



## Draft Agenda

# Competitiveness Conversations Across America: *Nebraska — Leading the New Frontier in the Global Bioeconomy*

## April 29-30, 2026

Durham Museum  
Swanson Gallery  
801 S 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Omaha, NE 68108

## All Times Central

### April 29

2:00 PM – Registration and Networking  
2:30 PM – Competitiveness Conversation Programming  
5:30 PM – President’s Reception  
6:30 PM – President’s Dinner  
8:30 PM – Adjourn

### April 30

8:00 AM – Breakfast, Registration, and Networking  
8:30 AM – Competitiveness Conversation Programming  
12:30 PM – Lunch and keynote  
1:15 PM – Competitiveness Conversation Programming  
2:45 PM – Adjourn

# Nebraska — Leading the New Frontier in the Global Bioeconomy

**Wednesday, April 29, 2026**

Durham Museum  
Swanson Gallery  
801 S 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Omaha, NE 68108

**2:00 PM REGISTRATION AT THE DURHAM MUSEUM**

**2:30 PM A VISION FOR NEBRASKA AND THE NATION: INNOVATION-DRIVEN GROWTH IN THE BIOECONOMY**

These opening remarks will frame this Competitiveness Conversation by spotlighting Nebraska’s statewide leadership in innovation, particularly within the bioeconomy, and connecting it to a broader national strategy. The session will also introduce the Council on Competitiveness’ vision for expanding the innovation economy to more communities across the country, while highlighting the organization’s new national initiative to strengthen and scale the U.S. bioeconomy.

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System
- Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness

**2:45 PM KEYNOTE: THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE BIOECONOMY IMPERATIVE AND THE FUTURE OF U.S. COMPETITIVENESS**

- Dr. Scott Hutchins, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE), United States Department of Agriculture

### 3:00 PM PANEL DISCUSSION: NEBRASKA — AT THE HEART OF INNOVATION AND U.S. COMPETITIVENESS

Nebraska has developed a distinctive model of competitiveness — one that combines innovation with the capacity to scale and deliver lasting economic impact. This panel will examine how the state’s leaders align business, infrastructure, and research to strengthen Nebraska’s competitiveness and what lessons the Nebraska model holds for the rest of the country.

- Mr. Jim Clifton, Chairman, Gallup
- Ms. Maureen Larsen, Director of Economic Development, State of Nebraska
- Mr. Derek Leathers, CEO, Werner
- Ms. Sandra Reding, President, Aksarben Foundation
- Mr. Hunter Traynor, Executive Vice President, Legislation and Policy, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- **Moderator:** Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System

### 3:45 PM FIRESIDE CHAT: OMAHA IN MOTION — BUILDING A CITY FOR THE NEXT ECONOMY

Omaha is emerging as a dynamic hub for innovation — drawing talent, investment, and economic growth. In this fireside chat, city, business, and civic leaders will explore the forces driving — *and constraining* — Omaha’s growth today, and how strategic investments, public-private collaboration, and civic leadership are positioning the city as both a great place to live and a major competitive player in the next economy.

- Mr. Bruce Carpenter, Central Region Civic Director, HDR
- Hon. John Ewing, Mayor, City of Omaha
- Mr. Heath Mello, President and CEO, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
- **Moderator:** Mr. Mike Cassling, Founder and Executive Chairman, CQuence Health; Vice Chair, Aksarben Foundation

## **4:15 PM PANEL DISCUSSION: A NATIONAL ADVANTAGE — SCALING THE BIOECONOMY**

Nebraska unites an unmatched combination of agricultural production, bioprocessing capacity, investment, research, talent, geographic centrality, and industry leadership — all helping to position the state as an engine for the U.S. bioeconomy. This panel will examine how Nebraska’s integrated ecosystem is accelerating innovation from farm to market, enabling scale, and strengthening U.S. competitiveness across food, fuels, materials, and biomanufacturing.

- Mr. Kelly Brunkhorst, Executive Director, Nebraska Corn Board
- Mr. Billy Hagstrom, CEO & Co-Founder, Bluestem Biosciences
- Mr. Ben Rhodes, Executive Director, Nebraska Ethanol Board
- Mr. Craig Uden, Board President, Nebraska Cattlemen
- **Moderator:** Mr. Dan Hoffman, President, Invest Nebraska

## **5:00 PM BREAK/NETWORKING**

## **5:30 PM PRESIDENT’S RECEPTION**

## **6:30 PM COMPETITIVENESS CONVERSATION DINNER AND KEYNOTE**

- **Introduction:** Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System
- Gen. (Ret.) Anthony J. Cotton, Former Commander, United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM)

## **8:30 PM DAY 1 CONCLUDES**

## Thursday, April 30, 2026

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801 S 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Omaha, NE 68108

### 8:00 AM BREAKFAST AND NETWORKING

### 8:25 AM INTRODUCTION OF THE GOVERNOR

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System

### 8:30 AM KEYNOTE ADDRESS FROM NEBRASKA'S STATEHOUSE

- The Hon. Jim Pillen, Governor, State of Nebraska

### 8:40 AM DAY 2 WELCOME

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System

### 8:45 AM FIRESIDE CHAT: OPENING PERSPECTIVES — BIOECONOMY AT THE INTERSECTION OF PRODUCTIVITY, SECURITY, AND PROSPERITY

Building on Day 1's discussions of Nebraska's innovation economy and its central role in the bioeconomy, this opening session will set the stage for Day 2 by exploring how the bioeconomy intersects with national security, higher education, evolving innovation and financing models, and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence.

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System
- Mr. Jim Stutelberg, CEO, Primient
- Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness
- **Moderator:** Dr. Chris Kratochvil, Vice President for External Relations, University of Nebraska System

**9:15 AM    TECH TALK: STRENGTHENING DEFENCE AND RESILIENCE IN THE BIOECONOMY**

This session will highlight how strategic innovation and preparedness measures can protect critical bioeconomic infrastructure, mitigate emerging biological threats, and strengthen national resilience.

- Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Paul Friedrichs, Former Deputy Assistant to the President and Former Director of the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness

**9:25 AM    PANEL DISCUSSION: SECURING THE FUTURE — NATIONAL DEFENSE, BIOSECURITY, AND THE BIOECONOMY**

Panelists will examine biological risks and how emerging technologies, heightened vulnerabilities, and strategic partnerships are shaping the United States' approach to biosecurity and resilience. Discussions will focus on the imperative of safeguarding national interests while advancing economic growth — and explore strategies to achieve both.

- Dr. Tiffany Heng-Moss, Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR), University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- Dr. James Lawler, Associate Director of International Programs and Innovation, Global Center for Health Security
- Dr. Gina Ligon, Director, National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE)
- Dr. Marty Vanier, Director, National Agricultural Biosecurity Center, Associate Director, Biosecurity Research Institute, Kansas State University
- **Moderator:** Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Paul Friedrichs, Former Deputy Assistant to the President and Former Director of the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness

### **10:15 AM PANEL DISCUSSION: COMMERCIALIZING BIOECONOMY INNOVATION THROUGH UNIVERSITIES AND NATIONAL LABS**

Leaders from academia, industry, and the U.S. DOE national laboratories will share insights, challenges, and opportunities for translating research into commercial solutions, fostering partnerships, and preparing the next generation of innovators.

- Dr. Kirk Dombrowski, Vice President of Research and Economic Development, University of Vermont
- Dr. Peter Dorhout, Vice President for Research, Iowa State University
- Mr. Steve Marshall, Vice President, Process Innovation, Cargill
- Dr. Todd Pray, Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory
- **Moderator:** Dr. Ken Bayles, Vice Chancellor for Research, University of Nebraska Medical Center

### **11:00 AM BREAK**

### **11:10 AM LIGHTNING ROUNDS: BIG IDEAS IN THE BIOECONOMY**

Three rapid-fire talks spotlighting breakthrough ideas to unleash the bioeconomy. Fast-paced, forward-looking, and built to spark what's next.

### **11:40 AM INSIGHTS INTO CONSUMER DEMAND FOR BIO-BASED GOODS**

This session explores consumer preferences for bio-based products and how attitudes are shaping innovation in the bioeconomy.

- Mr. Dan Foy, Principal, Global Analytics, Gallup

### **11:55 AM FIRESIDE CHAT: STRENGTHENING THE DEMAND SIDE OF THE BIOECONOMY**

- Dr. Jonathan "Jon" McIntyre, Founding Partner, Nodl Advisors; Distinguished Fellow, Council on Competitiveness

### **12:30 PM LUNCH**

**1:15 PM    FIRESIDE CHAT: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEADING THE BIOECONOMY RACE**

This session will explore global trends, innovations, and strategies shaping the bioeconomy, highlighting lessons for U.S. leadership and Nebraska's role in the evolving global ecosystem.

- Mr. Rob Hanson, Co-Founder and CEO, Monolith Materials
- Mr. Joe Sanders, Executive Director, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute, University of Nebraska
- Mr. Gustavo Sergi, CEO, Sustainea
- **Moderator:** Mr. Gregory Jaffe, President, Jaffe Policy Consulting and Ambassador, World Bioeconomy Association

**1:45 PM    PANEL DISCUSSION: HOW CONVERGING NEXT-GENERATION TECHNOLOGIES ARE USHERING IN A NEW ERA OF BIO INNOVATION**

Artificial intelligence is transforming the bioeconomy and driving breakthroughs in personalized medicine, transportation, sustainable agriculture, climate solutions, and more. This panel brings together leaders from industry, academia, and government to explore how AI is accelerating innovation and shaping the future of the bioeconomy.

- Dr. Sarah Glaven, Visiting Fellow at Princeton University's Andlinger Center and former Principal Assistant Director for Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
- Mr. Edward Shenderovich, CEO, Roebing
- Dr. Mark Stone, Professor of Biological Systems Engineering and Director of the PRAIRIE Initiative, College of Engineering, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- **Moderator:** Dr. Santosh Pitla, Professor of Biological Systems Engineering, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Co-Director of the AI Institute, University of Nebraska System

### **2:30 PM NEXT STEPS: REFLECTION ON THE CONVERSATION — SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE U.S. BIOECONOMY**

In this closing conversation, the Cohosts from the Nebraska Competitiveness Conversation will reflect on insights from the day's discussions and explore the emerging opportunities for Nebraska and the Council's bioeconomy initiatives. The session will highlight priorities for innovation, collaboration, and investment, setting the stage for the next phase of advancing Nebraska's innovation economy and the U.S. bioeconomy.

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, President, University of Nebraska System
- Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness

### **2:45 PM Adjourn**