

Perlman: NU's Innovation Campus needs money to expedite development

By Julie Anderson / World-Herald Bureau | Posted: Friday, September 19, 2014 2:52 pm

LINCOLN — Speeding development of the University of Nebraska's new research park — and capitalizing on the park's economic development opportunities — will take further investments by the state, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's chancellor said Friday.

Harvey Perlman told the NU Board of Regents that the Nebraska Innovation Campus is off to a good start on its 25-year development plan.

Innovation Campus staff now is headquartered in the new Innovation Commons, the renovated 4-H Building, and the Global Water for Food Institute moved in Thursday.

The university's Food Science and Technology Department will move to the campus' Food Innovation Center in 2014, joined by anchor partner ConAgra Foods.

But the process of drawing other companies has been challenging, although the university has had interest from several, including a Fortune 100 firm and a western Nebraska company interested in space near university faculty to develop products.

Perlman said challenges of drawing outside tenants include creating enough activity so tenants don't feel isolated and building enough space ahead so it can be ready when tenants want it, often on a short turnaround.

"The challenge you face in any new development is to get started," he said.

On Friday, the regents approved \$1.5 million for additional classrooms for the Food Innovation Center and \$1.5 million to finish additional greenhouse space. That funding came from internal sources — \$2 million of it from an anonymous donor.

Moving a department there, he said, demonstrates the university's commitment and creates some of that activity. But such investments have created "a pull" on university resources.

"We've gone about as far as we can go," he said.

The state initially invested \$25 million in the campus. Perlman said the funds allowed the



innovationcampus_rendering

The master plan for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Nebraska Innovation Campus, shared in February 2010.

construction of needed infrastructure, the Innovation Commons and Food Innovation Center.

The university, he said, remains confident it can meet the campuses' economic development and employment goals.

But to accelerate the project, Perlman said, would take further investment by the Nebraska Legislature.

The Innovation Campus is one of a handful of initiatives included in the University of Nebraska's two-year budget request to the state for \$20 million to support "economic competitiveness."

Officials said investments in the university have a proven record of providing a positive economic return for the state. Currently, a number of other states in the region are planning significant investments in economic development initiatives.

Howard Hawks, the regents' chairman, asked whether the university could work with the Legislature to create a tax advantage district around the Innovation Campus to provide incentives to potential tenants.

Perlman said the university has looked at economic development incentives the state offers and could look at others. New York, for instance, has tax-free zones around its universities.