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## Topic: Nu Program Highlights in the Areas of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Future of the Nebraska Agricultural Industry

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**TOPIC: NU PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS IN THE AREAS OF FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES,  
AND THE FUTURE OF THE NEBRASKA AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY  
CAPITAL CITY KIWANIS CLUB  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2003  
JOHN C. OWENS  
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND IANR HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR**

Tonight I would like very much to talk with you about the good news of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

It is a pleasure to talk about good news. For the last two-plus years of my going-on three years in Nebraska, we have had a great deal of painful news to discuss, as Nebraska's budget crisis affected its land-grant university through budget cuts. Throughout the university and certainly in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, cuts occurred that we did not want to make and never would have considered had they not been forced upon us. They were cuts our constituents did not like, either, and we have been through some difficult, difficult times, losing good programs and good people for lack of funding. These days we watch anxiously to see how the state's tax revenues come in each month, knowing if they do not match or exceed expectations, more budget cuts could occur, further diminishing what Nebraska's land-grant university can do for Nebraskans.

Yet while we cannot help but acknowledge the reality of what the budget crisis means to Nebraska and its land-grant university, I think it tremendously important tonight that we also acknowledge – and celebrate the fact – that despite the difficulties of hard times in the past year and more, there were many accomplishments and much good news in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, as well. Today I'd like to share just a few illustrative examples of that good news with you, examples of how our faculty and staff are at work for Nebraskans, Nebraska and our future. For instance:

Just last week we announced a \$1.8 million grant from the National Science Foundation to study the Nebraska Sandhill's ecosystem. The 15-member interdisciplinary team that will carry out the four-year project thinks that while expanding knowledge of the Sandhills is a primary goal, results also could help expand our understanding of broader potential impacts of global climate change.

We'll be looking at links between the Sandhills' grass cover, wetlands, groundwater, and regional climate. We hope to develop a better overall picture of how climate and environment interact to create and maintain a fragile ecosystem. This work promises to be both fascinating and important for Nebraska and the world body of knowledge UNL scientists will add to as they go about their research.

On August 27 we "broke ground" for a new education center and laboratory at IANR Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory near Whitman, thanks to "gifts" from university supporters. Such gifts, always important, become even more so in extremely difficult economic times, because they "help us" move forward to benefit the state. The new education center and laboratory at Gudmundsen will accommodate up to 300 people for agricultural events and courses throughout the year, and "create" research and teaching space for faculty and graduate students.

Gifts to the University of Nebraska Foundation from Elaine Wolf of Albion and her husband James Wolf, who died in 2002, and the estate of Ray Bohy of Davey, who was the Institute's ranch and livestock manager for more than 30 years, "make" the new center possible.

Our students always are remarkable – in fact, the students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources within the Institute were a chief drawing point for me when I decided to leave New Mexico, where I was happy and where I'd been for 23 years, to come to Nebraska. I'm so proud to tell you that "one" of our recent graduates from our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, who was an agribusiness economics/public policy-major who minored in international agriculture, natural resources, and Italian, earned a Fulbright Scholarship in May and now is in Italy for a year's study.

CHRIS Gustafson - Near Mead<sup>3</sup>

Mark + Diane - Sister ANNETTE

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln homecoming queen in 2002 was a College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources agricultural journalism major and Mortar Board member. And the president of the Associated Students of the University of Nebraska for 2003-2004 is one of our agricultural economics majors.

Last November *Meat and Poultry* magazine ranked us "fourth" in its annual rankings of the nation's leading universities serving the meat and poultry industry, "up" from sixth the year before. They cited our Food Processing Center and "work" by food and animal scientists as "real strengths," and we agree.

In the past year our Cooperative Extension Division faculty "earned" grants exceeding \$10 million. I am a "firm believer" that extension-education is the best out-of-classroom "learning experience" yet devised, and you will find our extension educators and specialists working across the state, "both" in rural and urban areas, providing education Nebraskans can put to "immediate use" in their lives. These grants help further that work.

We "merged" our School of Natural Resource Sciences, Conservation and Survey Division, and Water Center into the School of Natural Resources this past year. We believe this merger offers opportunities for synergy of value "both" to the individuals participating, the Institute, the university and the state. I am looking

forward with "great-enthusiasm" to the benefits that synergy will provide.

In the past year we received a \$10 million award from the National Institutes of Health to establish the Nebraska Center for Redox Biology, a collaborative-research-enterprise of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the university Medical Center's Eppley Cancer Center. The redox biology center is headed by one of our faculty members, Ruma Banerjee, Willa Cather professor and professor of biochemistry, who was awarded the grant through a national, peer-reviewed competition to establish Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence.

Agronomist Michael Fromm, Director of UNL's Center for Biotechnology, "won" a four-year, \$6 million National Science Foundation grant for a Plant Genome Research Center. UNL is the lead-institution for the center, which includes "scientists" from five other universities.

James Van Etten, our William Allington Distinguished Professor of Plant Pathology, was elected to membership in the highly prestigious National Academy of Sciences, one of the highest honors accorded a U.S. scientist. Each of the three UNL professors <sup>elected</sup> to receive that honor has been a member of the Institute, a fact that makes us very, very proud.

Our Cooperative Extension Division provided knowledge and education to

help both rural and urban Nebraskans weather the drought, and made information and education on the new farm-bill-options available to the state's agricultural producers. We're now educating veterinarians and ranchers on how to adopt a scours prevention strategy through a new calving-system that can help Sandhills ranchers reduce calf scours, a leading cause of calf illness and death. One rancher estimated savings of \$40,000 to \$50,000 annually since implementing the system.

Our food scientists have developed tests that give processors new tools to protect consumers with food allergies. The newest test is for almonds, and the team recently improved-on an egg test it developed several years ago. The new version detects cooked as well as raw eggs. The tests provide processors quick, accurate tools to check for allergenic food traces on manufacturing-equipment, or in food processed on shared-equipment. Cross-contamination is a major-concern for food processors.

Several new, higher-value beef products are creating excitement in the industry and helping boost consumer demand for beef. The science behind these new cuts comes from our research. The best-known of the new products is the flat iron steak, which I hope you've all had the opportunity to sample. It's good!

Our Cooperative Extension Division's Building Nebraska Families program is teaching family-management and life-skills to people struggling to move from

CHIEFS  
CALFENS

welfare to work. And extension's Parents Forever workshops for adults, and Kids Talk About Divorce for children, help families work through the changes in their lives when parents divorce. Sometimes children need help understanding and coping in these situations, and these programs provide that. Some Nebraska judges now require parents with children under 18 to attend Parents Forever in the event of divorce, custody modification, or paternity suits.

Our National Drought Mitigation Center helps governments and policy-makers reduce society's vulnerability to drought by anticipating and taking steps to minimize drought impacts. And while concerns mount about global climate change because of increasing atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, our scientists are heading interdisciplinary research to measure, compare, and understand carbon dioxide's movement through the atmosphere, plants, and soil in irrigated and dryland cropping systems. They aim to identify factors influencing carbon movement and to develop cost-effective management factors farmers can use to boost carbon storage. Such information will be important to improve environmental quality and maximize potential benefits to Nebraska farmers if programs are established to provide compensation for storing carbon in cropland.

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we work with the very



basics of life – food, water, and people. It is work for all of Nebraska. There is not one of us here who can survive for long without food and water, and few of us who would care to survive for long without other people. When we use the word agriculture in the Institute, we mean everything from the farm gate to the restaurant plate, and all stops in between. We can never take our safe, abundant and affordable food supply for granted, nor our safe and adequate supply of water, which recent listening sessions tell us is a concern to Nebraska citizens.

Nebraska is a powerhouse agricultural state. The *Nebraska Agriculture Fact Card*, a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Bankers Association and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, tells us that 22 percent of all Nebraskans are employed in farm or farm-related jobs. Twenty-two percent. Just over one in four people has a farm or farm-related job. I'd actually suggest that agriculture is part of all of our lives in our state, not only because of its economic importance to Nebraska, but – because we all eat!

Cash receipts from farm marketings contribute more than \$9 billion to Nebraska's economy each year. Every dollar in ag exports generates \$1.48 in economic activities such as transportation, financing, warehousing and production.

Based on 2002 figures, Nebraska is the leading state in the U.S. in commercial livestock slaughter, commercial red meat production, commercial

cattle slaughter, and Great Northern beans production. We are <sup>“</sup>second in all cattle on feed as of January 1, 2003, and in pinto beans production, based on 2002 figures.

Here are a few – and just a few – of the many other areas in which Nebraska is an agricultural leader: Fourth in corn for grain production in 2002, fifth in grain sorghum and soybean production in 2002, sixth in all hay production, seventh in winter wheat production.

Nebraska's farms and ranches cover 46.4 million acres of the state, which is 96 percent of Nebraska's total land area. There are nearly 23 million acres of rangeland and pasture in Nebraska, half of it in the Sandhills.

When you drive from the western edge of Lincoln out to the Wyoming border, up past Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff, what do you see? Agriculture. Natural resources. Miles and miles of fertile acres dotted with rivers and streams. Today one American farmer/rancher produces enough food for 129 people – 95 in the U.S. and 34 abroad.

While only a small percentage of Americans are involved in agriculture today, the importance of what our farmers and ranchers do cannot be overestimated. When someone asks me if agriculture is as important today as it once was, and will continue in importance in the future, I can't help but smile and

reply, “Only if you eat.” *Of course* agriculture is important! *Natural resources* are important! Food and water are vital to survival! Only a short-sighted or misguided nation would take lightly the resources needed to feed its citizens should it one day find food imports held hostage either through war, terrorism, or economic boycott.

We are one Nebraska, not with rural *or* urban areas, and never the twain shall meet, but with rural *AND* urban areas, both part of the whole that is our state. What occurs in our rural areas affects our cities, and what is done in our cities affects our rural areas. To understand our state and its future, I think it is important to understand the agricultural base on which we build. I think it vital that we explore the value-added opportunities for new businesses and industries we can foster because we *are* the powerhouse of an agricultural state. And I think it imperative that we work together to build a future good for all of Nebraska.

It’s important that we understand and preserve the abundant water supply that underlies much of Nebraska, and that we protect and preserve our natural resources. It’s important that we value the strengths of both our rural and urban areas, that we build bridges that cross indifference and misunderstanding to help us all realize how closely we are allied, and how dependent we all are, one on the other. I welcome your help in building such bridges, because I think it is vital to

the strength of Nebraska's future.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you here tonight.