

Research budget cuts challenge ANR



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For more than a century, Californians have looked to UC for the scientific advances and practical research discoveries needed to maintain productive farms and ranches, a healthy environment, and a safe and nutritious food supply. In today's highly competitive, rapidly changing world this reliance on the University for science-based, cost-effective innovation is greater than ever.

Look at the critical issues facing Californians — agricultural sustainability, food safety and security, exotic

pests and diseases, international trade and competitiveness, environmental quality, nutrition and public health — and you're likely to find UC scientists on the forefront of research and discovery.

However, our ability to continue to address these important issues, much less maintain the core research capacity necessary to anticipate and respond to the challenges of tomorrow, is at grave risk if current budget trends are not reversed. California's severe economic downturn — and a \$24 billion budget shortfall in the state's coffers — resulted in significant cuts in research funding for UC in the fiscal 2002-03 state budget. This budget contains the largest single-year cut for research in University history — totaling \$32 million, or 10% of state general funds committed to UC research.

The impact on the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) is especially dramatic, with nearly one-third of the research cut — equal to \$10 million — to be absorbed by the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES). As the largest multicampus research unit in the UC system, the AES supports research activities on the Berkeley, Davis and Riverside campuses and statewide. More than 650 scientists from nearly 50 academic departments hold AES appointments, which fund core salaries and benefits and operational expenses. Around 85% of our state research funds are committed for these purposes.

Currently, we are making permanent cuts of \$10 million to AES programs at the campus and systemwide levels (see p. 181). We do this with full knowledge that today's decisions will have lasting impacts well into the future.

At the campus level, the deans of the College of Natural Resources (Berkeley), College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (Davis), College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (Riverside) and School of Veterinary Medicine (Davis) are taking about \$8 million in cuts. The remaining \$2 million will come from statewide operations under my office. These include the research and extension centers, statewide special programs and projects, and administrative support. Rather than make across-the-board cuts, we have decided to assess administration at a higher rate than programs with a strong research component.

As a result, Oakland-based and statewide administrative offices will sustain larger reductions, averaging 13%. State-

wide special programs and projects (such as the Statewide Integrated Pest Management Project, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, Small Farms Center and Mosquito Research Program) will take cuts of around 4%. Some specific examples of other steps being taken in my office to meet the overall 10% cut include:

- All existing discretionary funds for new programs, "seed" efforts or unexpected issues will be eliminated.
- The number of issues of *California Agriculture* will be reduced from six to four in 2003, with substantial savings in printing costs and postage.
- *ANR Report*, our internal newsletter, will move from hard copy to an electronic format, with estimated annual savings of more than \$15,000 and speedier delivery.

Despite the cost-cutting measures being implemented across the campuses and in my office, we know that reductions in state general funding for the AES will result in the loss of research faculty and staff. The cuts will also limit acquisition of new laboratory equipment and the upgrading of research facilities.

In the near-term the situation may become more difficult. There is speculation that UC and state agencies will face further midyear cuts, with additional budget reductions looming in 2003-04 if the state's economy doesn't rebound. To position ourselves for this contingency, we have instituted a hiring freeze on positions supported by state funds in my office. This freeze affects all new and vacant Cooperative Extension positions and all staff positions.

Cuts in state research funds beyond this year's 10% would be particularly difficult for our AES programs to absorb. Further cuts also don't make economic sense over the long run, as they would severely restrict our ability to meet new and evolving challenges. State research funds allow AES researchers to deal rapidly with emerging issues such as the outbreak of Pierce's disease in grapes, the spread of sudden oak death syndrome along the coast and the discovery of West Nile virus in Southern California. AES scientists also leverage state funds at greater than a 1:1 ratio, competing successfully for grants from government agencies and the private sector. It's a win-win for Californians.

The future promises more, not less, of these critical, often unforeseen problems, requiring immediate response. On the horizon are bioterrorism, new insect, plant and microbial diseases, economic hardships and dislocation that come with the loss of rural industries and jobs, and the increasing need for nutrition research that provides a foundation for better health and disease prevention. Will we be prepared?

One of our strengths in the Division is that our research capabilities span not only the agricultural sciences, but also human and natural resources. No other institution serves statewide needs in these areas with the same breadth and depth of world-class scientists, the same systematic know-how and the same sophistication in laboratory facilities. We are willing to share our part of the economic downturn, but if we are to survive and rebuild, we must keep basic capabilities intact.