

Vice chancellor high on IANR impact in Nebraska

Written by gothenburgtimes
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WHITMAN—During a recent Open House at the Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources vice chancellor John Owens listed five areas in which IANR meets or exceeds its goal of serving Nebraskans.

Owens enumerated successes in ongoing research, discussed one of several new initiatives, and listed student enrollment, grants, gifts and contracts and 4-H, as well as facilities like GSL, as ways in which IANR continues to prosper.

Among established successes is IANR's wheat breeding program, Owens said. Using new wheat varieties developed by IANR scientists, growers can produce enough wheat to feed 3.7 to 3.8 million more people in 2009 than in 1960 on the same acres of land.

"One of our faculty members has come up with a method to take some ingredients from beef tallow and some from soybeans and use them to reduce cholesterol in human beings," Owens said. "That product is in human testing right now and looks very promising."

Owens mentioned the "gut initiative," which doesn't have a very appealing name but what it might do is very appealing.

A team consisting of food scientists, a microbiologist and a new medical doctor with a bachelor of science degree in animal science are working to design new foods that are much healthier and more beneficial than our current diet.

"Designer foods are talked about and we think they're going to be a big part of the future," Owens said.

In the area of student enrollment, Owens said that the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources has led all of UNL in new undergraduate student growth.

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“CASNR is a wonderfully engaged college where the faculty get to know their students,” Owens said. “Our students just don’t get lost, even though Lincoln is a relatively large campus.”

Grants, contracts and gifts are an important part of what drives the University, Owens said. The difference between an adequate and an excellent public university is always found in the generosity of its alumni, its friends and supporters and UNL has been blessed to have that.

Whether from U.S.D.A., the National Science Foundation or the Institute of Health, IANR and related areas remain the single largest component of grant and contract activity on the Lincoln campus. This helps advance the University and Nebraska and agriculture in general.

“4-H is absolutely huge in Nebraska,” Owens said.

Nebraska leads the nation in per capita enrollment. One-third of all age-eligible Nebraska young people are involved in 4-H. That’s 135,000 young Nebraskans. These programs include the traditional activities as well as some non-traditional programming, like robotics and after-school programs.

“I’ve said, and no one has proven me wrong, that there is no other land grant university ranch, located remotely from its central campus, that has better facilities than GSL,” Owens said. “That translates into this wonderful laboratory where major scientific experiments are conducted.”

UNL research at Gudmundsen has taken a systems approach, Owens said. Scientists there rarely study a single component of beef production. They work all the way from conception through harvest and delivery of the product.

GSL is also the intellectual and spiritual home of the Nebraska Ranch Practicum. It’s ten years old now and has a waiting list each year. Students come, not just from Nebraska, but from other states as well. It’s taught by the same faculty who are conducting the cutting edge research.