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Leo E. Lucas

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, lucasforne524@cox.net

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OPENING COMMENTS AND EXTENSION'S ROLE IN NEBRASKA

LEO E. LUCAS, Dean and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68583-0703

I would like to echo Dr. Massengale's comments in welcoming you to Nebraska. We are pleased to have you here. Nebraska is a major agricultural state. Ninety-seven percent of the land is privately owned and most of it is in agricultural production of one type or another. Nebraska ranks fifth in total receipt sales of Ag products. Nebraska ranks second in the nation in numbers of cattle on feed, fourth in cash receipts from all livestock marketing, first in production of great northern beans, popcorn and alfalfa meal, and fourth in corn production. Agriculture is important to the state's economy.

Agriculture and animal damage problems often go hand in hand. We have problems in agricultural situations with native coyotes, prairie dogs, pocket gophers, and ground squirrels and with the imported starlings, house sparrows and commensal rodents (Norway rats and house mice). Other animals including several game species cause agricultural damage at times. A variety of animals ranging from snakes and woodpeckers to bats and skunks are nuisances occasionally for homeowners. The Cooperative Extension Service plays an important educational role in helping Nebraskans handle these problems in the most effective, safe and appropriate manner that is available.

The extension wildlife program in Nebraska is fairly new; we currently have two positions. One is an animal damage control position working through integrated pest management funds. The other encompasses wildlife enhancement activities as well as animal damage control. Currently, animal damage problem inquiries account for the majority (perhaps 80%) of requests from the public for wildlife-related information.

The Extension Service meets demands for information in a variety of ways. These ways include, of course, responding to letters and phone calls, utilizing newspapers, radio, TV, and other mass media outlets, and conducting public meetings with various target audiences. In addition, each year, specialists conduct one-day inservice training meetings in animal damage control for extension agents. These training meetings help provide information so that many inquiries can be handled by Extension offices throughout the state. These and other meetings also provide feedback to the wildlife specialists on current problems and concerns observed by the Extension staff in the counties.

In meeting animal damage control needs, the Cooperative Extension Service works in close cooperation with other individuals and agencies, particularly the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Animal Damage Control and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. This cooperation includes coordinating activities and programs and sharing information and materials. Personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Game and Parks Commission have regularly assisted with the inservice training for extension agents mentioned above. Departments within the University also cooperate to better solve problems and meet needs in Nebraska. For example, wildlife extension work with commensal rodents has regularly involved the Departments of Animal Science and Agricultural Engineering. In another instance, agronomy and wildlife personnel are working together on rodent depredation to newly planted grain.

In short, extension is a lot of things, but it is a team effort aimed at educating, leading and coordinating to achieve common goals.

A last point I will make relates to the way the public views information from the Cooperative Extension Service. Recent random county surveys conducted in Nebraska during 1979 and 1980 have been made to assess Extension's image and program needs. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents that have used Extension indicated they received appropriate assistance when they contacted the Extension office. A majority of all respondents believed that the Extension Service is the most unbiased source of information. These results indicate that the Extension Service is viewed as an unbiased source of information where people can obtain appropriate assistance. These points are important when dealing with topics such as animal damage control that are at times controversial.

In Nebraska, we intend to continue our extension role in the area of animal damage control and to cooperatively work with others with common interests. Extension is pleased to have all of you here at this workshop. During the next three days we hope you get acquainted with each other, share information, develop new ideas and learn a little about Nebraska and Nebraskans. Let's make this workshop a team effort in finding ways to solve animal damage problems in the most effective, safe and appropriate way for now and in the future.