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Nebraska Turfgrass Conference

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NEBRASKA TURFGRASS CONFERENCE
JANUARY 8, 2002
JOHN C. OWENS
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR

I'm delighted to be here with you, and look-forward to visiting with as many of you as possible both today and in the future.

I've just completed one-year in my job as University of Nebraska Vice President of agriculture and natural resources and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and it has been a learning year for me. As I start this second-year, I look forward to learning even more about Nebraska and its citizens, and one of the ways to best do that is to-hear what you are thinking. I want to know what you consider Nebraska's greatest needs, now and in the future. I want to know how you think the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources can help meet those needs. I seek ways all of us, working together, can find efficient-and-effective solutions to Nebraska's concerns, and I want to know your interests in our work - what you think we do well, what you think we could do better, what you think the needs of the future will be.

In the Institute we say we are partners with Nebraska, and we mean it. To be good partners we must work with you and many other people —

with many other interests to find ways to best meet the needs of this state. That's why I am always "particularly happy" to have opportunities such as this one to visit with our partners.

I also am happy to have this opportunity to thank the Nebraska Turfgrass Foundation for your terrific support. The funds you annually "provide" our turfgrass program to help support our turfgrass research and outreach, most of it at the Agricultural Research and Development Center near Mead, mean "a lot" to us, and our faculty and staff "work-hard" to see that you get a "good-return" on your dollars. We "thank you" for that support, and for the support you show us in other ways, as well. We also appreciate the others who support our program, and are thankful for that support.

I'm pleased to be asked "to speak" about the role of turfgrass science at a land-grant university because I am a huge believer in and supporter of land grant universities, and because "turfgrass-science" plays a significant role in the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

After all, "members" of our turf team "estimate" there are 400,000 acres of Nebraska land in lawns, parks, ballfields, and golf courses. They also "estimate" the value of maintaining those lawns, parks, ballfields, and

golf courses is \$750 million to \$1 billion yearly, which includes such things as sales of fertilizer, grass seed, and installation of irrigation systems.

That's a sizable figure, and does not include "the value" of the land itself.

It is our land grant university mission that makes "those-of-us" in the Institute "partners" with Nebraska. I think it "vital" that we work with you and our "other-partners", and you with us, in a mutually respectful "two-way street" approach to the issues affecting your industry and the state. We "need" your input and your expertise. I think that land grant universities that exclude their constituents from "the process" of helping set the direction of research and extension education programs are in trouble.

It is the mission of land grant universities "to take" the resources of the university to the state, and "that-mission" is reflected in the Institute's vision statement, which says the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is to be, and I quote, "*the premier provider of educational, research, and outreach programs*" essential "for shaping Nebraska's future as a leader in the 21st century in the areas of food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources. We are dedicated to providing the highest quality programs that are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially responsible, and scientifically

appropriate."

In short, "within our areas" of expertise we are "constantly-working" to be the "best" partners possible with Nebraska.

Certainly I see "that-dedication to being good partners" exemplified in the university's "work" conducted by those in our turfgrass program. I also see "a dedication" to keeping the Institute's programs competitive, and to seeking new opportunities. I appreciate "the leadership" our turfgrass team has shown in developing the new PGA/professional golf management program "we hope" to have up and going as a new major next fall. This interdisciplinary program, housed in our Center for Grassland Studies, will provide students with emphases in plant sciences, the business side of running different sectors of the golf industry, and hospitality management.

MARTIN MASSER
TERRY REYER
+ THE TURF TEAM

Because of the "strong" turfgrass program already built and in place in the Institute, we do not have "to develop" a number of new courses from the ground up for this new major. Courses we "already-have" are highly adaptable to this need. We do expect there will be a need to develop "some courses" specifically focused on this new major as students progress to their junior and senior years, and "I think" we will build a strong and much-needed program. FOR NEBRASKA AND BEYOND.

If we did not already have such a strong turfgrass program with so much expertise in our turfgrass scientists, I do not know if this new major would be possible without a significant infusion of new dollars. I am particularly excited about it because I see this program as an opportunity to grow enrollments in our College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and that is something we simply must do. There are several reasons growing enrollments is so important.

First, we have tremendous faculty with great expertise to share, and we provide a solid base from which young people can build many satisfying and rewarding careers. Second, there are people who look at college enrollments and from those enrollments make judgments about the importance of the subjects taught in the college. We cannot have people believing that a decline in our college's enrollments signals a decline in the importance of natural resources and agriculture, because that simply is not true. We must increase our college-wide enrollments, and in doing that, we must look at new opportunities to offer majors that build on our traditional strengths. As I said before, I am so pleased with our turf team's willingness to do that in developing this new major. If there are other majors you think we should consider, as well, in any of the areas in which those of us in the Institute work, I would like to hear your ideas.

I think that if we can expand our offerings, and with those expansions, "inform people" of the wide variety of careers the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources "degrees" encompass, we will "build on" and "preserve" the strengths of our "traditional" undergraduate programs. We cannot afford to let those strengths erode or languish because of "misunderstandings" as to their importance, so we must do "all" we can "to preserve" and build on our strong suits. Plus, we'll gain students who will leave our campus "well-prepared" for their chosen careers, and with a "better-understanding" of the importance of natural resources and agriculture in the world - a plus for them, a plus for Nebraska, and a plus for us all.

Another challenge we face in the Institute "right now", of course, is faced by "the entire" University and state government, and that is "the-challenge" of reducing the funds upon which we've made our budget plans for the next year "because" of the budget reduction mandated by declines in state revenues. We must do this in such a way that "we can continue" to be "the best partners possible" for our constituents.

As you may have read, the reduction called for by the legislature would be 2.5 percent of the University budget. The chancellor has asked those of us at UNL to prepare budgets showing a "five percent" reduction.

That is very serious business for us in the Institute, as it is throughout UNL. There is no fat to cut; we are into meat and bone, and that is difficult. We realize, however, that the entire state is experiencing an economic downturn, and we think we must do our part to be part of the solution to the problem.

Of course, we in IANR know how critical and how interrelated teaching, research, and extension-education are to our mission as a land-grant university. We also know the Institute is the only comprehensive teaching, research, and extension education institution in the state with programs in natural resources, agriculture and agribusiness, communities, families, and individuals. Program cuts could have the potential to eliminate program accessibility to students and constituents because the program may not be available elsewhere in Nebraska." We hope that our uniqueness within the University will be strongly considered when final budget reduction decisions are made. I can promise you that whatever the final reduction decisions, we in the Institute remain dedicated to doing all we can to meet the needs of the people and communities of Nebraska.

During my first year in the Institute I realized it would be very difficult for anyone to find a land grant university with as strong a

traditional agricultural program as ours. I think the Institute's teaching, research, and extension-education "agricultural-focus" was built correctly, and I applaud the people who built it, as well as "everyone" in the Institute who continues "to-build" on our strengths today. I think the "turfgrass-team" does that "magnificently," taking what we've learned about wise-stewardship of land, plants, and water in agriculture, and building on and refining that knowledge, adding their own research and knowledge "to develop" best practices for wise stewardship of resources as those practices apply to lawns, golf courses, parks, gardens, landscaping, and more.

Our "turfgrass-team" constantly is researching ways to be good stewards of our land and water resources, to protect our environment, to grow healthy plants ^{TO MANAGE INSECT} ~~and~~ and plant diseases, to develop turf that is environmentally friendly and less expensive to maintain, and to provide "sound-maintenance" options.

"Legacy," the "improved-buffalograss" developed by our turfgrass scientists and released by the University, is an example of that. It has a better color and looks "a bit more" like bluegrass than past turf-type buffalograsses we've released, plus it only needs mowing every two to three weeks. It uses half the water and requires "much-less" fertilizer or

chemicals than other turfgrasses.

That work, and our turfgrass seed production research in the Panhandle, not only is "a boon" to your industry, but it can provide "alternative crops" for farmers and allow them to diversify their economic base. This is "your land-grant university at work, conducting research and sharing knowledge" that benefits "Nebraska.

Our work on evaluating different pesticides for control of insects, diseases, and weeds in "turf-areas" is highly important. We need to monitor and ^{SUPRETS} ~~these~~ these pests "before" they can do significant damage. We're pleased "our turfgrass research" was used in developing Haymarket Park, the magnificent new home of the Saltdogs and Husker baseball in Lincoln.

I hope you're familiar with the work our turfgrass researchers are doing "to grow" golf course greens in a healthier and more integrated manner. They've found that "soil particles" in a U.S. Golf Association-sanctioned root-zone mixture that includes 5 percent silty clay loam do not migrate toward the surface and seal around the sand. That has been a long-standing concern for some people "because," if it occurred, it would block "water infiltration" and make the playing-surface of putting greens too hard. "Knowing it does not is valuable. Plus, our scientists found greens grown in that mix containing silty clay loam bounced back more

quickly from both injury and aeration.

We're pleased to be one of two places in the country with a "rhizotron" devoted to turfgrass. This underground lab and observation-area provides our researchers a more natural view of turfgrass roots, allowing scientists to track the growth - or lack of growth - of roots under "various-stresses." Our faculty also use the rhizotron to monitor the movement of chemicals through the soil.

Turfgrass science has a natural place in a land grant university, discovering and providing knowledge of value to both businesses and consumers. We are pleased to be your partners in Nebraska, and we look forward to continuing our partnership in the years ahead.

Thank you.