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## IANR's Contributions to Nebraska's Future

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## IANR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEBRASKA'S FUTURE

Agriculture Builders of Nebraska

January 16, 2002

John C. Owens

NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln

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

in the 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. These rural towns ~~are~~ are the very places where Governor Johanns and

the state legislators have joined with us in the Institute and the University in seeking ways to preserve and to strengthen rural Nebraska.

The University's Rural Initiative, which President Smith spoke of, draws heavily on the resources of the entire University of Nebraska.

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 this 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 those 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, and we distribute that new knowledge in our classrooms and our

laboratories through teaching and we distribute that 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.

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 a 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.

This fall *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.

One of the things I felt best about when I looked at the schools on *Meat and Poultry’s* top 10 list, “however,” is “the fact” that while Nebraska is the state on the list 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 Governor Johanns and each of the senators ~~██████████~~ for your vision and your support of the university. I “thank-you” for realizing that the work conducted “here” by our

LAST SPRING, U.S. NEWS +  
WORLD REPORT - Agricultural Economy  
#6 in the Nation  
⑤ = CORNELL ④ = N.C. STATE

faculty and staff is vital to Nebraska.

All of us right now are dealing with Nebraska's decrease in the rate of economic growth; and the necessity for the governor and the legislature to reduce the state budget. Those of us at the university are reducing budgets to bear the university's share of that budget rescission. And Nebraskans in general are dealing with the economic slowdown as it directly affects their 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. Today's current hard times cannot cloud for us, however, how supportive Nebraska is of its university. My sincere appreciation is expressed for all that has been done to support the University of Nebraska throughout the years by governors, legislators, members of the Congressional delegation, <sup>MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS</sup> ABN members, and the citizens of Nebraska. And in return, I think you have created and supported an excellent land-grant university. A university that is working hard to get even better. And 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, ~~and~~ natural resources, and human resources, which includes families, communities, and individuals. In those focus areas we work for Nebraska in a variety of ways. Some of the benefits we provide are captured on the eight fact-cards at each of your tables. They illustrate some of the diversity of the work conducted by our faculty and staff, ranging from helping develop a new alternative crop for the Panhandle - chicory - to helping Nebraska entrepreneurs evaluate whether they should start or expand a business. In fact, Nebraska EDGE courses started just last week in Valentine, Mullen, Oshkosh, and Ogallala.

Chicory, which some of us may have heard associated with World War II coffee, contains large quantities of the carbohydrate inulin in its roots. Inulin stimulates beneficial-bacterial-growth in both human and pet digestive-systems. Right now Panhandle chicory is headed for pet food,

but human uses will be explored, as well.

The fact cards tell you of research that led, at a time when conventional thinking said there were no new-beef cuts possible, to the development of the "new" flat iron steak. Adding value to Nebraska products is an ongoing goal for us, and you can be assured that important goal continues in the future. Finding additional uses for our current crops, examples of which range from films and coatings made from proteins found in soybeans and wheat, to highway de-icer from whole kernel sorghum, to industrial uses for vegetable oils and animal fats, is a chief concern for us.

One card tells of Cooperative Extension's work with low-resource clients to enhance opportunities for self-sufficiency by helping people improve through education how they budget, how they shop, and how they eat. Another card tells of the remarkably large number of Nebraska young people who participate in 4-H programs; and still another card tells of UNL research on *E. coli*, so important in our continuing research and extension education programs designed to enhance food safety.

There's also information about one of our professors who recently was recognized in Washington, D.C., where he won the highest teaching

award for United States faculty in agriculture and related areas. There's a fact card about a remediation or "cleanup" technique for pesticide-contaminated soil that costs considerably less than current methods which usually involve removing, transporting, and incinerating soil.

I'd like to tell you, also, of a few other examples of the diversity of contributions I'm proud to say IANR is making to the Nebraska's economy and its citizens:

\*When we talk about "adding value" to products - one of our animal scientists has developed "a process" that turns eggshells into a supplement "equivalent" to monocalcium or dicalcium phosphate, the most common phosphorous "feed-ingredient" for livestock. The university has "filed" a patent on this process.

\*Building Nebraska Families is an "educational-program" of the IANR Cooperative Extension Division "funded by the <sup>Nebraska</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. This "educational-program" helps family members "learn" needed life skills before they "assume" work-responsibilities. "Soon" this UNL program will be available in 40 rural counties.

\*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 UNL's; 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 means 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, 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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