched in magnitude in any of the states surrounding us. We believe in this model, but with the enormity of the cuts we've endured, we no longer can afford as many research and extension centers across Nebraska. We no longer can continue all the work we've done before.

South Central has the smallest number of faculty of any of our centers. It has a more limited scope of programs and less infrastructure than any of our other research and extension centers. It also is the most recently established of our centers. [For these reasons we propose the South Central Research and Extension Center as a \$661,707 vertical cut to help meet IANR's \$2,028,767 current cut. In this cut we will lose 19 FTE positions. All tenured faculty will retain their employment, moving either to another research and extension center or to East Campus in Lincoln. One tenure-track position and two non-tenure leading extension specialists, as well as center staff, are part of the proposed budget cut. We will do all we can to help these faculty and staff find alternative employment.

We will maintain as much of the South Central program as possible within the remaining four centers across Nebraska and the academic programs in Lincoln through the continuation of the South Central Research Farm as a field laboratory at Clay Center.

Water quality and water quantity work are key research areas at this center, and such work will continue. Irrigation is important to a number of Nebraska producers, and we would not abandon this vital research, teaching, and extension education area. Teams of faculty have addressed surface water quality at the South Central Research and Extension Center over the last several years. Often these teams have been co-^{led} by faculty based on East Campus in Lincoln. These faculty, as well as the tenured faculty at South Central and their technical-support, will continue working on these teams. Much of the water-quality-work involved in farm demonstrations involves extension educators, whose positions remain in the county extension offices in the South Central District.

Several faculty in Lincoln and at other research-and-extension centers address water quantity issues. All faculty with extension appointments who work on water-related issues have statewide responsibilities, regardless of where their offices are located. The IANR extension irrigation-specialists have been functioning as a team, and this team has provided needed educational programs in the geographical area covered by South Central for several months because of a vacancy created when the South Central irrigation specialist accepted a position in another state. This team will continue to provide educational programs in the South Central area.

Ongoing water-issues work continues at the other research and extension centers and in Lincoln dealing with both groundwater and surface water.

Those current South Central faculty who will be relocated within IANR will have the opportunity to continue their field research at the South Central Research Farm. Certainly their multi-disciplinary work can continue, and can be a model to encourage other faculty to conduct research at the Clay Center field laboratory. Because the faculty will be conducting research at the farm, they'll be in Clay Center at various times and will consult with area constituents. In addition, like all of our specialists located elsewhere, they'll never be further away than the telephone or e-mail when constituents wish to contact them. Faculty currently based in Lincoln who are conducting work at the South Central Research Farm will continue that work.

Today I think it important to address another concern I've heard in the last month, and that is a concern about where cuts proposed in this round of budget cutting occur – on the campus in Lincoln, or outside Lincoln.

I need to be crystal-clear that in the Institute we do not make decisions about our cuts based on whether a program is located in Lincoln or outside Lincoln. We make cut-recommendations based on what we think will do the *least long-term damage* to Nebraska, to our constituents, to IANR, and to the university. We make permanent budget cut-recommendations based on what important needs we can continue to meet, even if we must meet those needs in different ways. We make cut recommendations based on how we can best protect the very core of university –

programming, so we'll have that core to build on when better times return – as they will – because preserving the core of the university is of most long-term benefit to *ALL* Nebraskans.

I am here to say publicly, and *very clearly* – *there is no lessening of Institute or university interest in any of the areas where cuts are proposed.*

There is only the cold reality of permanent budget cuts which mean we no longer can support all we've supported, *as we've supported it in the past.* The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is dedicated to the interests of rural Nebraska, and whether our faculty and staff are located in Lincoln or across our state, we in IANR are working to strengthen Nebraska's agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, families, and communities. Because of IANR's mission, any cut to our budget, whether in Lincoln or elsewhere, is a cut that affects rural Nebraska.

I am deeply aware that there are colleagues and constituents whom I hold in high esteem who disagree with this proposed cut. I also am deeply aware that that will be true of *any* cut we might propose. The faculty and staff of the Institute do valued work, and when the funding no longer is available to support all that good work, it is both frustrating and upsetting. To all of us. How to best deal with such permanent budget cuts is an issue on which informed and reasonable people sometimes must agree to disagree.

I think everyone here today realizes the dismantling of the valued university programs we've experienced as the result of three legislatively-mandated budget cuts in less than a year hurts down to the bone. I am frustrated by what we might face in January, when the Governor and Legislature next-meet to set the state's budget. We hear constantly that more budget-cuts will occur in the Legislature's regular session. When I think about how-painful the cuts we already have endured have been, I am deeply-concerned for what yet-additional-cuts would mean to this university and to our state.

These cuts affect every one of us. These cuts affect Nebraska's future. I hope in the next several months that concerned citizens and public officials will take the opportunity to reflect on what Nebraska needs and what Nebraska wants its university to be, as well as what Nebraska is willing to do to support that university. There are tough-decisions ahead for all of us and I hope that working-together we can find solutions that are in the overall long-term best interest of all Nebraskans.

Thank you.