

State has key role in addressing global food needs

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Nebraska is at the epicenter of the challenge of increasing food production to meet the needs of a world population expected to reach more than 9 billion people by 2050, said the vice chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Ronnie Green was the keynote speaker at the Heartland Transatlantic Conference on Food and Fuels Monday morning at the State Capitol.

The conference, which also includes a visit to UNL's East Campus, continues Tuesday. It showcases Nebraska agribusiness prowess.

Diplomatic officials from countries including France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Estonia have joined Nebraska representatives at the conference, which focuses on the vital role Nebraska agribusiness and research plays in meeting the global demands for food and fuels.

"Nebraska is truly at the epicenter of innovating food production to meet the challenges of doubling the quantity of safe and high quality food for an anticipated global population of over 9 billion people by 2050," Green said.

"To be successful, this production must occur while sustaining our natural resource base as well as growing alternative energy sources," Green said.

Green noted that IANR's work in foods, fuels and water security is central to addressing the challenges. By 2050, he said, the world's population will grow by 40% and will require twice the food it needs now, and 70% of that additional food must come from efficiency-improvement technologies. One-third of the world's population already suffers from water shortages; by 2025, two-thirds likely will be affected.

"Agriculture is responsible for 70% of all water withdrawals," Green said. "We must grow more

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food with less water.”

Nebraska already is a leader in global agriculture, Green said. It has the largest aquifer, is first nationally in commercial red meat production, second in ethanol production capacity and fourth in value of ag productions sold.

That agricultural strength, coupled with UNL’s leadership in education and research, positions the state well to address the world’s food challenges.

The new Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute will help lead the way. This research, education and policy institute is committed to helping the world efficiently use its limited fresh water resources. Sustainability is critical, Green said.

IANR’s longtime strengths are well-suited to the world’s needs, he added.

“Our work in the areas of plant science innovation, livestock innovation, energy sciences research, water research and in ag and food policy will continue to be essential as we address these global challenges,” Green said.

The conference is sponsored by IANR, Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale, and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

“Nebraska is one of the leading states in America in terms of agriculture and ethanol production. Nebraska’s significant agricultural capabilities and natural resources will be called on to meet the future food and energy challenges of the world,” Gale said.

“The conference is a wonderful opportunity for diplomatic officials to visit our state, network with key Nebraska representatives and hear about the exciting developments in the state.”