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## Local Food From Local Farms: Benefits and Opportunities

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Consumer Factory!!  
HRTM

J. B. Milliken + NAWA Street

U.O. + I want the event!  
P. Owen

Local Food From Local Farms: Benefits and Opportunities  
A Local Foods Educational Conference

Tuesday, August 7, 2007

John C. Owens

NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

Last month -- July 4, to be exact -- the *Lincoln Journal Star* "devoted" more than a page "to stories" about Community-Supported Agriculture Networks, and a Nebraska "family" who sells jams, jellies, pickles, noodles, free-range eggs, dry-mixes and tomato-soup at the Haymarket Farmers-Market on Saturdays.

The July 10 *Lincoln Journal Star* carried "a story" about the "beginning" of a Wednesday Worksite Garden Market for state employees, "a plan" of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human-Services and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to "make it easier" for busy, working-people to buy fresh, locally grown fruits, and vegetables for healthy-eating.

In such stories the newspaper notes "a trend" I think you in this room identified much earlier. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ And the demand is growing.

It both intrigues and encourages me, this "desire" we see of

people wanting to eat fresh and healthy foods grown locally;  
wanting to get closer to the source and the care of their food-  
production, wanting to know the people who grew the food, and  
the place it was grown.

There was a time <sup>when</sup> people didn't have to wonder about that.  
Much more of our country's population lived on farms and  
ranches and consumed the fruits of their labor. The cow that  
gave the milk had a name. If you didn't live in the country or <sup>if you</sup>  
<sup>didn't</sup> grow your own food, you had a much-better chance of knowing  
someone who did all of that.

Then, it became grandma and grandpa who sent-home fresh  
eggs and homegrown meat, canned green beans and tomatoes.  
Maybe an aunt or uncle. Many of us still knew the people - and THE  
place - our food came from. It connected us with something  
absolutely basic. It connected us with the land that gives us THE  
food, which SUSTAINS life. It connected us with "the people" who  
grow that food, who plant the seed, <sup>AND</sup> who gather in the harvest.  
More people understood the basics of our food production, and  
with food being one true basic in our lives, that is important.

As more and more people moved away from farms and ranches, as fewer and fewer people were "involved" in growing more and more food through increased production and efficiencies, we'd "joke" that many people seemed to think food simply came from the grocery store - appeared there magically, was ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ <sup>PURCHASED</sup>, brought home, and consumed. We'd laugh about it, but that lack of knowledge of the importance and value of this country's food production is no laughing matter. So for me it is "deeply-satisfying" to see renewed interest, on the part of "both" consumers and producers, to connect, "to determine" just "who" is growing the food consumers are eating, and "who" is eating the food "producers-grow."

So - how does the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at your land-grant university play a part of benefit to both producers and consumers?

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ you've already heard from Chancellor Perlman this morning, as well as Elaine Cranford, "development-specialist" at our Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, so you've learned "something" about that already. I hope, in the time I have

with you, to first answer the question about how the Institute plays a part in food systems from a more macro view, and then talk about some specifics, also.

First, from the macro view: We are your land-grant university. We in the Institute take that role very seriously. It is our land-grant mission to take the resources of the university to Nebraska. We do that through research, teaching, and extension education. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, part of the Institute, is the only four-year agricultural college in Nebraska. We provide Nebraska's future leaders the knowledge and skills to work in a variety of careers and businesses, including the valuable agbiosciences industry growing in Nebraska.

Our Institute scientists are among the most-cited agricultural researchers in the world, and Nebraskans have every right to be proud of that. The intellectual power and dedication of these agricultural researchers, who rank eighth as most-cited among U.S. universities, and 16<sup>th</sup> in the world, are at work for Nebraska.

An independent study recently showed the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources returns a conservative \$15 for each one state-tax-dollar Nebraska invests with us. That's a 15-to-1 return – conservatively. That's money in Nebraskans' pockets through new or improved products and best management practices.

Work accomplished in the Institute – and we work statewide – helps keep Nebraska's food-supply safe, abundant, and affordable.

I hope you're familiar with the research our meat scientists and their University of Florida colleagues conducted that led to new beef products such as the flatiron steak. That research has added \$50 to \$70 in value *per head* over the past seven years. At the *lower amount* of \$50 value-added per head, last year "alone" that was an additional \$130 million more for Nebraska ALONE, ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~. Consumers benefit, <sup>also</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~, through tasty, less-expensive cuts of beef.

IANR-developed wheat-varieties that perform well in Nebraska fields and offer the "quality characteristics" millers and

bakers “demand” now are grown on about 60 percent of Nebraska’s wheat acreage. They’re worth “roughly” \$45 to \$50 million annually to Nebraska producers, based on “increased yield” alone. Yield improvements in these varieties “mean” Nebraska wheat growers can feed nearly four million “more” people a year than they did on the same acreage in the 1960s.

We don’t get “to see” all the faces of those four million people. But we “know” the importance of our work on behalf of those whose crops “help feed” the world.

We research and provide education on alternative crops, such as garbanzo beans, chicory, and amaranth grain for cereals and crackers, and on niche markets. In 2005 we received a \$750,000 grant to help expand our organic-farming research and education, enhance collaboration with growers, and develop science-based information for organic food production. Last year the first of four of our organic research farms received certification from the Organic Crop Improvement Association International.

I’m sure Elaine Cranford told you the Nebraska Cooperative

Development Center has been involved in local food system development projects since 1999. They provide technical assistance to businesses created with multiple owners as the basis for the business and have seen significant interest in the last several years in direct marketing of foods produced on Nebraska farms. They assisted in the formation of the Nebraska Farmers Market Association and have been involved in several programs that increased local farmers access to large markets, with products ranging from meat-and-fish to wine, nuts, goat and ~~meat~~ <sup>cow</sup> dairy products, and more.

Providing research and education to help Nebraskans be successful is important to ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> faculty and staff.

I hope you're all familiar with the Nebraska MarketMaker project, available on the Web. It's made possible by initial funding and project leadership provided by the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative with assistance from our Food Processing Center. If you're not familiar with it, I urge you to check it out – that's Nebraska MarketMaker, with MarketMaker as one word.



Nebraska MarketMaker is a resource for all businesses in the food supply chain, and, as they say on their Web site, ~~●~~ **THEY ARE AS** interested in helping grocery stores find farm-fresh eggs as they are interested in helping farmers find a place to sell them.

The site contains helpful, demographic and business data that might be helpful to you. It has information both on finding a business and finding a market, and links to other sites of interest. I hope you'll check it out, and see how it may help you.

One of our horticulturists works with commercial vegetable growers and provides a newsletter for them. She responds to inquiries on commercial herb production and commercial specialty cut-flowers. She has worked with Lincoln farmers' markets and with development and leadership for the Nebraska Farmers' Market Association.

In Omaha, the UNL Extension Division, working with an Omaha church that provides land for a garden and with extension's Master Gardeners in the area, has the Growing H.O.P.E. Hunger Prevention Project. HOPE in this case stands for Helping Omaha's People Eat. Last year, the garden raised two

and a half tons of fresh produce for the Omaha Food Bank.

They're hoping for more this year.

I know you'll be hearing about our Food Processing Center after lunch, but I am going to say just a bit about the Center now, because it is a wonderful resource for Nebraskans, as well as <sup>for</sup> people across the country who are drawn here by its reputation.

Since 1983, our Food Processing Center has offered technical and business development services to meet the needs of diverse clients and sectors of the food industry. They work with small, medium, and large firms, companies, and entrepreneurs. They combine science, engineering, and business-development-services, assisting clients with increasing market and economic vitality.

If you've got an idea for a food product but aren't quite sure how to proceed, the Food Processing Center can help. It's a one-stop resource with the expertise to move a product from the drawing board to the dinner plate. Depending on your needs, it

will offer you a stand-alone service or a fully-integrated package of technical and business-development support.

The Center's "From Recipe to Reality" workshop in one day provides entrepreneurs information it might take months to gather on their own. It helps participants understand the challenges of starting a food business and allows them to make informed decisions as to whether developing a business is a right choice. I think you'll find your next session about the Food Processing Center interesting.

As I end, let me thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. As part of your land-grant university, we in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources are delighted to be at work for Nebraska.

Thank you.