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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I'm Karen Hinton, Dean and Director of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. It's a pleasure to be here with you today and present an overview of some of our programs that are being conducted in the areas of agriculture and natural resources.

I'd like to begin with just a little background information on Cooperative Extension. The program was initiated both nationally and in Nevada in 1914, and was established as a partnership between state, county and federal government. Cooperative Extension is tied to land-grant institutions across the country -- in Nevada, that being the University of Nevada, Reno. This chart shows the overall funding for Cooperative Extension in fiscal year '02. This shows the percentages contributed by the core partners as well as through grants, which have been a growing source for supporting and expanding programming. We have 18 offices statewide and programs in all 17 Nevada counties. Mineral County is the last of Nevada's counties to become a part of Cooperative Extension. NRS does require a county to make a financial commitment to receive our programming. As of July 1, 2002, Mineral County made that commitment. We requested in our proposed budget, the funds necessary from the state, to allow us to meet the basic needs for a county program and to place a professional educator in Hawthorne. Although that funding has not yet been budgeted, we do hope that we will receive your support to establish full programming for Mineral County. Our major program areas as outlined in NRS 549 are: Community Development; Horticulture and Natural Resources; Agriculture; Human and Family Development; and Health and Nutrition and we conduct our programs in both urban and rural settings throughout Nevada.

I'd like to describe some of the major ag and natural resource programs that are currently being conducted, such as the national award-winning Inside Beef program. It teaches ranchers the economic principles of futures and options for selling cattle and protecting against downside market risks, while improving the bottom line. Extension has taken the interaction that local residents might have at the traditional coffee shop to the Internet, connecting 250 cattle producers with each other and university faculty. This question-and-answer service provides timely, up-to-date information and users report that it has a major impact on the way they conduct their ranching operations. To meet the consumer demand for healthy and safe food, we're helping ranchers receive national certification that their beef meets the highest standards of animal production.

In 1999 we received a state appropriation of \$75,000 to lead a statewide effort on Tall Whitetop. The Initiative brought together local citizens, agencies and media; hundreds of acres of weeds were sprayed and mapped; and in fact, your initial seed money was tripled with additional funding and support. These efforts are ongoing and have expanded into a collaboration of many agencies focused on weed eradication, education and research.

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Alfalfa hay and seed production are important to the economy of rural areas of Nevada. We work with farmers in optimizing scarce water supplies and fertilizing efficiently for profitability and for the protection of our natural resources. In December, we hosted a western state symposium on hay and forage production. We collaborate with farmers in trials of new, hardy crops that can augment income and use less water. We've been involved in testing warm-season grasses, shrubs and trees, barley, nursery stock, native seeds and even wine grapes. The Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team requested our involvement in facilitating and providing technical assistance to six local teams working on 20-year sage grouse habitat plans. We're helping the local groups balance the need for the species and habitat conservation with those of land users. Our local Extension Educators help local citizens diversify and expand their economies. Our economic and community development programs link closely with agriculture and natural resources across the state.

The Fallon "cancer cluster" has caused concern about the safety of local water sources. Our researchers and educators work on several projects, funded by the USDA and EPA. Our Nevada GOLD project trains volunteers to provide information on drinking water and arsenic levels. Last summer we worked with EPA to recruit and take blood and water samples from 900 citizens, who are 20-year Fallon residents, as a part of a study to determine the long-term effects of arsenic. We collaborate with firefighting agencies and the media to help individuals prepare for and respond to Nevada's high wildfire-hazard environment. With outside funding, we developed a half-hour TV special which ran several times and as you can see in the slide, more than 1.6 million copies of our defensible space publication have been distributed through the western states. We also work with local groups to get community action projects started. The Living on the Land program helps urban ranch owners become good stewards of the land and protect soil, water, plant and animal resources. It has now expanded to other western states and the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture program recently selected it to be among 12 programs that they will feature in their next national report. The Center for Urban Water Conservation is a multi-agency collaboration in North Las Vegas. Researchers investigate water use in relation to plants and turfgrass. Master Gardeners use the facility for projects and field days open to the public. Our Master Gardener program is thriving, with distance technology now making it possible for us to reach outlying communities. After training, these volunteers teach other citizens horticulture practices. Last year, these volunteers contributed the equivalent hours of 14 employees.

Our 4-H youth programs are growing in both urban and rural communities. More than 52,000 youth participated in 2002. Teaching life skills and leadership development are core concepts of the program that help prepare 4-H youth to be productive adults. Natural resources and science-related projects have been popular, as well as Ag in the Classroom which is conducted in collaboration with other agencies and organizations.

We track our total educational contacts statewide, and continue to implement strategies that help us to increase the number of individuals we reach. In 2002, we made more than 719,000 face to face contacts in our educational programs. Additionally, we reach thousands of people through the media, by writing newspaper articles and columns, and through radio and TV programs. We use new technologies to expand the traditional classroom to learning centers, homes and workplaces statewide. We teach via the Internet – where we have more than 600 publications on our web site – and also through the use of satellite and compressed video.

We're proud of our programs and the positive impact they have on Nevadan citizens. We're also proud of the level of interaction and collaboration we have with other agencies and organizations and the fact that these partnerships helps us all to use our resources more efficiently. Thank you for the opportunity to highlight a few of our programs. The packet that you have been provided will give you further information on our agriculture and natural resources programs, as well as the total breadth of our programs statewide.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.