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## Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture Budget Hearing

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Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture Budget Hearing  
Nebraska Statehouse, Lincoln  
March 10, 2003

John C. Owens, NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

Senator Wehrbein and members of the Appropriations Committee. As I mentioned in earlier testimony, I am John Owens, and I am University of Nebraska Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. I am here to speak with you about the proposed biennium - budget for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture – NCTA. *At Curtis, Ne.*

Governor Johanns proposed reducing NCTA's appropriation by 10 percent, from \$2,273,884 to \$2,046,496, for FY2003-2004, and holding the budget at that level for FY 2004-2005. We appreciate your efforts on NCTA's behalf as you've recommended \$2,130,324 for NCTA in FY2003-2004, and \$2,155,253 in FY2004- 2005. I know you are aware, as we are, that it is extremely difficult for "small-institutions" such as NCTA to face "significant" budget-cuts, because even in good times there is relatively-little-flexibility in a small college's budget.

Today I will share with you what the cuts in state appropriations mean to the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis and the 253 students who enrolled with us there this past fall – an 8.2 percent increase in enrollment, which we were glad to see. Cuts of the magnitude before us "most-certainly" affect the way NCTA fulfills its mission.

When we couple the proposed budget cuts of round four with the cuts of the three rounds that preceded them, NCTA sees no choice but to become an academic year campus for most of its programs. This will reduce the amount of campus-based technical education provided NCTA students through hands-on learning experiences in summer sessions. As an alternative, NCTA will seek industry internships during the summer for students to receive hands-on learning in some areas of study, and NCTA will work diligently to modify its academic year programming to limit the number of students affected by the loss of campus-based, hands-on summer instruction. But it is a fact that fewer summer courses will be taught. To allow students to complete all associate degree requirements within a 20-month period, as they can now, NCTA plans to offer some essential summer session instruction by hiring only a few faculty members back for the summer session as needed. These faculty will provide only a limited number of general education and technical courses.

Forced by budget issues to eliminate an entire degree program in the last round of budget cuts, NCTA, with only four academic majors now remaining, is looking at ways to preserve its academic core. The NCTA administrative team, after careful consultation with faculty and staff, decided to vertically cut the summer program, rather than to eliminate one or more of the four remaining academic majors. The following conclusions were reached:

- 1) The four majors available – Agricultural Business, Veterinary

Technology, Agricultural Production, and Horticulture – are a 'critical-mass' essential to provide quality, mid-managerial, and technically-trained personnel needed by Nebraska. In addition, these academic majors provide opportunities for students to prepare themselves to pursue a baccalaureate degree if they wish.

2) Eliminating 'any one' of these four majors would 'negatively-affect' NCTA's ability to fulfill its statewide mission.

3) Course information taught in each major is integral to developing a well-rounded 'graduate' in all majors.

4) Eliminating 'additional programs' would significantly impact enrollment.

NCTA will eliminate one full-time faculty position in Ag Production Systems that presently is vacant, and reduce seven faculty positions with 12-month appointments to academic year appointments, common with colleges which offer the Associates Degree, for a 'total reduction' of 2.75 Faculty FTE. 'Four' 12-month full-time staff positions will be reduced 'either' to part-time or academic year appointments, for a 1.25 FTE reduction in staff positions.

This reduction in faculty FTE will mean that NCTA will be unable to provide 'the amount' of faculty support to students that it has in the past. To counter the reduced faculty support, students will be placed in 'industry internships' for the summer. The staff positions, for the most part, are summer faculty support and farm laboratory support positions.

The operation of the college's instructional farm laboratory will be reduced

by converting the current grain cropping program from approximately 160 acres of irrigated corn and soybeans and 40 acres of dryland wheat to approximately 160 acres of irrigated hay and 40 acres of dryland hay and forage crops. This will reduce the current level of farm management and farm labor needed. Students pursuing education in "grain-cropping" practices and procedures will gain learning experiences from "class visits" to commercial farm operations as part of course requirements during the academic year, and by completing 12-week industry internships during the summer growing season.

Over the past seven years, NCTA has significantly increased the "educational-requirements" and the classroom and laboratory teaching expectations for its faculty. Significant "positive-changes" have occurred and the "academic-quality" of the college and its faculty <sup>HAVE</sup> improved. We are concerned that this continuing financial crisis will affect "faculty-retention", as well as the ability of NCTA to attract outstanding faculty, which in turn will affect the college's ability to prepare students "to effectively serve" Nebraska's number one industry, agriculture.

Thank you for your consideration.