

Nelson announces ag rehabilitation program

BY JESSICA FLANAGAN
Staff reporter

At a news conference Wednesday, Gov. Ben Nelson announced a partnership with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension to launch a new program called "Decisions Now - Building Your Future."

This \$118,250 program, funded by the University of Nebraska and the Rural Rehab program is a financial planning and analysis program for struggling ranch and farm operations.

"Low livestock and crop prices, diminishing export markets and adverse weather conditions have combined this year to make things extremely difficult for Nebraska agriculture," Nelson said.

Nelson also spoke of his work toward developing a federal crop insurance effort. According to the Nebraska Farm Business Association approximately one third of Nebraska farm families were unable to cover their family living expenses, which was a reason cited by Nelson to indicate the need for such a program for Nebraska farmers and ranchers.

"Generally when there's a downturn in agriculture, it's one or two

sectors, not every sector at once," said Larry Sitzman, director of the Nebraska department of Agriculture. "The current situation is putting significant financial stress on farm and ranch operations."

"The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and the Nebraska department of Agriculture are collaborating to help producers cope with financial stress as they plan for 1999," said Kenneth Bolen, dean of the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

"The program will help farmers and ranchers determine where they are now financially, what resources they have and what decisions they need to make," said Larry Bitney, an agriculture economist with in NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. "For some people, it will be a fine-tuning. For others, it could be a major overhaul."

Bitney explained that in addition to financial analysis and planning, the program will help families discuss and write their personal goals.

The program will be offered at several locations around the state. Families may begin enrolling in October for sessions in January, February and March. Cooperative Extension farm management staff, educators and part-time instructors will conduct the training, which will cost \$75 per family.

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