



State Sen. Heath Mello took some good-natured ribbing from fellow senators questioning the amount of agriculture in his district when he proposed a resolution making July 25 Farmer Appreciation Day in Nebraska.

Mello, who represents Omaha's District 5, took it in stride.

"My intent with LR256," Mello said, "was to raise awareness of the importance of agriculture, especially as an urban senator. Agriculture is the backbone of the Nebraska economy."

Mello said that whether food in Nebraska is grown for local farmers markets or for worldwide distribution, "we want to build a healthy, sustainable way of life that cuts across urban and rural communities."

Sustainability is key to Nebraska's agricultural strength.

Bruce Johnson, agricultural economist in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said strengths found in variations in Nebraska's water, land and soils make the state a rich and diverse source of crop and livestock enterprises.

Differences in climate from the southeast to northwest corners of Nebraska are as great as from the East Coast to Nebraska's east border, Johnson said.

"Nebraska has a unique set of natural resources that position it to be a national and international leader," Johnson added.

Brad Lubben, IANR public policy specialist, agreed, saying the art and science of Nebraska agriculture has continually grown since 1862, when the Homestead Act, the Morrill Act creating land-grant colleges and the Pacific Railway Act that built the transcontinental railroad all passed, and fueled it.

One in three Nebraska jobs relates in some way to agriculture, according to a 2006 Nebraska Policy Institute report on the importance of agriculture and agribusiness to Nebraska's economy.

Those jobs occur in both rural and urban areas, and range from agriculture and agribusiness to transportation, processing, insurance, banking and much more.

Citing USDA data, Lubben added that in 1950, U.S. farmers and ranchers received 41 cents of every retail dollar spent on food eaten in the U.S. Today, their share of the food dollar is 19 cents, with the other 81 cents going for packaging, transportation, labor, etc.

"The farmer/producer is a major resource manager for society," Johnson said, which grows ever more important as the world's population and needs increase.

He pointed out that Nebraska has five of the top 100 agricultural counties nationwide, largely because of livestock receipts.

Lubben and Johnson both said human resources are among Nebraska's—and agriculture's—most significant assets. Nebraska producers often are community and state leaders, and are "economically astute with a commercial mindset," Johnson said. "We all prosper from that."

Lubben agreed. "When agriculture does well, it contributes to the strength of the state's economy."

Facts about Nebraska agriculture

Did you know?

1. Nebraska ranks No. 1: Nebraska ranks first nationally in production of commercial red meat. —*Nebraska Agriculture Fact card
2. No. 1 again: Nebraska has more irrigated farmland acres than any other state. One in six acres of U.S. irrigated farmland is in Nebraska. —2007 Census of Agriculture
3. No. 4: Nebraska ranks fourth nationally in amount of acres in farms and ranches, and also consistently ranks fourth in total agricultural receipts. —2007 Census of Agriculture
4. No. 2: Beef is big business in Nebraska. Nebraska ranks second in the U.S. in cattle and calf sales, with a Jan. 1, 2009 inventory of 6.35 million head. —*Nebraska Agriculture Fact card
5. Top 100: Cuming, Dawson, Phelps, Lincoln and Platte counties in Nebraska are in the top 100 agricultural counties nationally, largely because of livestock receipts. —2007 Census of Agriculture
6. No. 1 and 2 again: Nebraska is first in Great Northern bean production. Nebraska also ranks second nationally in pinto beans and proso millet production. —*Nebraska Agriculture Fact card
7. And No. 3: Nebraska is third in the nation in producing corn for grain, with nearly 1.4 billion bushels produced in 2008. Nebraska also is third nationally in production of grain sorghum and all dry edible beans. —*Nebraska Agriculture Fact Card
8. Top 10: Nebraska's 10 leading commodities, in order of importance for cash receipts, are: cattle and calves; corn; soybeans; hogs; wheat; dairy products; chicken eggs; hay; grain sorghum and dry beans. —*Nebraska Agriculture Fact Card
9. No yolk: 2.78 billion eggs are produced in Nebraska annually, which ranks it seventh nationally. —National Ag Statistics Service/USDA
10. What we eat: The average person in the U.S. each year consumes 21 gallons of milk; 126 pounds of fresh fruits; 197 pounds of flour and cereal products; 245 eggs; 117 pounds of red meats; 33 pounds of cheese; 85 pounds of poultry; 21 pounds of rice; 202 pounds of fresh vegetables. —Economic Research Service/USDA
11. Spent on food: Less than 10 percent of American disposable income is spent on food—less than is spent on taxes. —USDA/Department of Commerce
12. The world is our customer: Nebraska is a leading state in agricultural exports, ranking fifth overall in total dollar volume in fiscal year 2008, with a rank of third in feed grains and products, and second in live animals and meat. —Economic Research Service/USDA

*The Nebraska Agriculture Fact Card is a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, USDA, NASS, Nebraska Field Office, Nebraska Bankers Association and Nebraska AgRelations Council