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Global water expert to head Water for Food Institute

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By KEVIN ABOUREZK / Lincoln Journal Star JournalStar.com | Posted: Wednesday, August 3, 2011 4:00 pm | (3) Comments

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The University of Nebraska has chosen Roberto Lenton, one of the world's foremost experts in water management and development, to lead the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute. (Courtesy photo)

The University of Nebraska has chosen one of the world's foremost experts in water management and development to lead the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute.

Roberto Lenton has been chairman of the independent World Bank Inspection Panel since 2009. The panel works to improve the bank's compliance with its social and environmental policies.

"It's only the University of Nebraska that had the vision to set up this kind of institution," Lenton said in a telephone interview from his home in Washington, D.C. "Nebraska already has a large number of people who are already engaged in different aspects of water for food. There's a huge amount to build on."

His appointment as executive director of the Daugherty Institute is effective Feb. 1, and he'll remain a member of the panel until August 2012. Lenton also will hold an appointment as professor of biological systems engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

He helped establish and then served as director general of the **International Water Management Institute** in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1994. Under Lenton's leadership, the institute grew from a small project-based organization to employing more than 300 people in 10 countries with an annual budget of more than \$10 million.

The Daugherty Institute was established in 2010 through a \$50 million founding gift from the Robert B. Daugherty Charitable Foundation. Daugherty, founder of Valmont Industries and a pioneer in the irrigation industry, died in November 2010. The institute is a university-wide, interdisciplinary research, education and policy analysis center dedicated to the efficient use of the world's freshwater resources.

In addition to hosting the annual Water for Food conference, which this year drew more than 450 participants from around the world, the institute will focus on building international partnerships with universities and ministries to help develop solutions for optimal use of water in agriculture.

"Roberto Lenton is the ideal person to lead the Daugherty Institute as its founding director," said NU President James B. Milliken. "His experience in water management, food security, sustainable agriculture and responsible use of resources is exceptional. As important, he shares our vision for the institute and its potential to have an impact on Nebraska and on the world."

Lenton, who was raised in Argentina, said he plans to draw together water and food experts from various disciplines across the four NU campuses to work toward a goal of improving food production while preserving water in Nebraska and around the world.

"One of the important strategies will be to really keep a balance between work focused on Nebraska and work focused on the rest of the world," he said. "What I find exciting is I think those two can be supportive and complimentary."

Reach Kevin Abourezk at 402-473-7225 or kabourezk@journalstar.com.

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