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Family, Youth and Community Partners Luncheon With Senators

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DEAN MARJORIE KOSTELNIK
Human Resource + Family Science

Mrs. Treva Gangwitz - Rod
Mrs. Jan Meyer - Kevin

FAMILY, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS LUNCHEON WITH SENATORS
MARCH 20, 2002, NEBRASKA STATE CAPITOL, ROOM 1126

JOHN C. OWENS

NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR

Good afternoon.

I am so pleased to be here with you today. I welcome this opportunity to talk with you about how University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, works with Nebraska's at-risk families. I'm extremely proud of our work to help families meet their needs and develop and strengthen skills they can use to better share in Nebraska's good life.

I thank both our state senators and our Family, Youth, Community Partners for being here today. Senators, would you stand ^{Hands??} and be recognized? Thank you for your support of at-risk families, and for your time on what we know is a very busy day. Thank you, also, for all you and your legislative colleagues are doing with the governor, to steer Nebraska safely through these difficult budget times. I think we should give these senators a hand.

We do recognize that these days of reduced economic growth are stressful times for everyone, and they are days filled with often-agonizing decisions. As we

think of how the legislature and governor are struggling with major decisions, and how the university and state agencies are deeply concerned over what additional cuts might mean, we also must constantly remember that this economic slowdown is touching so many Nebraskans, including those most at-risk.

As a fairly new member of the University of Nebraska community, having only been in Nebraska a little more than a year, I've been greatly impressed by the way Nebraska and Nebraskans have historically supported their university. We cannot let today's hard times minimize that. I sincerely appreciate everyone who has supported the University of Nebraska through the years, including governors, legislators, members of the Congressional delegation, members of the Board of Regents, and Nebraska citizens, including those of you who are members of the now year-old Family, Youth, Community Partners.

In return, I think Nebraskans' support has created an excellent land-grant university. A university that is working hard to get even better. A university that is an economic engine for the state, helping small businesses succeed, creating new jobs, bringing money and services into communities across Nebraska, and reducing "brain drain." A university that is of real service to Nebraska through our teaching, research, extension education, and public service programs.

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we 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 Nebraska, to put our expertise and resources to work for Nebraska, and to address the concerns of our state and its citizens. We discover new knowledge through research, we distribute that new knowledge in our classrooms and laboratories through teaching, and we also distribute new knowledge throughout Nebraska and beyond through Cooperative Extension education.

I personally believe Cooperative Extension is the most effective out-of-classroom educational system ever devised. Teaching is a vital part of our university – in fact, teaching, research, and extension are the three legs of our land-grant university mission – and extension teaches. Extension educates. Extension provides knowledge people can use to make decisions necessary to their lives.

I think of the old Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" when I think of the three programs I'm going to talk about today – programs captured in the fact sheet and the newsletter at your tables.

The first, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Nutrition Education Programs, help educate families to become more self-sufficient by teaching everything from good budgeting and meal planning to food-safety and

nutrition. To offer "nutrition education programs" that help "low-resource" Nebraskans, extension "works" with federal programs such as the Women, Infants and Children program and Head Start, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, "Employment-First" programs, "local" food pantries and food banks, family resource centers, public schools, and social-service organizations.

The newsletter on the table tells you about some of that Nutrition Education Program work, as well as "other" extension-education-activities. New numbers available since the nutrition education story was written show almost 73,650 Nebraska families have participated in NU Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Program since it began in 1969. In the fiscal year ending Sept. 20, 2001, there were 6,166 families, 7,389 youth and 1,650 "older-adults" participating.

More than 11,250 families have participated in the Food-Stamp Nutrition Education-Program since it began in Nebraska in 1994. Nebraska's Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program was one of three nationwide to receive an award for "excellence" in nutrition-education from USDA in 2000.

In February 2002, about 50 percent of the 87,616 Nebraskans "receiving-food-stamps" were children. Another 15 percent were "either elderly or disabled". That means "roughly 2/3" of those receiving food stamps in February are among those we "traditionally-see" as the "most-vulnerable" members of our society.

The Department of Health and Human Services [“]estimates[”] that in Nebraska, 65 percent of those-eligible [“]receive[”] food stamps. Sadly, we must note that the number of people in Nebraska receiving food stamps is [“]growing[”]. The program has seen a 7.3 percent growth in the past year, according to DHHS.

When it comes to extension's Nutrition Education Programs, evaluations [“]show[”] 88 percent of nutrition-program [“]graduates[”] adopt better nutritional habits, 87 percent learn [“]better-ways[”] to spend their food-dollars, and 61 percent [“]make[”] food-safety improvements. A state Department of Health and Human Services [“]official[”] has said [“]partnering[”] with NU extension [“]provides[”] nutrition-education to 85 percent to 90 percent of the state's [“]food-stamp[”] recipients. He added that [“]this training[”] teaches recipients to make [“]the-very-best-use[”] of their limited resources.

Numbers tell [“]an-important-story[”] in showing significant [“]benefit[”] to many lives, while [“]individual-stories[”] further-explain [“]what[”] those benefits mean. For instance, there's the 18-year-old with an infant-daughter who said the program [“]taught[”] her that she needed more calcium, and she learned, too, about eating other [“]healthy-foods[”]. She said where before [“]she-might-fix[”] macaroni and cheese for dinner, now she tries to have fruit-and-vegetables when she makes meals. That's education [“]we-expect[”] will transfer from [“]her[”] to the next generation. !

[“]Another[”] University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension program that

figuratively ~~teaches people to fish~~ is Building Nebraska Families, ~~launched~~ in 1999.

There is a great ~~deal of emphasis~~ these days on moving people from welfare to work, but when people ~~make that transition~~ it means more than just ~~getting a job~~. Successful ~~transitions, those that last,~~ include building self-sufficiency through money management and, often, through improving everything from communications ~~and parenting skills~~ to nutrition and time management.

Extension's Building Nebraska Families ~~reaches out to people who face~~ multiple obstacles to success, such as debt, low self-esteem, anger, and little self-responsibility for making their lives better. Building Nebraska Families ~~provides~~ intensive one-on-one training so participants ~~can build~~ their own self-sufficiency by improving money ~~management skills, parenting skills, nutritional knowledge,~~ communications ~~skills, and~~ goal-setting skills.

Building Nebraska Families ~~has grown from working with families in 12 counties to working~~ today with families in 37 counties. More than 100 people ~~participate~~ in the program. ~~New funding~~ from the Department of Health and Human Services ~~supports~~ additional extension educators to work with program participants, bringing the number of extension ~~educators~~ with this responsibility to 11.

Program participants say the program has helped ~~them~~ improve their time management ~~and problem-solving skills, feel better about themselves, and~~ earn more

money at their jobs. The average income for participants entering the Building Nebraska Families program is \$446.19 per month. After completing it, their average income has risen to \$808.76 per month. Some participants credit the program with helping turn their lives around.

Both our Nutrition Education Programs and Building Nebraska Families are possible through partnerships between UNL Cooperative Extension and others, including the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Without these partnerships, these programs would not be possible.

One of our extension educators working with Building Nebraska Families tells the story of a woman we'll call "Sue" – not her real name – who had two young children, no job, little family support, and a stack of bills. "Sue" was reluctant to work with the educator, but after a month of missed appointments and excuses they began to meet. It was another month before "Sue" could start to share her feelings. Extremely low in confidence, "Sue" didn't want to go out and look for a job. She didn't want to ask for help in solving her problems.

"Sue" and the extension educator started working on self-esteem and management skills. Making bread together one day provided the opportunity to talk about cleaning and household management. Gradually "Sue" began to pick up her home, to sweep and vacuum. She started meal planning, organized grocery

shopping, and sit-down-meals with her children. She began to spend time with her children, to establish a schedule for them, and to spend "one-on-one" time with them.

"Sue" now lives in a "different, neatly-kept apartment. She has been working "almost a year now", and continues to work on her "money-management skills. She takes "much-interest" in her children and their activities, which include weekly library trips. She serves as a room mom, and has "family-time" at least once a week.

The extension educator says "improved-self-esteem" and feeling good about "herself" have been key to "Sue's" success. "Sue" has "graduated" from the Building Nebraska Families program, but she and the extension educator continue to stay in touch. "Sue" once "told" the extension educator, "You didn't just tell me things, you showed me how to do things!"

Doesn't that echo the importance the proverb places on teaching someone to fish?

I'd also "like to tell you today" about our research "relating" to welfare reform and rural-women. Our researchers are "surveying" 42 rural Nebraska women of all income-levels for three years; their work is "part" of a regional-study that includes only women eligible for food-stamps. Our researchers "chose" to do a more inclusive-study to compare how "income" influences the lives of women in the same community. Participants tell researchers "about" child care availability, medical

services, and transportation in their communities, their incomes, jobs, expenses, and spending habits.

In preliminary results, researchers find child care availability a "major concern," with many women working nights so they and a spouse or partner "can share" responsibilities for child care, or they rely on family and friends. They also find most women like living in their communities, and while they realize they may give up something economically to live in small towns, they value the strong community-connection. We hope in the future policy-makers will use ~~the~~ ^{THESE} research findings in welfare-reform policies. Currently, many policies that address the needs of at-risk families are written only with urban areas in mind.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to talk with you about these programs today. Cooperative Extension works in so many areas – from agriculture and natural resources to food safety, health, and wellness to communities, families, and youth, including our popular 4-H program, now celebrating its 100th anniversary. Cooperative Extension so often is so woven into the fabric of a community that people aren't fully aware of the breadth and diversity of its programming, and the many, many benefits extension provides Nebraska.

I thank all of our Family, Youth, Community Partners for your understanding of the importance of this programming, and for your passion for strengthening the

skills, and brightening the futures of Nebraskans, including our most at-risk citizens.
The way Family, Youth, Community Partners and Cooperative Extension engage
with each other, the way you help us hear and address the needs of constituents, is
vital to our land-grant university mission to take the resources of the state to
Nebraskans. Would all our Family, Youth, Community Partners stand?

Thank you for your dedication and for being engaged with your university and *your*
state to constantly enhance educational programming of benefit to Nebraskans,
particularly children, youth, and families. Thank you, partners and senators, for all
you do on behalf of Nebraska and its citizens. And thank you again for this
opportunity to be with you here today.

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