The Joslyn Institute’s highly successful Urban Thinkers Campus, held in November 2015, focused on small and mid-size cities and rural–urban synergies. Nearly 200 participants and speakers from around the world engaged deeply in the task of defining The City We Need, making recommendations for inclusion in the New Urban Agenda at Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016. The role of small and mid-size cities became a key focus of Habitat III: sustainable urbanization will not take place without empowering local governments, including those of small and mid-size cities, it was decided. While today’s 34 megacities (those with a population of over 10 million) are expected to grow to 41 by 2030, the number of intermediate cities is also rising—in many places, far more quickly than any other type of urban expansion. Despite their growing importance, these medium-sized cities have been neglected in international analyses of urbanization to date. The New Urban Agenda seeks to redress that dichotomy. Our recommendations recognizing the increased interdependence between rural and urban areas, re-emphasized by a large contingent of mayors attending Habitat III, have become a critical part of the core tenets of the Habitat Agenda.

The Joslyn Institute has signed a Lead Partner Agreement Memorandum of Understanding with UN-Habitat. This agreement ensures the Joslyn Institute a seat at the table of the World Urban Campaign Steering Committee, which is responsible for establishing the campaign’s goals and objectives, defining the activity strategies and annual work plan and setting the Campaign’s governing procedures. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to coordinate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda through joined knowledge sharing, policy dialogue and advocacy activities. Working from a basis of core principles such as dealing with effects of climate change; inclusionary and human-rights-based approaches to urbanization; using data for more effective and sustainable change; adequate housing; strengthening municipal finance; interconnectivity and interdependence of cities and of urban and rural areas; addressing needs of and opportunities for vulnerable populations—refugees, disabled, elderly, women and children; the importance of culture, and more, the World Urban Campaign oversees the multi-stakeholder partnership for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

As part of our commitment to the World Urban Campaign, the Joslyn Institute will chair a new sub-committee, the Elders Legacy Committee for Urban Sustainability. The work we do in this regard will be coordinated with a local committee of a similar name. The World Urban Campaign has identified 15 Constituent Groups, including Local and Sub-national Authorities (in part, as a response to our own Urban Thinkers Campus about small and mid-size cities), Indigenous People, Research and Academia, Women, and others, including a new Constituency Group, Older Persons. The Joslyn Institute will address this new constituent group of older people as a potentially active and engaged cohort. Our plans for an Elders Legacy Committee for Urban Sustainability dovetails with work Cecil has been engaged in with State Sen. Ken Haar and Don Wilhite, former director of the UNL School of Natural Resources and founding director of the National Drought Mitigation Center. They have formed a kind of citizens advisory group, putting together experienced, thoughtful ideas on ways to present to and engage this demographic in issues of climate change, population shifts, consumption, and other related challenges.
The USDA is providing a $75,000 grant to Lakehouse Farm, to be administered by the Joslyn Institute as part of a $150,000 project to create the necessary networks for the eventual establishment of a regional food hub for Southeast Nebraska. The grant builds upon the Joslyn Institute’s groundwork laid recently when conducting a feasibility study for a regional food hub to be located in the Pershing Auditorium in Lincoln. While the location of the proposed food hub remains a question, the work to establish working networks of stakeholders—both producers and consumers—has begun. Faced with climate change, vagaries in commodities pricing and markets, demands on resources, questions of food security and more, producers increasingly are finding it advantageous to pivot to family-size farms that grow food. For these farmers, finding viable and reliable markets, processing and distribution facilities, marketing help, and so on, can be daunting. For consumers, both institutional and individual, having access to fresh, secure, reliable food sources is a growing priority. A regional food hub potentially solves the issues of both farmers and consumers.

EcoStores Nebraska has been named a winner of an Environmental Leadership Award by the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Environmental Leadership Awards honor businesses, organizations and individuals which have demonstrated environmental stewardship and dedication to sustaining and improving our environment. Eco Stores is being honored in the Community/Nonprofit sector. Eco Stores was previously the recipient of WasteCap Nebraska’s Product Stewardship Award. Also this past year, Eco Stores, along with Sharon Kuska, JISC Board Member and a civil and structural engineer and faculty member in UNL College of Architecture, and Richard Sutton, landscape architect and faculty member in the College of Architecture, created a green roof at the Eco Stores site. The roof featured three plots of four different recyclable mixes, forming the growing substrate, and a number of native Nebraska prairie plants. The project was deemed a big success. Eco Stores provides a chance for building materials and fixtures to be reused, to be an economical alternative for the community and to reduce building material landfill waste.

Eco Stores this year completed a 12-month study of construction and demolition (C&D) waste in the Lincoln area. The nation’s landfills are being overladen with wood, shingles, metals, plastics, concrete and bricks, and more, with an estimated 170 million tons of C&D waste being added to them each year. C&D recycling greatly reduces the burdens on our landfills and is good for the environment. Recycling C&D waste promotes sustainable building and saves natural resources. Companies that routinely recycle on their job sites find it easy, and they realize savings in reduced disposal costs. Building sites that recycle tend to be safer and more efficient. And more cities, counties and states are requiring documentation of C&D recycling on projects. While Nebraska lags behind much of the nation in recycling and zero-waste initiatives, new and increased efforts are being welcomed as a strategy to save resources, increase revenue streams and jobs, and other positive economic, social, environmental and technological benefits. Craig Steward, Eco Stores Manager, has prepared a report based on the coalition’s findings, Construction & Demolition Waste Management Best Practices Manual, which is available on our website.
The Joslyn Institute’s work on Strategic Communications continues with a $125,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. This year, we produced a *Community Handbook: Strategic Communications for Sustainable Community Development*, which synthesizes the results of two projects: Dr. Jay Leightner’s work on designing strategic communications for sustainable outcomes in three Nebraska towns, and Cecil Steward’s and Sharon Kuska’s work on a “dashboard” of Nebraska communities for the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (see next column). The *Community Handbook* is available as a PDF on our website. In addition, the Strategic Communication project comprises public lectures, workshops, conferences, and distributed information on applied practices with emphases on the following priority categories of the NET: habitat, surface and ground water, waste management, air quality, and soil management. Through strategic communications design for conservation and sustainable development, the project will include establishment of an annual public awards and recognition program for successful applications of conservation and sustainable development practices, and other projects.

The Joslyn Institute was contracted by the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA) to develop a “dashboard of sustainability data” that can be extracted and customized by any individual community, or for external measures of the quality-of-life/sustainability opportunities in given, specific communities. For a number of years, NIFA has assisted Nebraska communities in addressing their housing needs through the engagement of a research firm for the production of the annual Profile of Nebraska report. Soon after the 2013 report was made available, NIFA took this availability of data to a new and higher level. JISC’s Cecil Steward and Sharon Kuska expanded using Sustainometrics and outlined a strategy for blending the metrics with existing data for a more comprehensive assessment tool. With the roll out of the Nebraska Dashboard, NIFA now provides communities with an even greater ability to make use of Profile of Nebraska data. The Nebraska Dashboard, a web-based interface, allows users to access not only information in the current Profile of Nebraska, but also historical data from ten prior years of Profile of Nebraska reports and data concerning future and existing conditions of community sustainability, or, quality-of-life.

The 2016–17 Sustainability Leadership Presentation Series is under way, featuring a new partner and six compelling programs. The Joslyn Institute produced the first program of this season, *Stories from the Field: Using Social Science to Build Sustainable and Resilient Communities*, featuring Dr. Prabhakar Shrestha, UNL’s Sustainability Director, as featured speaker. The Center for Urban Sustainability at the University of Nebraska–Omaha has joined the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, Central Community College, Metropolitan Community College, Environmental Studies department at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and WasteCap Nebraska as a presenting partner. Each presenting partner produces at least one live program from its location during the coming year, and the SLPS is live-streamed to watch party locations around the state. SLPS programs feature experts on sustainability, energy, and the environment and how they apply to the lives of individuals. Free and open to the public, the programs are held at locations across the state on the first Thursday of each month during the school calendar year. Our participation is funded, in part, by our grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.