

Strategic Plan for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources

IANR's mission

The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) focuses its research, teaching and extension education expertise in agriculture and food programs, natural resources, families and communities to help Nebraska grow an environmentally sound, economically viable, socially responsible future.

Building on the basics

IANR remains committed to these basic goals established in earlier strategic planning, and to the programs that make them possible:

- * *Increase Nebraska's agriculture and agribusiness competitiveness;*
- * *Give value-added and entrepreneurship programs high priority;*
- * *Improve natural resources management and enhance environmental quality;*
- * *Strengthen the quality of life of individuals and families and contribute to community vitality;*
- * *Bolster food safety and a safe food supply.*

As we move forward, IANR also will provide special focus on two issues Nebraskans have identified as vital to the state. They are:

- 1) economic development and community vitality;**
- 2) water.**

IANR's goals in these two areas are to:

- * *Focus IANR research, teaching and extension education efforts to meet Nebraskans' identified need for economic development and community vitality.*
- * *Focus IANR research, teaching and extension education efforts to provide Nebraskans knowledge they can use to make water quality and water usage decisions in their personal lives, communities and state.*

Listening sessions

IANR conducted more than 30 listening sessions with approximately 700 Nebraskans in 2003. In the sessions, held all across the state, people identified a number of issues of concern; issues they look to IANR to provide research, teaching and extension education to help them handle.

Throughout all the sessions, two overriding issues emerged: 1) economic development and community vitality; and 2) water. We heard them in listening sessions with Nebraska stakeholders and in conversations with IANR faculty, staff and administration.

Rural areas of our state worry about the vitality of their communities; about jobs that will allow people to stay where they would like to be if jobs are available; about young people leaving small communities while the remaining population grows increasingly older; about economic opportunities that will bring people to their areas to be contributing members of their communities.

They are not alone. Urban neighborhoods share many of the same concerns. As one Nebraska, composed of both urban and rural communities, we can, working together as a state, seek and find solutions of benefit to all. People and their concerns are important to IANR. Youth, family and community research and education done within IANR contribute to Nebraska's economy and quality of life. IANR provides leadership training and researches and educates on community, family and youth issues so important to community vitality.

Since Nebraska is a powerhouse agricultural state, it is only natural that value-added agriculture and niche markets are among the possibilities for economic development of value to all parts of the state. Such possibilities will be further explored.

Water, both quantity and quality, is the second concern heard throughout all of Nebraska. Keeping water safe and providing for business, home and recreational uses are concerns Nebraskans face. Knowledge on best management practices for both agricultural and urban areas is needed.

People are concerned about water conservation, both in rural and urban areas. Knowledge is needed on water-conserving crops, efficient irrigation practices, household and lawn practices and conservation. Drought is a fear and a reality, and people look to IANR for help in understanding the issues and providing the knowledge needed to meet them.

Water policy education is another area where knowledge is an identified need. People look to IANR for research and education to help them and their policy makers reach the best decisions possible in considering water policy and regulations, from the local through the regional up to the national level.

IANR already has a body of knowledge on water in Nebraska, and will further that knowledge in response to this statewide concern.

Working with its expertise and the expertise of the many individuals, agencies and institutions with which we partner, IANR will call upon all resources possible to address these issues. We welcome additional partnerships as we help the state grow.

Strategies for meeting the special focus goals

Research and education on economic development and community vitality and on water issues are not new to IANR, where scientists have worked in both areas for some time. Naming the two as focus areas in this strategic plan signals IANR's intent to do even more, and to focus the work done throughout IANR to contribute in these areas.

Each unit within IANR will be asked to detail, through unit action plans, how their work contributes to strengthening Nebraska's future in these areas. Looking at the bedrock goals on which IANR builds, noted at the beginning of this plan, it is apparent this increased focus dovetails well with those goals.

The University's Rural Initiative, which draws on the knowledge, skills and creativity throughout the university to stabilize and enhance the economy and quality of life in rural Nebraska, is housed in IANR. IANR expects the Rural Initiative to play a key role as IANR focuses on the economic development and community vitality need identified repeatedly in listening sessions, knowing the work done on community issues by the Rural Initiative is applicable in all of the greater community that is Nebraska.

The Rural Initiative seeks to build on Nebraska's strengths, which are many. Partnerships both within and outside the university are critical to its success. So is working regionally to build networks to sustain and develop a knowledge base for economic development opportunities and ways to increase communities' health and vitality. IANR expects to increase research capacity to add new knowledge to economic development because some research essential for this work is not available. IANR also plans to involve both graduate and undergraduate programs in this work, and is redirecting some extension educators to focus additional resources in this area.

The Water Resources Research Initiative at UNL provides university support for the next few years to address and impact water issues and broaden Nebraskans' knowledge and understanding in a broad range of surface- and ground- water areas. Interdisciplinary research relevant to the state and region will draw on expertise from IANR and from other parts of UNL, as well as from throughout the university system.

Other goals for the coming years

Several other goals established in earlier strategic plans remain extremely important for IANR to pursue in the coming years. IANR will continue to:

- * Strengthen recruitment, retention and placement of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources students, and of students who are human sciences majors. Tremendous opportunities await those who seek careers in food production, from the farm gate to the restaurant plate, and in natural resources, youth, families and communities. Recruitment is the responsibility of the entire IANR community, and the Institute's expectation is that all faculty and staff will make it a priority. We seek help from our alumni in accomplishing this important task.
- * Provide state-of-the-art courses that meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional students on and off campus.
- * Enhance and market learning opportunities through distance delivery of education in Nebraska.
- * Encourage career, personal and professional development that keep IANR administrators, faculty and staff leaders for Nebraska.
- * Actively promote diversity and gender equity, realizing that the talents, skills and knowledge found in the whole spectrum of society are needed if we are to successfully meet current and future challenges.
- * Communicate continually with the people of Nebraska. It is the expectation within IANR that administrators, faculty and staff will actively communicate the findings of IANR work for the benefit of Nebraska and Nebraskans.

Interactive communication, engaging with the people of the state, is a given for all who are part of a land-grant university. To that end, IANR will schedule a number of listening sessions yearly to hear what Nebraskans want to tell us, and will engage with Nebraskans in active two-way dialogues, knowing we learn much in doing so. IANR will use the information gathered in these conversations to continually adapt this strategic plan, which is a constantly in-progress and flexible guide to the future that must be and is able to change as new needs arise.

And, of course, IANR will continue its usual methods of distributing knowledge throughout Nebraska and of providing knowledge for policy makers and citizens to put to use in their own lives, and the life of the state.

Strategies for looking to the future

Strategic planning is all about looking to the future, and acting on identified strategies. IANR has a strong tradition of strategic planning. This is a guide that points the way to the work IANR will do, and the outcomes expected from that work. IANR expects those outcomes to be

measurable, and to report them to Nebraskans. Our constituents expect accountability from us, and we expect it from ourselves.

At all times it is important to be scanning for issues that will face Nebraska in the future, as well as dealing with those at hand. That way, IANR can do research and provide knowledge necessary for making informed decisions when future issues become current.

To that end, we expect our faculty to be continually scanning the horizon for issues so we can refine and update our strategic plan to best meet the concerns Nebraskans will face in the future. IANR will develop a formal process to gather information that results from such scanning, and to provide interdisciplinary input as to how we might best meet the challenges ahead, and who among our partners might best contribute to the work we have to do.

Partnerships are very important to IANR – partnerships within the university, among state agencies, and with our constituent groups, individuals and communities. Partnerships that are statewide, region-wide, national and international. We bring the expertise of all to bear as we work to meet the concerns of Nebraskans.

Because we work in the basics of life necessary to survival, we know the work we do is important to all people. We intend to put the knowledge we develop to work not only for our traditional constituencies, but for new constituencies as new needs develop, as well.

As IANR works in the focus areas of 1) economic development and community vitality, and 2) water, we intend to be leaders in facilitating statewide discussions of the issues that face Nebraska and Nebraskans, and partners in implementing solutions to the state's concerns.

IANR will develop interdisciplinary teams to explore individual aspects of these two focus issues. The teams will be charged with in-depth research and education on a specific aspect of the concern, and will be expected to make widespread public distribution of their findings to the state, as well as ways to put those findings to work for Nebraska.

In doing this we fulfill our land-grant university mission of taking the resources of the university to the state. We also, through research, teaching and extension education, help grow Nebraska's future.

Steering Committee

Thank you to the members of the 2003 IANR Strategic Planning Steering Committee for all their work:

- * Chair Alan Baquet, Associate Vice Chancellor, IANR
- * Donald Beermann, Head, Animal Science Department
- * Lloyd Bell, Associate Professor, Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, and IANR Liaison Committee
- * Linda Boeckner, Professor, Department of Nutrition and Health Sciences, Panhandle Research and Extension Center
- * Andrew Christiansen, Extension Educator, Hamilton County
- * John DeFrain, Professor, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
- * Mark Gustafson, Agriculture Builders of Nebraska (ABN) and Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching (CARET) representative, Mead
- * Tiffany Heng-Moss, Assistant Professor, Department of Entomology
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- * Dewey Teel, Extension Educator, Antelope County
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- * Susan Williams, Interim Director, Southeast Research and Extension Center

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