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## Nebraska LEAD XXI Morning Meeting

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Nebraska LEAD XXI Morning Meeting  
March 14, 2003  
John C. Owens  
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

What a treat it is to be here with you this morning to say congratulations and offer my best wishes as you complete your LEAD program. This is a significant accomplishment, and one of which you each can be rightfully proud. I hope you are celebrating and savoring the moments today, and I hope you've done that through the past two years. It is with high hopes and real enthusiasm that I look forward to watching your future contributions to the world and <sup>to</sup> the people around you as you serve as leaders in agriculture, in your local communities, in Nebraska, and in our global community, as well.

Certainly there is a great need for good and capable leaders in our world today. Leaders with integrity, understanding and intelligence, able to analyze a problem and work with others toward solutions. Leaders with compassion and empathy. Leaders with courage and dedication. Leaders with a clear sense of their place and purpose on the continuum between past and future.

As Nebraska leaders you are aware of what the state's budget crisis is doing to Nebraska. All of Nebraska, including your land-grant university. Last Monday,

announcements were made of what about one-third of the 10 percent budget cuts proposed by Governor Mike Johanns will mean to the university. More announcements will come April 1, and still more in June, if needed.

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, three rounds of budget cuts have slashed our budget nearly \$4 million already. Last Monday, a proposed additional \$2,851,207 of state funding cuts were announced for IANR. These are horrific cuts, for the Institute, for our constituents, and for Nebraska. One eliminates state funding for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, which works with many communities in the state. Another eliminates<sup>"</sup> state funding<sup>"</sup> for the Nebraska Forest Service, which affects rural fire districts and other programs throughout Nebraska. A<sup>"</sup> third eliminates<sup>"</sup> the veterinary student contract program, which has paid the difference between instate and out-of-state tuition for 100 Nebraska residents each year who are studying veterinary medicine at Kansas State University.

These are awful cuts, and most awful of all is that we recommend *these* cuts<sup>"</sup> because we think the alternative cuts we would make if we did not make these<sup>"</sup> would be *even worse* for Nebraska. We are wedged so tightly between a rock and a hard place that there's no room to wiggle a finger as we find ourselves doing our very best to<sup>"</sup> manage<sup>"</sup> a significantly reduced budget externally imposed upon us. If

the governor's proposal is enacted, the Institute's budget will be **\$9.5 million** less than it was a year ago. The Institute is the only comprehensive program in agriculture and natural resources in our major agricultural state. Cuts of this magnitude mean that no matter what we cut to balance the budget required of us, we have no choice but to seriously reduce or eliminate programs important to our constituents and to Nebraska. The frustration of that runs very, very high among us.

I tell you this today because you are Nebraska leaders. Nebraska needs thoughtful people to lead discussions and to help decide what our state wants and needs to be in future, and how we will get it there. I know that as members of this LEAD class you have accumulated both experiences and knowledge to draw upon in leadership situations – experiences and knowledge others may never have the opportunity to acquire. I think yours have been wonderful, thought-provoking, exhilarating, growth-promoting experiences, and from my own life I know that such experiences can forever change how we view the world.

I know that in the past two years you've had many opportunities, as LEAD fellows, to broaden your perspective and to explore ideas. I hope you always retain the importance of being open to and exploring new ideas, and that you are known in your communities as a good person of which to bounce ideas off. I

imagine each of us has been in situations where bringing up a new idea was so threatening to the persons to whom it was proposed that the idea was squashed immediately, before it could even be explained or discussed. When we foster ideas, when we hear them out and explore them with others and, when we help others see the possibilities – or the impossibilities – of what we’re discussing, we grow ourselves, and we help each other grow.

As members of this LEAD group, you’ve traveled our state and you’ve visited key areas in our nation. You’ve been to Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. You’ve stayed in the homes of Argentinians, and visited the farms and producers of each country you’ve visited. You’ve received executive briefings at the United States Embassies in each country, and had meetings with representatives of United States commodity groups there. You’ve visited U.S.-based agricultural companies doing business in South America, such as Pioneer Hi-Bred, Monsanto, John Deere, and more. You’ve visited the countries’ schools and their institutions of higher learning. You’ve been to an Argentina port and seen a ship unloaded at an ADM facility, and you’ve visited a terminal livestock market in Argentina, as well.

You know South America is a major agricultural competitor to the United States, and you’ve observed that competition firsthand. While we talk about living

in a global marketplace and a global community, your opportunities through LEAD already have made that truly part of your real-world experiences. You've visited part of the global marketplace, talking with people in our global community, and know that worldwide, people share many of the same concerns and desires for a safe-and-good-life for themselves, their families, and their neighbors. You've seen how many of the challenges facing agriculture here in Nebraska seem similar to challenges facing farmers in South America. And, I understand, you've had the experience of driving across Argentina and viewing agriculture there in a scene reminiscent of driving across Nebraska into Eastern Colorado along the Platte River – corn and soybeans in the east, with higher annual precipitation and richer soil, and lower rainfall, cattle, and sandy soils in the west.

One of the things that I think is true of all real leaders is captured in three words by Albert Schweitzer: "Example is leadership." We all look to example. Enthusiasm is infectious, and my own experience is that most people don't mind – and even enjoy – working hard, if their leader is working right alongside them.

In the past two years, you've worked alongside each other, giving of your time and your talents as LEAD fellows. I most certainly hope you will continue to work together, and with other LEAD alumni, in the coming years. You now are

tapped into a tremendous network of leaders to whom you can turn for ideas and for advice, and in which you can find talented colleagues to band together to lead on issues you all agree must be addressed.

When I travel across Nebraska, I always enjoy meeting LEAD alumni, and now you will be among them – people helping chart the future of Nebraska – agriculture, people contributing to Nebraska’s communities, and people putting to good use the skills they’ve developed in the LEAD program. I am so pleased the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources has been committed to the Nebraska LEAD program for over 20 years now, providing office space and the full salary and benefits for Director Dr. Allen Blezek, who has worked hard in building this wonderful program.

LEAD XXI fellows, congratulations. I look forward to working with you in the future. I’d like to leave you all today with the words of the late anthropologist Margaret Mead, who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Thank you. And again – best wishes for all you will accomplish in the future.