

# Smaller funding package for AltEn research study advances

[Chris Dunker](#), Mar 31, 2022



Larkin Powell (left), professor of conservation biology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Ian Hoppe, UNL graduate student, label and bag red-winged blackbird eggs and feathers collected for research June 17 near Mead., GWYNETH ROBERTS, Journal Star file photo

A study examining AltEn's impact on Mead and the surrounding area got a boost from the Legislature after it was left out of several budget packages approved earlier this year.

On Thursday, Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue found support for an amendment providing \$1 million to the University of Nebraska to continue research into the potential adverse effects the ethanol plant has had on human health and the environment.

The amendment, which comes on Day 52 of the 60-day legislative session, adds the funding to a bill (LB1068) from Sen. John Stinner of Gering expanding internship and practicum opportunities for aspiring behavioral health practitioners across the state.

AltEn used pesticide-treated seed to produce ethanol, leaving behind waste products highly contaminated with insecticides and fungicides until it was forced to close by the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy in 2021.

Shortly after, researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska Medical Center and Creighton University began tracking the spread of pesticides through the environment, funded through private donations.

Blood introduced a bill (LB1048) appropriating \$10 million — more than the \$7.8 million the research team estimated it needed — to continue the study, but that proposal failed to get out of committee.

With the legislative session winding down, Blood worked with Stinner, the Appropriations Committee chair, and Sen. Bruce Bostelman of Brainard, whose legislative district includes Mead, on the amendment.

“It’s about the science, friends,” Blood said in introducing her amendment Thursday. “It’s about the research.”

Several senators voiced support for continuing the study, including Omaha Sen. John Cavanaugh, who said the research would provide critical health information to residents of Mead who may be impacted in the years to come.

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### **How they voted**

**Senators voted 31-6 on Thursday to allow an amendment to provide \$1 million in funding for research studying AltEn's impact on the community of Mead to be attached to another bill (LB1068).**

**Yes (31): Aguilar, Blood, Bostar, Bostelman, Brandt, Brewer, J. Cavanaugh, M. Cavanaugh, Day, DeBoer, Dorn, Flood, Gragert, M. Hansen, Hilkemann, Hunt, Kolterman, Lathrop, McCollister, McDonnell, McKinney, Morfeld, Moser, Pansing Brooks, Sanders, Stinner, Vargas, Walz, Wayne, Williams, Wishart.**

**No (6): Albrecht, Clements, Erdman, Friesen, Hughes, Linehan.**

**Present, not voting (6): Arch, Halloran, B. Hansen, Jacobson, Lowe, Murman.**

**Excused, not voting (5): Briese, Geist, Lindstrom, Pahls, Slama.**

**Absent, not voting (1): Hilgers.**

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Unlike other studies, which take place after the fact, Cavanaugh said Nebraska has an opportunity to monitor the potential outcomes as they happen.

Many, including Sen. Lynne Walz of Fremont, who was among a dozen or so state senators who were present at a town hall in Mead last summer, said the stories of several residents who had been impacted left an impression.

“If it was happening in your community, you may have a different view on things,” Walz said.

Other senators, including Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston, said they were skeptical the study was needed. Sen. Steve Erdman argued he did not think the Legislature needed to appropriate additional money to NU.

The Bayard lawmaker later challenged the amendment’s germaneness to the underlying bill, saying they dealt with two different issues and couldn’t be considered together.

Stinner’s bill appropriated money to expand opportunities for behavioral health practitioners, Erdman said, while Blood’s amendment provided funding for environmental research.

“Therefore, they are not the same,” he said.

Sen. Dan Hughes of Venango, sitting in the presiding officer’s chair, ruled the amendment was not germane to Stinner’s bill

Blood challenged Hughes’ ruling, telling senators she had spent hours looking for a bill that could serve as an appropriate vehicle for the amendment, and found a partner in Stinner and Bostelman .For nearly an hour, senators weighed in on the germaneness issue.

Bostelman said he supported Blood’s amendment and effort to overrule the chair, saying “the people of Mead deserve to have their concerns heard” by the Legislature.

“I work with them, I talk with them,” he said. “There is a part of this, I think, will be with them a long time.”

Blood, who introduced several bills in response to the AltEn crisis, called it the Legislature’s last opportunity to help Mead.

“If you’re on the fence at all, lean yes,” she said. “Let’s show compassion, and that policy is not just about numbers.”

After several delays waiting for senators to return to the legislative chamber, the amendment was adopted on a 31-6 vote.

The bill, with Blood’s amendment attached, then advanced to second-round consideration on a 33-4 vote.