

# Omtvedt seeks more support for changing animal science

By Marsha Jark

Dr. Irvin Omtvedt, (pronounced Um-Twite) the new head of the animal science department in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources sees one of his challenges as getting more support for his department.

"It is one of the leading animal science departments in the country," he said, "and it has done tremendously well with limited resources, support, and salary levels."

He said a number of surrounding states with fewer farmers and a lower per capita income give more support to agriculture than Nebraska does. NU's animal science department is good, he said, because of a young staff dedicated to their research efforts.

One of the oldest areas of study on campus, the 77-year-old animal science department has been changing rapidly in the past few years to meet an economic crisis in the livestock industry, Omtvedt said. Profit margins for the livestock producer are low, in some cases negative, because of rising grain prices and falling livestock prices, he said.

"Our main concern," Omtvedt said, "is in terms of research, with a program that is both producer and consumer-oriented."

He said he is seeking communication and cooperation with livestock producers across the

state in order to meet the needs of the livestock industry. One of the reasons Omtvedt chose to come to Nebraska, he said, is because 65 per cent of its agricultural income is from livestock.

### Three areas

Omtvedt said he sees his job as entering into three areas: extension, research and teaching. Basic research goes on in the animal science building on East Campus with field research at Mead in beef and dairy cattle, sheep and swine.

In addition to these centers, four other regional stations in Nebraska cooperate with the NU program. Eleven staff members work out of stations in Clay Center, North Platte, Scottsbluff and Concord.

The extension program seeks to reach farmers with scientific breakthroughs which haven't been implemented on the farm or in processing plants, Omtvedt said.

He said the extension department looks at all facets of meat production from the producer to the consumer. They do computerized performance testing on beef and swine to select the best animals and to improve the eating quality of meat, Omtvedt said.

### Greater emphasis

In genetics and animal breeding, a greater emphasis is being placed on statistics and math, while new courses are being added to cope with a rapidly changing field, he added.

Omtvedt said that, because of the poor economic conditions, livestock producers are very willing to accept changes to improve their operations but he said he sees them as working in a team effort to guide research into areas where it is needed. According to Omtvedt, the average producer is more knowledgeable and better educated than in the past. Many work in an advising capacity as the research program is formulated, he said.

Omtvedt said an educational challenge is ahead in livestock production because of the food crisis. He said people tend to look at the conversion rates of grain into usable meat protein and forget about two important points.

"A lot of land won't produce cereal grains but will support cattle and much grain that cattle eat is unfit for human consumption," he said. Many methods are used to try to increase efficiency, Omtvedt said, including recycling waste products such as crop residues like cornstalks and corncobs and using them as fodder. What is needed, he said, is to be able to produce meat using a minimum amount of grain that could be used for human consumption.



Irvin Omtvedt, new head of animal science in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources

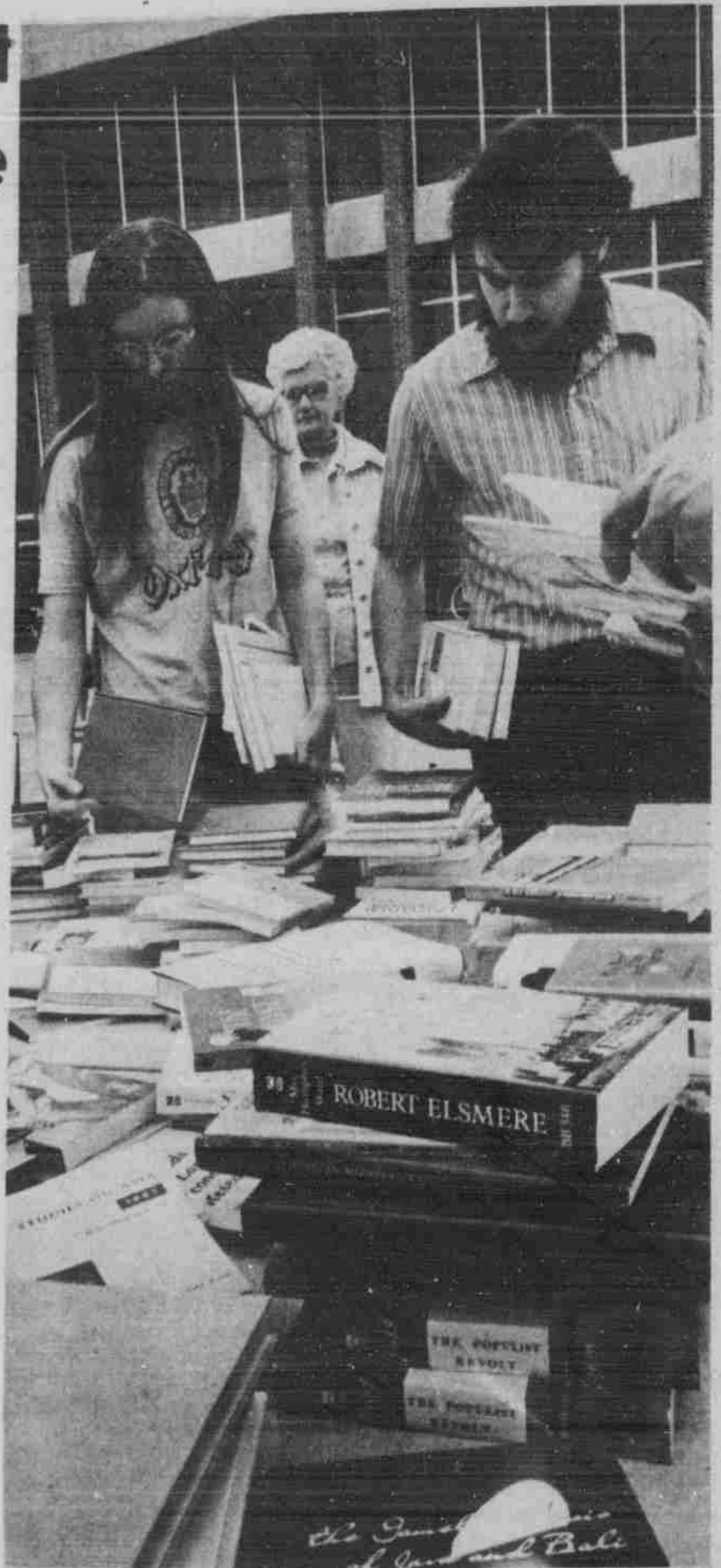


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