

From the editor

This issue of *The Sower* looks at East Campus, the bread basket of the university and the state.

On the cover, photographer Joel Sartore captures UNL senior Bob Duer, an ag major, sitting atop a plastic horse practicing his calf roping skills in the East Campus Livestock Judging Pavilion.

On Page 2, Judi Nygren reports on the ag enrollment drop caused by the farm crisis.

Ann Lowe writes about the end of an era on page 3, as a record number of ag professors prepare to retire and ag school administrators scramble to find replacements.

On Pages 4 and 5, Kevin Warneke travels to Franklin, Neb., to see how small businesses are surviving after farm foreclosures and decreasing ag prices.

Lisa Nutting investigates the secret of FarmHouse fraternity on Page 6. The fraternity has maintained the highest Greek Grade Point Average at UNL for almost 74 years.

On Page 7, Ward W. Triplett III asks a recent UNL graduate, who is now practicing veterinary medicine in Lincoln, about the university's need for a vet school.

Finally, Michelle Kubik reports on the UNL Dairy Store's efforts to help state industries test products.

Ag enrollment drops as crisis hits university

For almost 22 years, Kent Andersen has lived on his family's farm 18 miles northwest of Lexington, working the 300 acres of land and helping his dad nurture piglets to their 250-pound slaughter weight.

Having grown up on the farm, the UNL animal science major said farming is "pretty much inherent" to him. It is a good life, he said, a life he someday hopes to return to.

But as a senior, Andersen said, he may be forced to give up his dream of returning to the family farm. Leaning back in a chair, he crosses his leg and reveals chunks of mud on his cowboy boots. Andersen talks casually about the farm crises and the financial strife it has created for his family.

Like many of his Lexington neighbors, Andersen and his family fight high debts, low land values and poor market prices. Some of the neighbors, however, have lost the battle and that worries Andersen, he said.

"It can sneak up on people and really take them by surprise," he said. "I guess I'm just prepering myself in case we'd ever lose the farm."

The Andersen's are not alone. The farm crises has grown to such proportions that it has spread from farm communities, such as Lexington, to almost all sectors of the state. Finally the crisis has hit UNL's College of Agriculture.

T.E. Hartung, dean of the ag college, and Leslie Sheffield,

associate professor of agricultural economics, say many of the college's problems are caused by the farm crisis.

One such problem, Hartung said, is a "sharp" decline in the college's enrollment. According to records from the ag college, enrollment dropped from 1,719 students in 1983 to 1,574 in 1984. From 1980 to 1982, enrollment ranged from 1,889 to 1,864. Hartung said the drop occurred because fewer farm students can afford college, and those who can often choose other careers, such as engineering and medicine.

This decline did not take the college by surprise, Hartung said. Nationally, enrollment in ag colleges began to drop in 1978. Based on this trend, he said, administrators expected an eventual decline at UNL.

"We just didn't feel it would be so sharp," he said.

Sheffield predicts enrollment will continue to decline over the next few years. Farm families who three years ago were "well-to-do, even to the point of being millionaires" are now struggling, Sheffield said. This often means farm children who would have gone to UNL no longer can, he said.

The decline in enrollment goes beyond mere figures. Sheffield said fewer students translate into fewer dollars for teachers and research.

"We're going through a down cycle," he said. "This means some level of stress for the university . . . and it requires special attention."

Hartung's explanation differs from Sheffield's. Hartung said agriculture's strifes have meant less state funding for the college. As a result, he said, three teaching positions have not been filled and will remain empty indefinitely.

"It's a short-term readjustment," he said.

These enrollment and financial reports appear bleak, but Hartung said, they overlook one thing — agriculture's bright future.

"Nebraska's agriculture is very dynamic," Hartung said. "We're paying an adjustment price now, but we'll rebound. Nebraska has staying power."

The future, as seen by Hartung, includes a diverse agriculture community based on high technology and strong agri-business. These things, coupled with Nebraska's resources, will give the state's farmers a competitive edge, he said.

While Sheffield agrees that the future holds great possibilities in agri-business, his views on farming are less promising. Nebraska may return to a farm era of "either you inherit it (farm) or marry it," he said.

For graduates of the ag college, these differing views mean an uncertain future.

In Hartung's world, graduates who want to farm or ranch — in 1984, this included 22 percent of all graduates — will have little trouble breaking out on their own. It will only be a matter of getting financial backing, he said.

"With the low land values," Hartung said, "this could possibly be the best time to buy."

In Sheffield's world, however, graduates have few financial sources. It is tough to get started because banks are reluctant to lend money to young farmers.

This differs from the "old days," Sheffield said, when banks allowed farmers 70 to 80 percent leverage — amount borrowed vs. assets. With 70 to 80 percent leverage, farmers needed only \$20,000 to \$30,000 for a down payment on a quarter section valued at \$100,000. Today if young farmers borrow this amount, he said, their cash flow will have to be consistently high and "they can't depend on that."

While Hartung's and Sheffield's farm worlds differ, both agree agri-business has a future. Hartung said that with 30 percent of the United States' business and industry related to agriculture, agri-business has great potential.

However, Sheffield said, this does not necessarily mean the jobs are in Nebraska. According to a Federal Reserve Bank in Kansas City, 32 percent of Nebraska's agri-businesses are in financial trouble.

Hartung and Sheffield are not alone in their predictions. Because many experts think agri-business is the way of the future, the ag college, now under curriculum review, will place more emphasis on agri-business. Hartung said this emphasis will not include changes in the number of classes offered in either production or agri-business. It will be a shift in attitude. The college will encourage a broad range of courses and make students more aware of all the options in agriculture, he said.

With a broad curriculum base, Hartung said, students will be able to apply science, economics and people skills to agriculture. This will prepare students for "lifelong" success, he said.

Two agriculture students already have adopted this new attitude. Andersen and Wayne Schold, a sophomore ag economics major, plan to return to the farm, but not without a broad education to fall back on.

Andersen said he wants to return to the family farm to "fulfill my livelihood." However, he may get a master's or doctorate degree before returning.

"It's getting harder and harder to make a living just farming," Andersen said. "I might have to farm and do something else."

"Something else," he said, could be anything from consultant to feed work. But he won't limit himself to one area yet.

Like Andersen, Schold also wants to finish school before returning to Oakland to farm with his father.

"Farming is what I've always wanted to do," Schold said. "If you can make a living at it, it's a good living."

But because the farmers in Oakland are "pinching pennies," Schold said, he needs an education as insurance.

"If you're going to return to the farm, the only way to survive now is through better management," he said. "But if farming doesn't work out, I'll have other areas to go to." — Judi Nygren



Kent Andersen holds one of 11 piglets from a litter he's raising.

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