

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is strategically increasing its investment in agriculture and natural resources, looking to hire three dozen new faculty after a decade of budget cuts and stagnant hiring.

Ronnie Green, vice chancellor of the university's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, where the faculty will be housed, said the new hires will come in subject areas filling workforce gaps critical to the global challenges of the future, including expanded and more efficient food production and improved water and natural resources management.

The world's population is expected to increase from about seven billion to nine billion by 2050, and the challenges of feeding that population are significant, Green noted.

As one of the world's leading agricultural producers, Nebraska is the epicenter of these issues, and its land-grant university must be there, too, Green said.

The 36 new positions are primarily in the areas of science literacy, stress biology, computational sciences, healthy humans and healthy systems for agricultural production and natural resources.

"They cover a fairly wide range of areas across the institute addressing contemporary agricultural and natural resource issues," Green said.

"We are absolutely convinced that as a university it's time to double down in our investment in these areas around food, fuel and water," Green said. "All of the needs out there indicate that we need to expand our efforts to meet the challenges that are ahead."

The initiative fits with UNL Chancellor Harvey Perlman's goal of increasing faculty and student enrollment significantly by 2017. IANR is in a position to do this thanks to eight years of annual enrollment growth in its College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, record levels of research funding and a strong agricultural economy in Nebraska.