

Appendix A to the October 14, 2003 AFC Meeting Minutes

Executive Summary

Response to proposal of Dissolution of the
Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, Oklahoma State University
Submitted by the Faculty
October 14, 2003

ACTION: DASNR administration has proposed a reorganization of the Division in which the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology will be dissolved and faculty and staff dispersed to other units within DASNR. The departmental faculty is opposed to this action and respectfully submits the following rebuttal and justification for retaining the unit.

HISTORY: The Department of Entomology was organized in 1891 and has been an active and productive unit for over 100 years. The Department of Botany and Plant Pathology was created in 1923 and later established as a separate department in 1974. In 1997, Plant Pathology merged with Entomology to form the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology. During this time, we have graduated hundreds of productive scientists with B.S., M.S. and PhD degrees that have served society in science, education and industry.

CURRENT SITUATION: The current unit administration as a Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology was organized from a merger of the two departments in 1997, which already served to streamline operational efficiency. The department offers undergraduate (16 current enrollments) and graduate degrees (34+ current enrollments), conducts research and provides extension education programs. All programs are developed and conducted in an interdisciplinary manner. The Entomology and Plant Pathology Department at Oklahoma State University represents the only presence of these two disciplines in the state of Oklahoma.

CRITICAL ISSUES: As a unit (education, research, extension), the department is dealing with current and future critical needs for the state and this requires a unit organization. Bio-security and pest management issues are of critical importance. Human population and material goods movement at the national and international levels have increased, and in parallel, so have insects and pathogens. The department is currently dealing with introduced pests and other organisms including the Russian wheat aphid, Karnal bunt, Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Pierce's disease, Sudden Oak Death, soybean aphid, soybean rust, race 3 bacterial blight, and Russian thistle. Newly introduced and threatening pests include the red imported fire ant, Africanized honey bees and Formosan termites. We need effective programs to address these bio-security and pest management issues. Such programs should be interdisciplinary and founded on fundamental, mechanistic, and applied research, and include strong graduate and undergraduate teaching program that produce students with sound training. Research results should be delivered through a streamlined, effective outreach program. The breakup and dispersion of faculty and resources will, in fact, hinder current and future efforts to address and solve these issues.

PROPOSAL: We, the faculty propose that 1) the plan to dissolve the department be revised and that the unit be retained; 2) That we work closely with the DASNR administration to develop plans that address space allocation issues, to improve and facilitate efficient use of the excellent Noble Research Center facilities; 3) That departmental programs be strengthened by placing increased emphasis on dealing with bio-security and pest management needs of Oklahoma based on an integration of fundamental and mechanistic research, applied science, extension education, and development of undergraduate and graduate programs that support Oklahoma needs and industries. We already have a strong, positive reputation and capability for such work, and have faculty in place that conduct research addressing these needs.

Position Paper regarding the
Reorganization of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources,
with special reference to the proposed dissolution of the
Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology

Submitted by the Faculty of the
Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, Oklahoma State University
October 14, 2003

On Wednesday, October 2, 2003 Dean Sam E. Curl of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (DASNR) presented a proposal for reorganization of the Division that included a proposed dissolution of the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology. As outlined by the DASNR administration, and purportedly in accord with the April 25, 2003 resolution by the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges Board of Regents, the need for this dissolution is derived from budgetary constraints anticipated in 2004 and beyond, and the need to strengthen programs at Oklahoma State University (OSU) to increase our effectiveness to our constituents throughout the state and nation, without making across-the-board financial cuts. While the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology recognizes that both of these priorities are certainly an important driving force behind the consolidation of departments, the DASNR administration has strongly suggested they envision dissolution of Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology as one of those strengthening moves. In light of our present level of research productivity, grantsmanship, teaching contacts per FTE, and high number of students in our graduate and undergraduate programs, we certainly do not perceive this dissolution as a strengthening or beneficial goal. We believe that other less dramatic changes remain unexplored by the DASNR Administration. The present position of our department, as supported by the undersigned, is to retain an independent administrative unit and to aid DASNR administration in providing efficient use of allocated space, resources and personnel.

Dean Curl indicated that the outcome of the dissolution of Entomology and Plant Pathology would be that some of the fundamental or basic biology faculty within our current department would join with a new department devoted to basic biology and to be housed in the Noble Research Center (NRC). The remaining majority of Entomology and Plant Pathology faculty would be dispersed to join other administrative departments, predominantly the Plant and Soil Sciences Department. Dean Curl also indicated that some faculty would be physically relocated from the NRC to other laboratory and office locations elsewhere. Specific details of, or reasoning behind, the administrative and physical moves have not been presented formally to date. However, informal discussions with the Deans and others on campus suggest two tangible reasons for the proposed actions relative to our department: 1) the desire to facilitate more productive use of space allocated within NRC, and 2) the need to show a cost-savings by reducing administrative costs within DASNR.

The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology represents an historical flagship in our region. The Entomology program was first established at OSU in 1891, and celebrated its centennial with the relocation of the department into the Noble Research Center in 1991. Plant pathology was organized in 1923 and its relocation into

the Noble Research Center actually preceded the move by Entomology. The purpose of those moves, relocating both applied and basic research programs into the new building, as stated by Dean Browning, was to “strengthen our abilities as a department to conduct essential research, teaching and extension functions that would vault us into the 21st Century as leaders in our respective sciences.” The Entomology program at OSU is unique to the state and represents one of only two departments in the Southwestern Branch of the Entomological Society of America. Previously, Texas Tech University dissolved its Department of Entomology and merged existing faculty into Plant and Soil Sciences. Faculty members in the new department were never fully accepted and subsequently began departing for other venues. More importantly, the department head for their new unit provided little to no support for entomology programming. Texas Tech University currently has 1.25 FTE for entomology, primarily assigned to teaching service oriented courses. This erosion of the discipline was the fate of what once represented one of the largest entomology undergraduate programs in the country, with an unprecedented reputation for teaching and research. This true, but sad story represents a clear vision of a failed policy that resulted in the demise of a strong, active program.

Many of the current faculty in our department responded positively to our first merger (1997) by working diligently and successfully to create a strong integration of diverse programs in Entomology and Plant Pathology, and to solidify the sub-disciplines of our respective sciences. This resulted in strong and productive teams that were both commodity-based and linked to fundamental exploration for new avenues relating to management and understanding of arthropod/pathogen/host interactions. Simultaneously, we continued to prosper and grow in our service to our clientele through strong extension, teaching and outreach programming. In 1997, the Departments of Plant Pathology and Entomology merged, beginning a transitional period for both disciplines that took time to solidify. While some cross-disciplinary teams were already working in concert to develop information for the public, many had to slowly discover their niche within the new department. Commendably, over the past six years these teams have developed into a diverse, interactive unit that holds itself strongly accountable to its stakeholders, the citizens of Oklahoma. In addition, departmental teams have linked across the division with other scientists to further strengthen the integrated approach to solving problems for our constituency.

The teaching and graduate programs within our department have experienced recent growth that places us at the top of the division in terms of contacts per FTE. We have witnessed a strengthening in our graduate and undergraduate programs that has resulted in our long-range commitment to nearly 55 students in our fields of study. Defining success, Dr. Schmidly states, “We must recruit, retain and graduate students from every cultural and socio-economic group in the state.” To accomplish this challenging goal requires a coherent, intact department and dedicated faculty that place the success of the program above personal ambitions, desires and agendas. Dr. Schmidly also elucidates that partnerships and collaborative efforts are essential to “effectively use OSU’s resources and to enhance our ability to serve.” To achieve these directives he points to Technology and the Information Highway, as well as, facilities and the physical environment. Dr. Schmidly states that “support areas (classroom and research facilities) must be designed to enhance the overall academic experience of students while providing an environment conducive to providing services.” These statements from our System

CEO/President coincide with the desires of the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology. Regarding the efficient use of the physical facilities, faculty members acknowledge that improvements are needed and that changes are warranted. Furthermore, we wish to cooperate with any well conceived plan to help us consolidate our allocated space to maximize efficiency. However, we feel that many other critical issues cannot be sacrificed simply in the interest of perceived effective use of physical facilities. Our most crucial issue is our need to remain as an effective and productive administrative unit, responsible for our own disciplinary identity, programmatic integrity, continued delivery of effective service & outreach programs, maintenance of faculty resources, such as future hiring, faculty appraisals, Re-appointment, Promotion and Tenure structure and administrative oversight. We maintain a very diverse group of accomplished professionals who interact in several areas within our respective sciences, such as shared laboratory procedures, applied science, statistics, population ecology, application of biotechnology, and diagnostics. In this regard, we function in cooperative arrangements to utilize our facilities in an effective and productive manner. We are somewhat limited in influencing space allocation provided to persons outside our department, but recognize the need for other scientists to gain access to these excellent facilities.

An integral part of our desire to remain an independent, administrative unit revolves around immediate and long-term impacts on our disciplinary integrity. First and foremost, a decision to dissolve our department will have negative and disruptive impact on our graduate and undergraduate teaching programs. With impending retirements of Drs. Wright and Barker, we can no longer provide the medical/veterinary portion of our program, an area in which OSU once led the nation. Likewise this represents a program that contributes teaching and research expertise to one of Oklahoma's strongest agricultural commodities that of cow/calf and stocker production (based on our national ranking). In addition, if the faculty within Entomology and Plant Pathology are dispersed among several other departments, then the urban and structural pest control program would no longer exist in a unit that can be easily identified. These programmatic issues are extremely important to address because students' academic and research programs should reflect the needs of our profession, our students and our society. We need reassurance from the DASNRR administration that there will be a mechanism in place to provide academic and research programs for both our graduate and undergraduate students of the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology. Without a separate department with its own administrative head, the facilitation of effective teaching, research and extension would become too burdensome for faculty to coordinate and deliver, resulting in overall weaker programs.

The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology at Oklahoma State University is positioned to actively respond to future needs related to conducting research and training of students in the areas of bio-security. Both of our disciplines could become central foci to any threats, or actions that are carried out on our agricultural commodities. Also insects and ticks are vectors of many human, animal, and plant disease-causing organisms. Currently, we have a strong reputation in these areas and conduct research into problems that include the Russian wheat aphids, karnal bunt, Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Pierce's disease, Sudden Oak Death and Russian thistle. Also, introduced and threatening pests that demand our attention include the red imported fire ant, Africanized honey bees and Formosan termites. Programs to address these bio-security

needs, requires organization at the unit level and must be addressed in an interdisciplinary fashion.

If Oklahoma State University seriously wishes to "recruit, retain and graduate students from every cultural and socio-economic group in the state," strengthen our international ties, and respond to new challenges that have arisen since September 11, 2001, we must heed the resolution statement from the Oklahoma A&M Board of Regents, "changes should focus on operational efficiencies and effectiveness while serving student needs." Faculty within the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology at Oklahoma State University desire to work with the present administration as closely as possible to address operational efficiency; however, as our history, record, performance and student dedication suggests, we are sufficiently poised to address the future direction and vision that Dr. Schmidly recognizes for our department, our science and our students.

Finally, the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology would like to commend the DASNR administration for challenging us to "think outside the box." We appreciate their guidance and resolve in finding viable solutions to strengthen our division while increasing efficiency. A resolution of questions accompanying the proposed plan will allow our faculty and staff an opportunity to refocus our efforts, morale and dedication to the University and the sciences we support.

We, The undersigned have read this document and agree to its public release in response to the proposed reorganization plan of the DASNR administration.

Faculty, Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology

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