

Computer designed for laymen

By John Ortmann

A computer system for the common man has been established at UNL.

Developed by Ag. Economic professor James Kendrick and Ag. Engineering professor Thomas Thompson, the Nebraska Agricultural Computer Network (AGNET) is designed for people with no knowledge of computers. The system came into use in 1974.

Kendrick said the system first was used in Nebraska, but has expanded to the five state Old West Regional Commission (OWRC) area. The states of Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota now are included in the system and funding is provided by OWRC, Kendrick said.

Thompson said there are other, more limited systems like AGNET in other parts of the country, but added AGNET has a broader scope than simply agriculture.

The actual computer, an IBM 370, is housed at the state capitol building and belongs to the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services, Thompson said.

Crop irrigation

Many farmers already have taken advantage of AGNET to schedule irrigation of crops, Kendrick said. He added that most Agriculture College students use the system for assigned classwork. Farmers and students are not charged for using AGNET, he said.

The only things needed to use the computer are basic typing skills and a short explanation by a programming assistant, he said.

AGNET supervisor Alfred Stark showed how a typical

session works.

He typed the word "Buspak" (Business Package) and the computer responded instantly via printout by offering to list economic programs. Simply typing the word "list" brought a choice of 10 program names, ranging from "capital budgeting" to "return on investment."

Stark selected a loan equity program and the computer asked for the size of the loan he wanted to consider, the interest rate, repayment schedule and time period of the loan. Stark selected some typical figures at random. In seconds AGNET printed out the total cost of the loan, total interest at various times over the repayment period and the size of the remaining debt.

Explained steps

At various steps along the way the computer printed "help?" By answering "yes" the computer prints out an explanation of what is going on and what is being asked of the user.

Stark said by using AGNET to examine loan situations one can compare different interest rates and repayment plans and come up with the most economical plan.

He added that an economics student using AGNET could work out a great number of such problems and begin to understand finance relationships while a student working by hand still would be on his first problem.

Other AGNET programs are available dealing with agriculture, home economics and elementary education. Terminals and assistance personnel are located on East Campus in Agricultural Engineering Hall.



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