Dear Dean Ramaswamy,

Thank you for submitting your March 15, 2010 report describing how the College of Agricultural Sciences proposes to address the Strategic Alignment and Budget Reduction Implementation Plan for 2009-2011. The Strategic Alignment and Budget Reduction Review Committee has completed its preliminary review of your plans and has prepared the following comments and questions for your consideration:

- Specific details were not provided concerning compliance with all academic and administrative system guidelines, including any academic programs that do not meet minimum graduation requirements, courses that fail to meet minimum class size standards, and college sub-units that do not meet the minimum for numbers of faculty. The Committee would appreciate receiving an accounting of any programs, courses or units that do not meet these guidelines as well as how the College plans to move toward alignment with the guidelines.

- The academic guidelines approved by President Ray stipulate a maximum of 5 sub-units per college. While the Committee recognizes the efforts involved in creating three merged departments and acknowledges that the large number of the faculty in the College may justify more than 5 sub-units, the proposal still leaves the College with 4 more sub-units than the guideline maximum. The College is encouraged to consider further reorganization/merging of departments, particularly those that have fewer than 20 faculty.

- Five signature areas have been identified in the College’s proposal: sustainable food and agricultural systems; bioproducts, biomaterials, and bioenergy; natural resource stewardship; environmental and human well-being; and fundamental science. Could these signature areas serve as a basis for a new departmental organization? If not, then how will these signature areas emerge or become identifiable within the proposed structure, and how will priority be given to these areas (e.g. potential new hires, research priorities, etc.)?

- Could the departments of Food Science & Technology and Biological & Ecological Engineering find sufficient common ground to merge in support of a new identity focused on integrative research and education? Alternatively, do opportunities exist to consolidate agricultural engineering interests with compatible engineering sub-units in other colleges?

- The College is encouraged to engage in a broader discussion within the Division of Earth System Sciences (ESS) concerning natural resources programs. There is considerable overlap across the Division in this thematic area and it is possible that such a discussion will result in innovative proposals that involve reorganization/consolidation of related departments into fewer sub-units, possibly within a single college.

- What discussions have occurred with leadership of other colleges in the ESS division regarding the proposed name change (particularly in reference to the inclusion of natural resources) and departmental realignment? What is the broader impact of the proposed changes on other colleges/units within ESS and OSU?

- The mission of the proposed Department of Applied Economics and Policy Studies appears to overlap with that of several other policy programs in other colleges, particularly the proposed
School of Public Policy in the College of Liberal Arts which will become home to an existing graduate degree program in Public Policy. Do opportunities exist for focusing these efforts, possibly in a single college? Similarly, has the possibility of merging applied (agricultural) economics with other economics programs in other colleges been considered and, if so, what is the justification for not moving in this direction?

- The creation of the proposed Department of Applied Leadership, Education, and Communication is a result of merging Agricultural Education and General Agriculture, a small academic unit, with Extension and Experiment Station Communications, a unit that is primarily a support unit that is not involved in the education and research missions of the college. What are the plans for increasing student enrollments, research funding, and tenured/tenure track faculty over the next few years for it to be a sustainable unit meeting University guidelines? Furthermore, has consideration been given to merging Agricultural Education with the College of Education?

- The College jointly administers three departments with the College of Science (Chemistry, Microbiology and Statistics). Is there a compelling justification for continuing this arrangement and what alternatives could be considered for simplifying administration of each of these units in a single college?

- For academic units, there are typically four layers of management between a faculty member and the Provost/President (Faculty Member—Department Chair/Head—Dean—Provost/President). The College has one additional layer consisting of two associate deans who supervise academic department heads. What is the justification for this additional management layer, particularly considering the proposed reduction in the number of departments?

- Considering the economic challenges faced by local communities and projected state tax revenues, the goal of generating 25% of branch experiment station operating budgets from local sources would be challenging. In the event that this goal is not realized and alternative strategies are not identified, what criteria and process would be utilized to decide which facilities would be subject to closure? Alternatively, if a local community raises funds exceeding the current 25%, is the college still prepared provide a 3 to 1 match?

- The College proposes to integrate management of branch experiment stations and the Extension Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Program, with stations serving as hubs for administrative support reaching out to county extension programs. Please provide more information concerning this proposal, especially whether the intention is to co-locate any of these and whether this would involve reassignment of personnel or reallocation of budgets.

- To what extent have faculty been involved in development of the College’s proposals? For example, have department mergers been discussed with the faculty involved and other related faculty, and if so, what was their assessment? Also have faculty in departments that have proposed changes in title and possibly mission focus, been consulted?

- Budget projections for the next biennium indicate that additional cuts will probably be necessary, possibly in excess of 10%. To what extent will the proposed changes address further decreases in state-appropriated funding?
The Committee is expected to develop recommendations for the Provost’s consideration by the end of May and, therefore, would appreciate receiving your response by April 30, 2010. In your response, please clearly identify substantive changes that will need to be approved by the University.

Please let me know if you have any questions for the Committee. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me if you think the Committee can play a facilitating role in development of plans, either within the College of involving other colleges, which may advance the strategic initiatives of the university.

Sincerely,

Becky Warner
Committee Chair