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Testimony to Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

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Testimony to Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education
NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE
FY 2007-2009
BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST

Chair Lauritzen and members of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. My name is 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.

I am pleased to visit with you today about the biennial budget request for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, and I'm especially pleased to introduce to you the new Dean of NCTA, Dr. Weldon Sleight. Dean Sleight began his duties with the College ~~in 2007~~ ^{THIS SUMMER.} We are fortunate and excited to have Dean Sleight in Nebraska. He came to us from Utah State University where he had a distinguished faculty and administrative career at Utah's land-grant university. At Utah State, Weldon most recently served as Associate Vice President for University Extension and Associate Dean for Continuing Education.

Weldon, would you please stand and be recognized. *AN EXPERT IN DISTANCE DELIVERY OF DEGREE PROGRAMS. "cell phones"!*

The administration of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture "now" is in the capable hands of Weldon Sleight. Dean Sleight brings to the college a new vision and an inclusive leadership style that I am confident will bring new success for the college. NCTA ["]historically ["] has been closely tied to the Institute of

Agriculture and Natural Resources and those ties have been enhanced ^{recently} through a new relationship with UNL's West Central Research and Extension Center. Dean Sleight holds the additional title of Associate Director of the WCREC, and the new Director of WCREC, Dr. Don Adams, now holds the additional title of Associate Dean of NCTA. Dean Sleight is passionate about rural Nebraska and the concept that if people are provided ideas through research and through the dissemination of new knowledge by participation in academic and extension education programs, they will make changes in their lives and professions that will create new opportunities for individuals, families, and communities. Dean Sleight has challenged the NCTA faculty to incorporate the concept of entrepreneurship throughout the curriculum and that will begin this spring. Too many of our youth leave Nebraska to find jobs elsewhere. He sees opportunities for graduates from NCTA to develop different thoughts ^{new} and perspectives about jobs and rural Nebraska. He wants them to graduate from NCTA with a vision that they can go back to their communities and be able to start up small businesses, so these bright minds can help rural Nebraska prosper. Therefore, you see why I think there are many new and exciting possibilities for enhancing the educational experience for NCTA students through the leadership of Dean Weldon Sleight and through a much closer relationship with the faculty and staff of UNL's West Central Research and Extension Center headquartered at North Platte.

On behalf of all of us at the University, I want to thank the commission for your previous support of NCTA. Because the new Dean joined us just when the Biennial Budget Request was being developed and approved, the current request basically is a continuation request. The Operating Budget Request incorporates assumptions for the continuation factors of compensation, facilities, and continuing operations that are consistent with those presented earlier by President Milliken; therefore, I will not repeat them here. A major area of concern is the rising cost of utilities experienced this past year and this is reflected in the request.

For the Capital Construction Budget, the NCTA request is for \$55,000 of programming funds for a new Education Center. There is a tremendous need to replace a number of old, inadequate, and deficient facilities which were constructed in the 1930s. Adequate facilities are an issue of great significance to NCTA, hindering its ability to grow. Although not eligible for state funding assistance, we want you to know we are working hard to find alternative funding sources for two of the primary barriers to implement Dean Sleight's vision – a new residence hall and a student life center. A new residence hall is the first priority and NCTA has asked the NU Foundation to assist in private funding. While NCTA can attract prospective students and their parents to visit the Curtis campus, the message too often is: We like your curriculum but student housing is inadequate, both on and off campus, and we lose them to another college.

Under Dean Sleight's vision we see a bright future for NCTA. Obviously, we need to solve the facility challenges and enhance and transform the curriculum. Dean Sleight has many great ideas and positive things already are happening. We recently hired a new DVM to teach in the Vet Tech program and we are searching for new faculty for positions in Animal Science, Agronomy, and Horticulture. This college is embracing technology and making those adjustments "necessary" to prepare its graduates for the significant changes taking place in agriculture, natural resources, and those businesses that support this significant portion of Nebraska's overall economy.

We ask for your continuing support as this college continues to evolve and to reshape its academic offerings under the leadership Dean Sleight. The level of support requested for the operational and capital budget will allow the college to accomplish many of its objectives over the next biennium.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak before the commission and for your continued support for the programs at NCTA. I would be happy to attempt to respond to any questions that you might have.