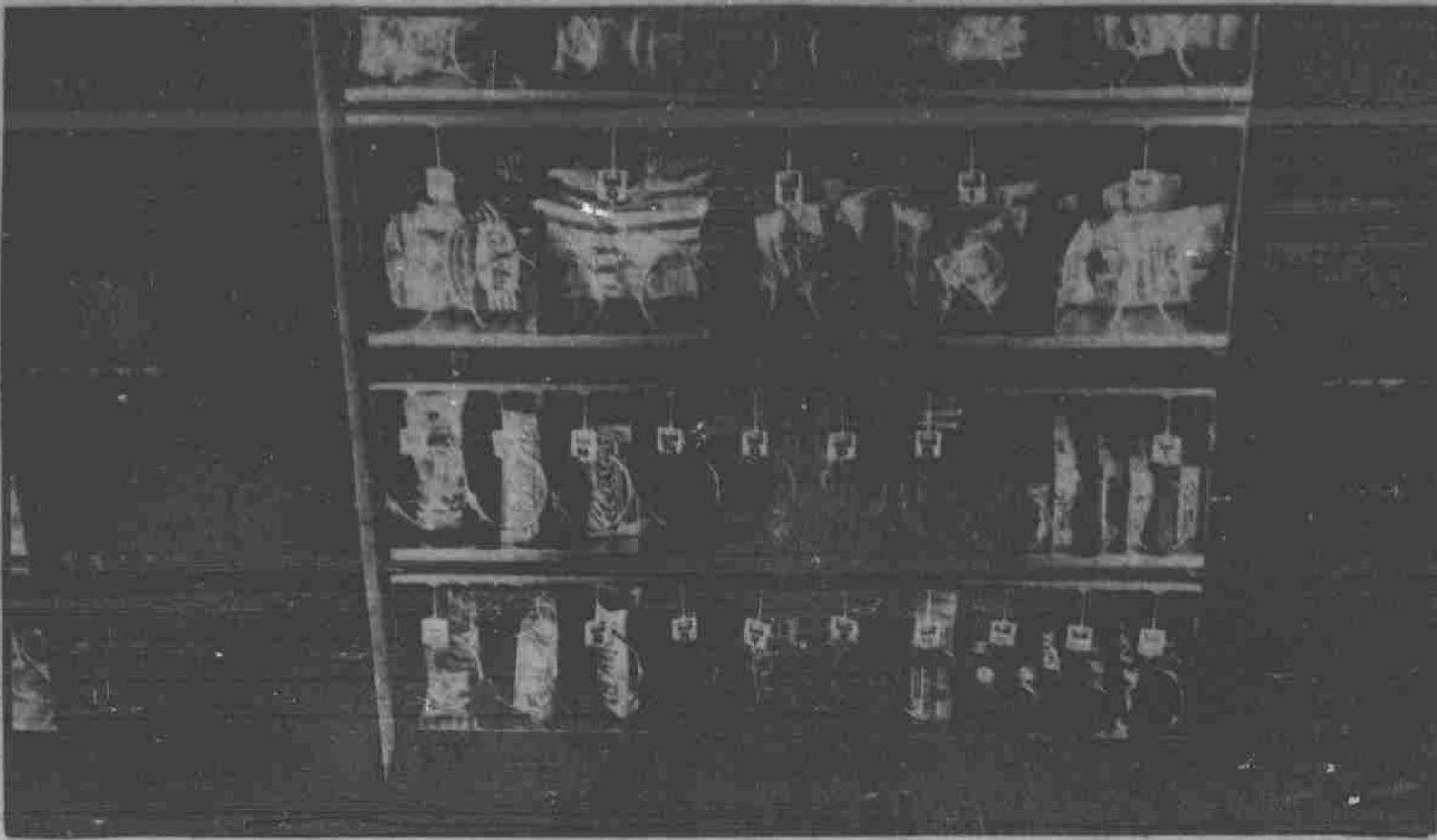


Vending machine bidders decide fate of students cash



One of the 255 vending machines on the UNL campus.

Photo by John Cranow

The amount of spare change students may have jingling in their pockets next year depends on how much local vending companies bid for UNL's vending machine contract, said Gene Meerkatz, vending systems manager for UNI.

The university currently is negotiating a two-year contract with 11 Lincoln and Omaha vending companies for the servicing of 255 machines on campus, Meerkatz said.

The companies bid on what percentage of the price of the products they want to pay UNL, Meerkatz explained. The companies bid item by item, so the bid affects only that item, he added.

Meerkatz said he has power to decide the prices of the products. He said he was specifically trying to keep the price of coffee at 15 cents a cup.

UNL's current contract is with Lincoln's Canteen Vending Service. He said UNL received approximately 15 per cent of the money made on product sales under that contract. He declined to give specific figures because publication of those figures might hurt UNL's chances of getting a good contract, he said.

UNL is negotiating for a two-year contract with a two-year option. The contract is essentially a four-year contract but the two-year option allows UNL to cancel the contract after two years if the company's service is not satisfactory, Meerkatz explained.

The contract outlines general requirements, sets pricing, and lists equipment requirements, Meerkatz said. Service and quality of the product also will be important in the decision of who gets the contract, he added.

The money the university makes from the vending machines goes toward creating new vending areas such as the one in Oldfather Hall, he said. It also pays for the cost of Meerkatz's office, utilities and custodial services, and accounting services done by the university, Meerkatz said.

The university may add vending machines in the new life sciences building and the new veterinary science complex, he added.

The alternative to contracting with vending companies is self-ownership and operation, Meerkatz said. Buying the machines initially would cost quite a bit but could be profitable, he said.

Meerkatz said he plans to visit other universities who own their machines and study the self-ownership system.

Debate scheduled for Food Day

Lincoln will join more than 150 cities Thursday in observation of the third national Food Day and will feature one of a dozen national debate panels.

Six Nebraskans, including two UNL professors, will represent various opinions of the food situation. They will participate in the 8 p.m. debate at the First Plymouth Congregational Church, 20th and D streets. Transcripts of the debate will be compiled in a book to be published by the Center for Science and the Public Interest, according to Deborah Kirschenman, Food Day local coordinator.

Nebraska was selected as one of the national debate sites because of its geographic location.

"Lincoln is in the heart of the agricultural belt, yet is an urban community with consumers who don't have a high knowledge of food problems," Kirschenman said.

She said Food Day's aim is to increase public awareness of the world food dilemma, with emphasis on educating urban dwellers.

"Hunger is a big problem in the world right now," Kirschenman said. "People are losing control of the food system and the food system is really changing now."

Bert Evans, UNL associate economics professor, and William Splinter, agricultural engineering professor, will participate on the debate panels. The other debaters include state Sen. Loran Schmit, Ed Tvardy of the National Farmers Organization, Newman Grove farmer John Han-

sen, and Robert Thompson of the Farm Bureau Federation.

Food Day will begin at 10 a.m. Thursday with a food fair on the Centennial Mall. Fifteen food and agriculture-related groups will sponsor booths providing information, education and community service on their involvement with the existing food system, Kirschenman said. The display will run until 9 p.m.

A community meal featuring high nutritional food at a low cost will be served at 6 p.m. at the First Plymouth Congregational Church. Admission will be \$1 for the meal provided by Open Harvest Food Cooperative, 2637 Randolph St.

The debate will follow the meal. There was a similar observation at UNL in early March, Kirschenman said. The "Seeds of Change" program sponsored by International Educational Services, the Nebraska Public Interest Research Group and Open Harvest, was a symposium on food policy.

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