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Agriculture Builders of Nebraska, Inc.

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IF NECESSARY, CAN I use your name as a referent??

AGRICULTURE BUILDERS OF NEBRASKA, INC.
 Cornhusker Hotel
 January 15, 2003
 John C. Owens
 NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

There's a story that a construction foreman one day noticed one of his workers pushing his wheelbarrow upside-down around the work site.

"Hey," the foreman shouted, "turn that thing right side up!"

The man with the wheelbarrow looked at him in surprise. "Don't be silly," he said. "Every time I do that, they put bricks in it!"

I think of that story sometimes, in the midst of these difficult economic times, as our state, its people, and its university, in turn, wrestle with budget cuts.

Wouldn't it be great if we all could just turn our wheelbarrows over and say, "No thanks, no more bricks! No more heavy loads to haul!"

Well, we can't, of course. When it's your job to keep the house safe and to build for the future, you have to keep hauling bricks because hauling bricks is your responsibility, no matter how-heavy those bricks happen to be. Some days it even might feel as if you're dodging as many bricks as you're carrying!

Such are the-roles of leaders, and such are the-situations facing Nebraska today.

As I look around this room I see people devoted to doing what each thinks

best for Nebraska. I thank each ^{of} you for all your ^{hard-work} on behalf of our state and its citizens. I thank those state officials who are with us today for all you have done for the university over the years, and through these tough budget times. While the university must share in the state's bad times, as well as its good, your actions and the actions of your predecessors since 1869 have made clear your vision in recognizing the importance of your land grant university and its place in building Nebraska's future. You have sought and you are seeking ^{creative-ways} to solve the state's revenue shortfall, in addition to cuts. "We thank you for that." We thank you for doing your ^{level-best} to meet this very difficult task of seeing our state through these tough economic times.

Sometimes it is likely that ^{some of us} in this room might disagree over what is "best" to do for Nebraska. If we must then ^{sometimes} agree to disagree, I know we shall do so ^{with respect} for the dedication and the desire to do the best possible job that ^{prompts} each of us to our actions. I think that no matter ^{how} our views might differ, our common dedication to doing the ^{very-best-we-can} for Nebraska provides us with a ^{bedrock-platform} on which we can meet to merge ^{our best efforts} to build for our state.

Someone once asked John F. Kennedy how he became a war hero. "It was involuntary," President Kennedy said. "They sank my boat."


How he reacted and how he acted following that “involuntary action”, however, set his course of history.

We know better times will come. As Winston Churchill once said, and I quote, “For myself I am an optimist – it ~~does~~ ^{does} not seem to be much use being anything else.” Better times will come for Nebraska, but they will be different times. We cannot expect they will be those-same-times we’ve known before. Change is a continual part of our lives. Leading through change, meeting changing needs, engaging with the citizens of our state in solving problems, providing unbiased expertise, forging and managing the future, rather than simply reacting to it, building the base on which Nebraska can compete and prosper in that future – these are the roles for which your land grant university was created. They are roles that increase in importance as the complexities and challenges of our time increase.

To prepare ourselves for those “different” better times, and to help frame the IANR our constituents want and need, this year the Institute is engaging in strategic planning. In doing so now, in these difficult, difficult days, I am reminded of Justin Morrill, “author” of the Morrill Act that established the land-grant universities, and of Abraham Lincoln, who signed that Act into being back in July of 1862.

Abraham Lincoln and Justin Morrill are heroes of mine, and probably of yours. At the time Morrill proposed the far-sighted Morrill Act and Lincoln signed

it into law, the Union was experiencing difficult times. Not only was the country at war 'with itself,' but the Confederacy was winning a number of battles. Things looked bad. 'Very-bad' for the United States of America.

It would have been so-very-easy for Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Morrill, and the rest of the Congress to focus 'only' on their current problems and to let the future care for itself. Instead, in the midst of those darkest days, these leaders *transformed* the future with their far-sighted vision that made higher-education accessible to the common man and woman who 'never before' had such access. Before the Morrill Act, higher education was primarily 'the privilege' of the elite. But Morrill and Lincoln recognized 'the place' higher education would play in healing and rebuilding our country, and in forging our nation's future, and the future of its citizens. They chose  to do the *right* thing, and they put in place a land-grant-university 'system' that for 141 years has played a tremendous role in the 'success' of the United States of America.

It seems to me that if Justin Morrill and Abraham Lincoln and the rest of that 1862 Congress could accomplish 'that' in the midst of a war of brother against brother, state against state, a war that could have 'torn-apart' our very country, we *at the univ.* can do this. In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we will not let today's current economic difficulties 'foster' a bunker mentality where we accomplish

no more than to hunker-down and wait for incoming fire. In the Institute we will *not* focus only on current woes and “how do we pay the bill?” – we will focus also on “what does Nebraska want to be, and what does Nebraska need to do to get there?” “What must we absolutely preserve to make that happen?”

We will hold listening-sessions across Nebraska to hear what our constituents see as their chief-needs in our expertise areas of food, agriculture and agriculture systems, natural resources, and human resources. We will build on those key components of Nebraska’s future in our strategic planning process.

We will remember that every-day we come to work we are about the land-grant university mission of educating Nebraska’s young people and taking the resources of the university to the citizens of our state, a vision laid out so brilliantly by leaders who rose above themselves and the Civil War which embroiled them and their nation to attend to future needs.

We will construct our plan on our strengths and our product. Our product is knowledge, and in IANR we have the privilege to work with the basics so essential to us all: Food. Water. The environment. People.

Through research, we discover new knowledge. We distribute that new knowledge in our classrooms and in our laboratories, and across our state through extension education programs. We provide knowledge people can use in their lives

and in their jobs – knowledge important to us all, and knowledge vital to Nebraska's economy.

Vital because "one in four jobs" depends on agriculture in our state. Some people hear of a "decline" in numbers of agricultural producers, and they take that to mean there is a "decline" in the importance of agriculture in Nebraska, as well.

To correct that mistake a person need only drive from the western edge of Omaha out through the Platte River Valley, up past Chimney Rock, and on west to the Wyoming border. Make that drive and you see "miles and miles" of Nebraska agriculture – crops growing, cattle grazing, small towns "dotting" the rural landscape.

Nebraska's farms and ranches comprise 46.4 million acres, or 96 percent of our state's total land area. One American farmer or rancher produces enough food for 129 people – 95 in the U.S. and 34 abroad. Only a short-sighted or misguided nation would take lightly "the-resources-needed" to feed its citizens should it one day find its food imports "held hostage" through war, terrorism, or economic boycott.

Here in Nebraska, where one in four Nebraskans "depends" upon agriculture for employment, we know the work we do in the Institute is "vital" to supporting and enhancing this "key" Nebraska industry. We know our work to help provide a safe, abundant, affordable food supply, to help sustain "viable" communities and families, and to help provide a "healthy-environment" with safe and clean soil, water, and air, is

important not only to Nebraska today, but also to future generations of Nebraskans. We also know the importance of providing a good return on the investment you make in us.

I hope each of you had the opportunity to see the story that appeared in the media the first week of January about the *E. coli* research funded by LB1206, passed in 1998, which provided \$250,000 a year for five years to research ways to control and help protect against this deadly bacterium. That legislative funding followed a massive recall of *E. coli*-contaminated ground beef processed at Hudson Foods in Columbus back in 1997.

Because of the Legislature's investment in university research, our scientists have laid scientific groundwork that will contribute to better control of *E. coli* 0157:H7, which causes serious food borne illnesses. We know much more about *E. coli* today because of the vision of many of the people in this room this afternoon. Plus, the research the Legislature funded helped our scientists gain more than \$2.6 million in additional grants and contracts to continue this work to keep our food safe. We thank the members of the Legislature for your key support of this very important work.

It's always a pleasure for me to talk about the impacts and the benefits of IANR's work in Nebraska, and frankly, I could happily spend several hours telling

you just that. Time does not permit, of course. But I would draw your attention to the “Points of Pride” flyers on your table. Those flyers contain just a few examples of the ~~diverse work~~ IANR conducts throughout Nebraska, from developing the flatiron steak which has ~~added~~ to the carcass-value of beef, to work done to develop a new ~~chicory industry~~ in the Panhandle. You’ll find information on ~~how~~ we help families transition from welfare to work, and on research focused on fabrics which can ~~protect~~ us from harmful ultraviolet radiation. There’s also information on IANR’s work to help create the nation’s ~~first~~ rural-agricultural-sciences magnet school, and on some ~~intriguing research~~ to store more carbon in cropland to help reduce ~~the threat~~ of global warming. Please take those flyers with you, and please know we are glad ~~at anytime~~ to provide many ~~more~~ examples of how the University helps Nebraskans ~~improve~~ their economic pictures and enhance their quality of life. As we work our way through our strategic planning process in the Institute this year, I welcome ~~the input~~ of everyone in this room. I also welcome your ~~support~~ for that future vision, and for our ~~partnership~~ with you and with all Nebraska citizens as we ~~work together~~ to move our state forward.

While I cannot promise that every need identified in our strategic planning process can be met at this time, I *do* promise that each person’s ideas ~~will be heard~~. In today’s ~~troubling times~~ we find ourselves in the ~~unhappy position~~ of people

sometimes thinking we haven't heard or valued them because we haven't been able to give them exactly what they want. I am sure that is a situation faced by everyone in this room, at one time or another. We welcome any aid you might provide in helping our constituents understand that we all currently are faced with difficult circumstances that do affect what we can and cannot do for Nebraska. Those circumstances do not, however, affect our desire to do our best possible. But some of that "best possible" we must do in ways different than we have done before.

It has been particularly painful when we've heard the charge as we have that rural Nebraska was specifically targeted in our budget cuts. This simply is not the case. We did not and we cannot make our budget cutting decisions based on location; we made them based on protecting core programs of value to the entire state, programs necessary if we are ever to build for Nebraska again. We made them knowing that any cut to any Institute program, whether it occurs on or off the Lincoln campus, affects rural Nebraska, because IANR is all about rural Nebraska.

I would like to update you a bit today on the Nebraska Rural Initiative, which is a university-wide initiative that brings together university and non-university resources to address both problems and opportunities in rural areas. True to our land-grant university mission, with the Rural Initiative we remain committed to helping Nebraskans solve problems, create opportunities, and manage rather than

merely react to the future.

Former State Senator Sandy Scofield heads-up the Rural Initiative, which has targeted increasing economic opportunity in nonmetropolitan areas as its primary focus. We are working to focus and to leverage university resources, as well as resources outside the university to increase economic vitality in Nebraska's rural areas. We welcome your partnership in this venture.

I will end my remarks today with another John F. Kennedy quote: "When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters – one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity."

My best hope, and my most-devout new year's wishes for each and every one present today, is that 2003 is a year of discovering opportunities and of avoiding dangers for all of us, and for the land and the people who make up Nebraska. If we must face danger, I hope we'll be granted the grace to do so with the courage and vision of Justin Morrill and Abraham Lincoln, along with a generous-dose of both the integrity and the vision of Nebraska U.S. Senator George Norris, who in the midst of the Great Depression dreamed and saw-passed the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Rural Electrification Act. I hope through it all we'll maintain as much good-humor as we can possibly muster. And while we await those better times to come, I hope we all do each other the courtesy of remembering we are in

“this boat together, each of us doing what we think is best for Nebraska.”

Thank you.