

Acker: guard state's agriculture resources

By Chuck Beck

From origins on an Atlantic, Iowa, farm Duane Acker has progressed to direct the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR).

Acker, vice chancellor in charge of the IANR, took his position in April 1974. He was the first person to head the institute, which was established by a 1973 act of the Legislature.

Six agricultural agencies consolidated under the IANR include:

- The College of Agriculture at UNL.
- Agricultural Experiment Stations at Lincoln and Mead.
- The School of Technical Agriculture at Curtis, where 250 students study horticultural and veterinary technology.
- The Cooperative Extension Service, which includes county agents who advise farmers and ranchers on developments in agriculture.
- The Conservation and Survey Division, which is responsible for soil mapping and natural resources inventory.
- And the Water Resources Research Institute at Lincoln, scientists doing basic research pertaining to consumer water use and irrigation by farmers.

Acker defined two goals he has for the Institute.

The first goal he defined was to "make the most effective use of the state's natural resources." Acker said he is concerned about maximizing the use and conservation of these resources over time.

A second goal Acker defined was to stimulate farm production and profitability, which would improve the welfare of Nebraskans, he said.

"When we emphasize the economic aspect of agriculture, we're not ignoring social concerns," he said. "By maximizing agricultural productivity and production, we address ourselves to the economic welfare of the state."

Acker explained that farm productivity generates money from income taxes. The tax money then can be used to stimulate state programs, such as hospital building, which improve the welfare of the state's citizens, he said.

Concerning teaching programs at UNL, Acker said it was impossible to determine how Nebraska's agriculture college ranks among other Big 8 universities.

"Besides that, I also have ties to four other schools in the Big 8," he said.

Acker received his bachelor's degree in animal science and his master's degree in animal nutrition from Iowa State University. He earned his doctorate degree in animal nutrition from Oklahoma State University.

Acker was an instructor in animal husbandry at Oklahoma State University from 1953-55 and an animal science instructor from 1955-62 at Iowa State University, where he attained the rank of associate professor.

He then became associate dean of agriculture at Kansas State University until 1966, when he became dean of the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at South Dakota University. After his tenure at South Dakota University, Acker took his post at UNL.

His position entails three aspects of representing agriculture to various persons around the state, he said.

He said he acts as a liaison to the chancellor representing farm programs as they relate to UNL.

A second aspect of his job entails travel around the state to keep farmers informed as to what University programs relate to them, Acker said.

The third aspect of his job is to coordinate research performed by the agriculture college with research performed by other UNL college departments, he said. Often agricultural research relates to experimentation in chemistry, geology and the life sciences, Acker said.

The vice-chancellor said the creation of his position improved communication between the agricultural sector of the University and the chancellor's office. Before his position was established, many human problems, such as jealousies, developed between faculty members at the agriculture college and the UNL administration.

"The two and one-half miles between east campus and the chancellor's office caused problems in communication," Acker said. "This showed up in decision making and budgeting programs."

Although some barriers existed between the agriculture staff members and the administration, such problems are common in programs that are regularly financed with tax money, Acker said. A staff member may want a certain program financed, but he may not receive the funds he requested, Acker said.

If there were problems before Acker's arrival at UNL, the agriculture college staff has been unchanging, he said. He said the low turnover rate of agriculture faculty members is due to the feeling of loyalty to the school and the community that staff members have developed.

"In some disciplines, turnover is a rather common feature because faculty members don't have the deep roots that faculty members have in agriculture."

Acker said that 93 per cent of the graduates remain to teach and do research in the agriculture college. Agriculture graduates foster the feeling of loyalty to their departments developed while attending classes, he said.

Conceding that the agriculture staff is paid the lowest salary rate among Big 8 universities, Acker said there has not been an exodus away from UNL.



Duane C. Acker

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