

Nov. 8, 2002

OSU COLLEGE RESPONDS TO CUTS IN STATE PUBLIC SERVICES BUDGETS

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CORVALLIS – Oregon State University will cut some unfilled positions, shift some faculty among Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station branches, trim administration and close two departmental organizations while meeting budget reductions caused by the economic downturn and mandated in 2002 Oregon legislative sessions. The College of Agricultural Sciences still will sustain its core teaching, research and extension functions.

Other agriculture programs - in the college and the OSU Extension Service - will face budget reductions of 5 to 20 percent to meet the mandate.

OSU will eliminate the departments of Entomology and Rangeland Resources as separate organizational units, though the core instructional, scientific and service functions of those units will remain in other units, according to Thayne Dutson, dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and director of the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station.

"These mandated budget reductions will hurt," Dutson said. "There is no sugar-coating the fact. But we approached the process in a strategic way that will minimize the effect on teaching, research and service to Oregonians. Prior to making the cuts, the college's unit leaders on- and off-campus recommended targeting reductions instead of applying them across the board and developed tools that helped us do so."

Decisions to close Rangeland Resources and Entomology as separate organizational units and make targeted cuts in other units were informed by measures developed by the college's on- and off-campus unit heads over the past year. They included such factors as student numbers and enrollment trends, level of state support per faculty member, the potential to integrate some functions into other units and the level of outside resources generated per faculty member.

The downturn in the state's economy has forced budget cuts to all state agencies, including the "Statewide Public Services" offered by Oregon State - the OSU Extension Service, the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station and the Forest Research Laboratory.

Reductions of \$2 million were made in agriculture- and natural resource-related programs of the Experiment Station in the first year of the 2001-2003 biennium. Additional reductions of \$5.6 million per biennium result from the State's fifth special legislative session and in anticipation of voter rejection (based on current polls and historic voter actions) of a proposed income tax increase at the Jan. 28 election. This is an overall reduction of \$7.6 million in the two-year budget, or about 13 percent.

Budgets for the Statewide Public Services are a line item in the legislative budget and not directly tied to the general fund budgets of OSU or the Oregon University System. Those budgets, however, are linked through the College of Agricultural Sciences, where many faculty have dual roles.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to make budget decisions in the Experiment Station or Extension agriculture program without affecting other parts of the college and vice versa," Dutson said.

Budget decisions to address the Agricultural Experiment Station cuts include:

- The Dean's Office in the College of Agricultural Sciences will reduce operating costs and program support, and will close some administrative positions (Estimated biennial savings: \$600,000);
- The Department of Entomology will be closed as a department, though some of the teaching and research functions will be folded into other units. (Estimated biennial savings: \$1 million);
- The Department of Rangeland Resources will be closed as a department, but with significant teaching, research and extension functions folded into other units including College of Agricultural Sciences' programs at Eastern Oregon University (Estimated biennial savings: \$470,000);
- Several vacant positions in the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station will not be filled and other personnel will be shifted among the 11 branch Experiment Stations throughout Oregon (Estimated biennial savings: \$600,000);
- Experiment Station programs in Animal Sciences, the Coastal Oregon Marine Experiment Station, Crop and Soil Sciences, Food Innovation Center Experiment Station, Microbiology and Veterinary Medicine will reduce budgets by 10 or 11 percent, with the unit heads, working with their associate dean, targeting the cuts (Estimated biennial savings: \$1.7 million);
- Seventeen other programs in the Experiment Station will make targeted cuts of 5 percent with decisions made by the unit heads, with their associate dean (Estimated biennial savings: \$1.2 million).

Reductions in the Extension agriculture program have been made for the rest of this fiscal year by freezing vacant positions and eliminating or sharply reducing operating budgets. That cannot be a lasting solution, however, Dutson said, because it doesn't reflect program needs and where the opportunities lie. On- and off-campus units and faculty will be at work with the college and OSU Extension administration to reshape Extension agriculture programs within the new budget constraints. Reductions in the Extension agriculture program, including what would be required if voters defeat the Jan. 28 tax measure, would be close to \$4 million, or about 18 percent.

Dutson said it is premature to speculate on how many positions will be lost, or whether layoffs will occur, because of the reductions. The college has tried to minimize the impact by not filling vacancies in many areas and keeping a number of previously approved, but vacant, positions frozen. Some more difficult decisions are ahead, he pointed out.

Consistent with university policy, initial discussions about the reductions began with unit heads, then with their faculties and staff. The University's Provost and Executive Vice President has also been engaged with the College leadership in this process.

"We understand Oregonians' desire to have specific information as soon as possible about programs that affect them. With these large, complex programs and a commitment to engage the units, their faculty and other stakeholders in the decisions, it takes some time and we are still early in that process. We are required to make major reductions before June 30, so we must balance the process against looming fiscal deadlines," Dutson said.