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IANR's Contributions to Nebraska's Future

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IANR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEBRASKA'S FUTURE

Plattsmouth Rotary Club

February 13, 2002

John C. Owens

NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

One in four Nebraskans depends upon agriculture for employment.

That fact, found in the 2001 Nebraska-Agriculture Fact-Card, a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Bankers Association, the Nebraska AgRelations Council, and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, underscores the importance of agriculture to Nebraska, and the importance of the work conducted in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

One in four people depends upon agriculture for employment. To say nothing of those Nebraskans who depend upon us to continually help provide a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply. And to help sustain viable communities and families. And to help provide a healthy-environment with safe and clean soil, water, and air, not only for us in Nebraska today, but also for future generations.

We in the Institute think of agriculture as everything from the farm gate to the consumer's plate. When someone declares that agriculture is

of declining importance in Nebraska – and there are some people who say it, by words and by actions – I respond:

*Twenty-five percent of Nebraska's population depends upon agriculture for employment. One in four. Any industry that accounts for one in four jobs in any state is an industry of tremendous-importance. We produce food, vital to survival. We produce affordable food, vital to the nation's economy. We live in a country that can sustain its own population – that-fact-card says one American farmer or rancher produces enough food for 129 people – 95 in the United States and 34 people abroad. Only a short-sighted, or a misguided Nation would take lightly those resources necessary to feed its citizens, should it one day find food imports held-hostage either through war, terrorism, or economic boycott.

To anyone who might under-rate agriculture's importance in Nebraska, I suggest they take a trip starting at the westernmost edge of Lincoln and driving all the way past Chimney Rock to the Wyoming border. Making that trip, what do you see?

Nebraska Agriculture.

Miles and miles and miles of farming and grazing land. You encounter soybeans spreading-green across spring fields; corn growing tall and tassled in summer; wheat fields rolling wave-like in the wind before

harvest; cattle grazing peacefully in pastures; alfalfa lush green and purple before cutting. Rich soils and irrigation pivots; flowing rivers and meandering streams." The 2001 fact card I cited earlier tells us that 96 percent of Nebraska's total land area is in the 46.4 million acres that comprise Nebraska's farms and ranches, and there are nearly 24,000 miles of rivers and streams that add to our state's bountiful natural resources.

Here and there you'll spot some alternative crops, too – sunflowers; chicory; grapes. Who would have thought of Nebraska as a grape-growing state 25 years ago? Yet there are five active wineries in Nebraska today, with others under development. Our Agricultural Research Division viticulture research is providing the technology for grape production to support Nebraska's existing and planned wineries. Yes, interest in alternative crops is alive and well in the innovative descendants of Nebraska's pioneers who, like their ancestors, seek ways to survive and to thrive in this wonderful place that is our home.

As you drive you'll also find the horizon broken, now and then, by towns, both large and small, that are home to many Nebraskans. We in the Institute and the University are working with Nebraskans to preserve and to strengthen rural Nebraska. The University has launched a Rural Initiative, which draws heavily on the resources of the entire University.

Our Institute faculty are providing significant leadership for this exciting, new Initiative. The Rural Initiative “partners” your land-grant University, with its mission to take the resources of the university to the people of Nebraska, with other organizations, communities, and individuals to seek solutions to communities’ concerns. Focus areas of the Rural Initiative include: rural sustainability and community capacity-building; business development and e-business; increased use of distance education; telehealth and telemedicine; niche crops and value-added activities; and youth and adult leadership and development.” Those of you who know us know the Institute already is involved in a number of these areas through both research and extension education programs.

We in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources take very seriously our responsibilities as your land-grant university, and we see ourselves as partners with Nebraska. We discover new knowledge through research. We distribute that new knowledge in our classrooms and our laboratories through teaching.” I am very happy to tell you that 14 Cass County students are studying with us in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, including eight graduates of Plattsmouth High School. We’re very happy to have them, and we would welcome many more.

We in the Institute also "distribute" new knowledge throughout Nebraska and beyond through "extension-education." I think cooperative extension is the "most-effective" out-of-classroom, educational-system ever devised. As you all know, "teaching" is a vital part of our university – in fact, teaching, research, and extension education are "the-three-legs" of our land-grant University mission – and extension teaches. Extension educates. Extension provides knowledge people can use to make those decisions "necessary" in their lives.

Here in Cass County, extension provides education "for life" for adults, and for youth. In 2001 there were 2,685 Cass County youth involved in 4-H, a cooperative extension program. Some were involved through clubs, and others through school enrichment, camping, and independent projects. "Some" took part in "more-than-one" 4-H experience, so altogether 4-H offerings in Cass County drew 5,673 participants.

The Institute's Cooperative Extension Division is "not" simply outreach, which many people think of as delivering information and programs on what we might describe as a one-way street. Cooperative Extension goes "well-beyond" outreach all the way to "engagement," which I'd liken to a two-way street, where we work with communities, groups, families, individuals, and organizations "in Nebraska," mutually respectful of the

expertise and value of all who are participating. Through engagement, educational opportunities are developed to meet needs identified at the community level. Community can be an actual place, such as a town, or county, or a community of people with similar interests and needs. At its best, engagement is an extremely invigorating and important "interchange" that adds to the body of knowledge originally brought to it by the participants." Extension's scholarly work often is so woven into the fabric of community that some people don't always identify it precisely as an extension contribution; they only identify it as something that's necessary to meet their needs.

On campus we were pleased this fall when *Meat and Poultry* magazine named us one of the top 10 schools in the nation in the quality of our meat and poultry programs. While I'm always a bit ambivalent about national rankings, because they can be so subjective, such recognition feels good – especially because in this case I think it is truly deserved. I think we have faculty and facilities in these areas within the Institute that it would be hard to exceed anywhere else in the nation.

And last spring, *U.S. News and World Report* named IANR's graduate agricultural engineering program as Number 6 in the nation. This program is in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering. This UNL program

was ranked just behind the program at Cornell University and just ahead of agricultural engineering at North Carolina State University.

One of the things I felt best about when I looked at the schools on *Meat and Poultry's* top 10 list, and the *U.S. News and World Report* list, is the fact that although Nebraska is the state on ~~both~~^{both} lists with the smallest population, Nebraskans have made such a tremendous commitment to this great land-grant university you've all built and supported. I thank you for that. I thank you for realizing that the work conducted here by our faculty and staff is vital to Nebraska.

All of us right now are dealing with Nebraska's decrease in the rate of economic growth. Those of us at the University are reducing our budgets to bear the university's share of that budget rescission - you've probably read or heard about the University of Nebraska-Lincoln budget cuts ~~that~~ Chancellor Harvey Perlman made public last week (February 5). We know Nebraskans in general are dealing with the economic slowdown, too, as it directly affects pocketbooks across the entire state.

Budget cuts never are fun, but because we are "partners" with Nebraska, we certainly expect to bear our share of that burden. I think it extremely important, however, that we not let current hard times cloud for us how supportive Nebraska is of the excellent land-grant university it —

has created. A university that is working hard to get even better. A university that is of real service to Nebraska through our teaching, research, extension-education, and public service programs.

I know we in the Institute are committed to providing a good return on your significant investment by continuing our strong tradition of fulfilling our land-grant mission to take the university's resources to the citizens of our state, to put our expertise and resources to work for Nebraska, and to address the concerns of this state and its citizens.

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we focus on food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources, which includes families, communities, and individuals. In those focus areas we work for Nebraska in a variety of ways. Examples of the work conducted by our faculty and staff are diverse, and range from helping develop a new alternative crop for the Panhandle - chicory - to Cooperative Extension's Nebraska-EDGE-program. EDGE stands for Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs, and helps rural and small-town residents evaluate starting or expanding small businesses.

At a time when conventional thinking said there were no new beef cuts possible, our research proved otherwise, and led to the development of the new flat iron steak which you may have read about in the

newspapers. "Adding value" to Nebraska products is an "ongoing" goal for us.

Another example is "how" our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources "is building" on our traditional strengths – and I must tell you, since coming to Nebraska a year ago I've come to realize that it would be difficult "to find" a traditional agricultural curriculum stronger than ours; it was "really" built correctly. Our College is exploring new academic programs "to provide" Nebraska's young people with careers as needs and opportunities arise. Among these are a degree in landscape architecture, joint with the College of Architecture; a professional golf management program, discussions for which are ongoing with the Professional Golfers Association of America; a teaching program in equine science; and a Ph.D. in "comparative" biomedical sciences. We welcome "your thoughts" and "ideas" about other academic programs you think important "to meet" the developing needs and interests of Nebraskans and others.

There are "so many" examples of our work that I'd like to tell you about, but time does not allow. I'd like to share one more, though, one that "illustrates" long-term benefits "the work" of our faculty and staff provides Nebraska and its citizens. Are you aware that the varieties developed through our wheat breeding program provide Nebraska growers

with improved wheats that perform well in the field and that offer "the quality characteristics millers and bakers demand?"

In the Institute's 2001 impact report, we noted that "Nebraska-developed hard red winter wheat varieties are planted on roughly three-fourths of the state's wheat acres. These varieties have increased Nebraska's annual yields by 19 percent compared with the 1960s. These improved varieties are worth roughly \$31 million to \$37 million annually to Nebraska producers based on increased yield alone. Consumers benefit also." Yield improvement in these varieties mean Nebraska wheat growers can feed nearly 5 million more Americans a year than they did on the same acreage in the 1960s."

We in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources stand with and we stand for agriculture, from the farm and ranch gate to the restaurant plate. We stand with and we stand for natural resources, and we stand with and we stand for human resources – communities, families, and individuals. In doing that, we stand with and we stand for Nebraska, where "one-in-four individuals" depends "in some way" upon agriculture for employment. We are "dedicated to the land-grant university mission, and we will continue to work with Nebraska and with Nebraskans to contribute to the economy and the quality of life within the 77,355 square miles that

make up the Cornhusker State.

We know that even in Nebraska where one in four jobs depends on agriculture, we have people who sometimes forget the importance of agriculture in our state's economy. We also know those people, whether they know it or not, depend for their safe, abundant, ^{and} affordable food supply on what happens down on the farm, out on our ranches, and within the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. They - or their relatives, or their friends, or their neighbors - might just be the one in four Nebraskans whose jobs depend on agriculture.

One in four.

Thank you.

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