



# Commitment to Excellence

*A Planning Agenda for Mississippi State University  
through the year 2001*

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

**Final Report of the  
Priorities and Planning Committee, Phase III**

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Presented to R. Rodney Foil, Vice President  
Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine  
Mississippi State University  
March 31, 1992



# MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine  
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April 1, 1992

To: The Employees of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine

With the transmission of this report and the associated administrative responses, we are moving through one important phase in our development into another, even more critical period.

The work of the Committee on Priorities and Planning for the Division is summarized here, and is being forwarded to President Zacharias for his consideration and submission to the Board of Trustees, Institutions of Higher Learning. This report along with those of the two University Priorities and Planning Committees and the four Unit reports in the Division, represents the culmination of countless hours of effort by some of our most talented and dedicated people. They have earned our gratitude, as well as our commitment to achievement of progress toward shared goals.

These recommendations address the spirit that separates the Land-Grant University from peer institutions. The historical, statutory, and cultural bases of the Division - research, extension and teaching - are examined, reaffirmed, and imbedded in each short statement. Our acceptance of future adherence to the thrusts of these reports should lead to a more coherent, productive era in our history.

The Deans and Directors and I are pleased to be able to respond positively to the report and its recommendations. Some elements will await University or system action, and some will require further staff work within the Division. All actions will be reported in accordance with the schedule contained in the report.

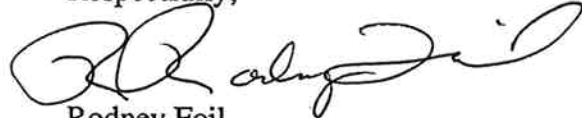
It is difficult to capture the essence of such a diffuse process, but I would like to share the underlying messages this and other reports have for me:

1. The people of this Division, and the University, desire, above all else, the opportunity to apply their talents and creativity to the tasks for which they are trained and yearn for release from fiscal instability, political uncertainty and clouded visions of their future;
2. The administration of this Division must respond to a changing environment with a more cohesive, decisive and inclusive approach to management;
3. Departmental and unit leadership, where faculty efforts are most understood and influenced, must be redefined, reaffirmed, and enhanced;
4. The diversity, autonomy, and individual visibility that has strengthened our programs and units in the past threatens our ability to respond to present and future opportunities where multi-functional, multi-disciplinary efforts are necessary;
5. Past efforts to consolidate activities have helped us sustain ourselves during difficult times, but have created the imperative that we address basic issues such as faculty rank, titles, tenure, and evaluation, along with appropriate accountability and structure of support and service functions;
6. Our future, like our past, is dependent upon our ability to come together as a university family to define personal and institutional goals in a manner that will allow productive attention to the solution of important human problems.

Employees of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine  
April 1, 1992  
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As Vice President of this wonderful Division, I am proud to receive these messages, to share them with the public we serve and on whom we depend, and to commit my personal energies to their attainment. Success in these efforts is, as always, dependent upon your acceptance of this vision and continued willingness to work together for the common good.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rodney Foil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping tail.

Rodney Foil  
Vice President

gc

**COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE**

**A REPORT OF THE  
PHASE III PRIORITIES AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine  
Mississippi State University  
March 31, 1992**

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## INTRODUCTION

Mississippi State University was created by the Mississippi Legislature on February 28, 1878 as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi. Its mission as a land-grant institution created under the Morrill Act of 1862 was to offer training in "agriculture, horticulture, and the mechanical arts...without excluding other scientific and classical studies, including military tactics." Subsequent Federal legislation authorized the Experiment Station (Hatch Act of 1887) and the Cooperative Extension Service (Smith-Lever Act of 1914).

The programs and administrative structure of the University have evolved in response to changes in society and society's expectations for a land-grant university. Throughout these changes, however, Mississippi State University has retained the land-grant philosophy and its commitment to the people of Mississippi. This commitment is evident in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine, where research and extension programs are dedicated to generating and transferring the information and technology needed by farmers, timber producers, consumers, rural and urban families, local governments, and agricultural and forestry-related industries. Considerable effort is devoted to areas which are beyond the parameters of traditional agriculture and forestry -- reflective of the University's commitment to all Mississippians. This commitment is particularly visible in the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, which maintains a presence of Mississippi State University in all 82 counties of the State.

Like the University, the Division and its units have evolved over time to accommodate a changing clientele and to meet the needs of an industry in continual transition. These needs have included greater challenges and brought increased demands for the services provided by the Division. Fortunately, much of this evolution occurred during a period when funding from State and Federal sources was adequate to support program growth. The units of the Division established new programs to meet new challenges and developed an administrative structure to accommodate these changes. Changes occurred in response to the changing needs of the State, and the University and the people of Mississippi have been well-served by the Division and its contributions.

One of the Division's strengths has been its ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances. For many years, units of the Division operated in an autonomous capacity, which provided a framework wherein the missions of the units were best served. In times of adequate funding, this structure worked well. This structure might still have some advantages if the Division's resources were adequate. After several years of inadequate funding and multiple budget reductions since 1985, the Division has been forced to merge similar units and move toward a streamlined structure. The emerging structure provides opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The Priorities and Planning process is an effort to examine those issues that impact the Division and determine whether existing structures and activities reflect the needs of the Division

as it faces continued budget pressures and increased demands for its services. Activities that impact more than one unit must be considered in light of their contributions to all missions. The Division must continue to seek new sources of funding, new methods of maximizing the effectiveness of existing resources, and more efficient ways to accomplish all missions.

Although this Committee sought to synthesize the unit reports into a comprehensive Division report, it must be stressed that this report does not contain those recommendations in the unit reports pertaining to issues relevant only to those units. This is not meant to minimize the importance of the unit reports. The Division Committee anticipates that each of the issues presented in the unit reports will be addressed. This report is intended to serve as a complement to those reports, and it must be emphasized that the results of the Division's Priorities and Planning process can only be obtained by consulting this report in concert with the unit reports.



## COMMITTEE CHARGE

In correspondence dated November 19, 1991, Dr. R. Rodney Foil established the Priorities and Planning Committee for the Division, appointed its members, and set forth its charge and function. In his instructions, he noted that this study should be a continuation of and complementary with the ongoing Phase I and Phase II studies. In his charge to the Committee, Dr. Foil indicated that:

"The Division P&P Committee is expected to make recommendations which will help position the units of the Division to serve the teaching, research, and extension needs of the State in the 1990's and beyond. Recommendations must take into account the current fiscal context within which we operate and the environmental trends in society, as well as historical strengths and philosophical and legislative mandates of MSU. In carrying out its charge, the Committee will function in accordance with the following:

1. It will interact with unit committees through the Chairs of the unit committees, who will also serve on the Division Committee. Issues which overlap units and those not unit-specific will be referred by unit committee Chairs to the Division Committee.
2. It will gather information on non-unit specific questions, e.g., administrative and support functions.
3. It will review, synthesize, and consolidate the unit reports, along with its non-unit specific work, into a Division report. Questions which arise with unit reports will be resolved through the overlapping membership of the committees. Compatibility among unit plans will be essential.
4. It will make recommendations in light of long-term strengthening of functions of the Division and in short-term financial savings which are consistent with long-term direction.
5. Its work will be coordinated with external constituencies, the IHL-commissioned Carlson Committee, and MSU committees."

## COMMITTEE PROCESS

The major portion of the Division Committee's work was to review, synthesize, and consolidate the unit reports. These unit reports were developed by four unit committees charged with conducting internal priorities and planning studies. Some of the unit committees also reviewed issues which impact more than one unit.

To facilitate the work of the Committee on overlapping issues, five subcommittees were created. These subcommittees examined cross-cutting issues that affect more than one unit of the Division and sought to ensure balanced consideration of all missions. These subcommittees prepared preliminary recommendations in many areas.

After the release of the preliminary unit reports, the Division Committee attempted to integrate the units' recommendations with the preliminary recommendations of the Division subcommittees. After release of the committee's preliminary report on March 19, faculty and staff had one week to submit comments to the Division Committee. During that week, the Committee continued to review the final versions of the unit reports and met with the IHL-appointed Carlson Committee to share information in developing final recommendations. During the week of March 22, the Division Committee made the final revisions in its recommendations. The Committee's final report was delivered to Dr. Foil on March 31. Dr. Foil then presented the report to President Zacharias on April 3.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The charge of the Division Priorities and Planning Committee required it to develop recommendations, which will position the units of the Division to serve the people of Mississippi during the 1990's and beyond. Throughout this process, the Committee has sought ways to provide better service to the citizens of Mississippi, make more efficient use of the Division's resources, and establish a truly comprehensive system that integrates the teaching, research, and extension functions of the Division's units.

### 1. Funding Issues

- 1.1 Require each unit of the Division to identify and report specific measures to achieve cost savings, if they have not yet done so.**

The Division Committee recognizes that funding comes from separately funded units within the Division. Discrepancies between the Division Committee charge and the unit committee charges inhibited the development of cost-saving measures by some units.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

- 1.2 Continue to seek separate funding for the four units of the Division that are currently supported in that manner by the State Legislature.**

Public support for the Division's units and other components of the University are best served by this system.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

- 1.3 Examine the level of E&G support for the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and the School of Forest Resources and seek equitable adjustments with the goal of achieving a "model staffing" level of funding within the College and School.**

Equity dictates that all teaching faculty be supported at comparable levels (with allowances for cost factors). Ultimately, minimum University funding for all academic units should be provided at "model staffing" levels.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.4 Review all assessments paid by the Division to the University.**

All assessments except the contingency fund are forwarded to the University (E&G Administrative Overhead, Utilities, Campus Landscape, Custodial, Contingency). Many other line-item units on campus do not pay such assessments and experiment stations and extension services at other land-grant universities apparently do not pay such assessments. The elimination of these assessments would place the Division on a footing comparable to that of other institutions in the Southern Region.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.5 Distribute information to all Division scientists regarding policies and procedures for obtaining patent or copyright protection and income from developed technology, where applicable, and assume a more aggressive approach to seeking income through these avenues.**

Opportunities for potential revenue for the University and individual faculty and staff members are being lost by a failure to capitalize on patent opportunities. Information concerning the recently developed incentive program should be distributed to encourage faculty participation. Any efforts in this direction should accommodate the University's obligation to the people of Mississippi and its service mission.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted in principle with modification in wording: *"Inventory and review current federal and University policies and procedures for obtaining patent or copyright protection and income from developed technology. Refine and distribute information to all appropriate Division personnel and assume a more aggressive approach to seeking income through these avenues."*

**1.6 Establish written and equitable cost sharing arrangements that allocate each building's utility and maintenance costs across all users (MAFES, MCES, CVM, and MSU). Such cost-sharing arrangements should be established for on-campus and off-campus facilities. Equitable cost-sharing arrangements are also needed within the Division and between the Division and the University to prevent individual units from bearing the full cost of maintenance and utilities for University-wide and Division-wide services and events.**

As comprehensive departments have been formed and as personnel have moved from one building to another, the prospect of an inequitable distribution of maintenance and utility costs among units has been created. Also, when Division-wide and University-wide services or events are housed in the Bost or Wise Centers, substantial costs are often borne by the unit that supports the facility used.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.7 Establish a routine maintenance fund for each unit of the Division.**

At the present time, no funds are allocated for minor "routine" maintenance and there is no clear delineation of authority for managing routine maintenance. Although the financial constraints faced by the Division are severe, the Division must begin to place higher priority on maintenance of facilities.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted with the understanding that this will be considered upon successful resolution of recommendation 1.6.

**1.8 Implement charges determined by the units of the Division for selected publications and services.**

Charging a fee for publications and technical services is felt to be preferable to the rationing that might be required by budgetary constraints. While charges and fees are not consistent with the philosophy held by most units in the Division, they may be preferable to the alternative (i.e., termination or strict rationing of programs and services due to lack of funding). Such charges must be implemented if it is determined that they will enable the Division to continue to serve its clientele. It should be noted that a number of other land-grant universities currently have cost recovery charges in place.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.9 Ensure that products arising from units and departments on campus remain therein and are not transferred to a central campus sales facility until a mutually acceptable, cost effective, sales system has been developed.**

The Division Priorities and Planning Committee requests that the decision to create a campus sales facility be reconsidered (recommendation 5.5.1 of the Priorities and Planning Committee II report). An analysis of a central MAFES sales facility has been conducted by an appointed committee. Such a facility may be impractical for two reasons. First, a duplication of costly capital investments would be required. Second, the needs of such a facility could disrupt programs within the Division. Because production is a byproduct of the research, teaching, and demonstration process, many items produced by units of the Division are available intermittently. Research and teaching activities should not be disrupted or compromised to satisfy the needs of a central sales facility.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.10 Establish Division policies that provide unit heads with greater latitude to seek salary supplements for faculty and staff from soft money sources.**

Salaries throughout the Division remain well below those of comparable institutions. These lagging salaries, combined with recent reductions in state appropriations, require the Division to use all available opportunities to obtain additional resources and prevent the loss of additional faculty and staff. An increasing number of land-grant institutions are using "soft money" funds as salary supplements. Similar or other innovative policies must be established if faculty and staff are expected to seek additional sources of funds.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted in principle with modification in wording: *"Establish Division policies that provide Division administrators with greater latitude to seek salary adjustments for faculty and staff from soft money sources."*

**1.11 Place top priority on program areas that promote, through fundamental (basic) or developmental (applied) research and service, the development of agricultural, natural, and human resources in Mississippi. Maintain productive programs with national and/or international recognition that may not fall into the above category, but that generate significant external funds to support the program.**

Given the resource constraints faced by the Division, emphasis must be placed on those projects showing the greatest promise of contributing to the economic development of Mississippi. At the same time, programs with broad recognition can also add to the resource base of the Division and to the reputation of the Division and the University.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

**1.12 Initiate a Division priority-setting process to define the research, service, and teaching objectives of the Division. This process should be initiated by July 1, 1992 and a final report completed by June 1, 1993.**

Neither this Committee nor the unit committees had the time and authority to establish a set of research, service, and teaching objectives for the Division. To ensure the implementation of recommendation 1.11, a process similar to that used to develop the Focus on a Better Future report should be initiated. This process should identify (a) the long-range outlook for the Division's resource base, (b) the problems facing the State of Mississippi, (c) the scientific opportunities available to address these problems, (d) a set of research, service, and teaching objectives consistent with the needs of the State of Mississippi and the available resource base, and (e) a staffing plan consistent with the available resource base.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.

- 1.13 Provide joint appointments for all off-campus scientists and specialists, with appropriate salary distribution between disciplinary departments and the Research and Extension Centers. Allow all scientists and specialists to participate in the rank, promotion, and tenure system.**

Providing all scientists and specialists with appointments in comprehensive departments will enhance efforts to coordinate research and extension programs. Off-campus scientists should be encouraged to participate in directing graduate student research when both the student and the project can benefit from such participation.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted in principle with modification in wording: "*Based on appropriate program-planning processes, provide joint appointments for off-campus scientists and specialists, with appropriate salary distribution between disciplinary departments and the Research and Extension Centers.*" It should be further noted that the "appropriate" range for salary distribution is understood to begin at zero dollars. The recommendation for participation in the rank, promotion, and tenure system is adequately addressed in recommendation 3.9.

- 1.14 Reduce the number of branch station administrative units and the number of branch station locations, or let them serve as production and/or demonstration units until funding improves.**

The lower level of funding available to MAFES is reducing the effectiveness of some branch stations. Given the need to use resources more effectively, the number of branch stations should be reduced and resources consolidated in the most effective research programs.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted with the understanding that when missions are clearly established (recommendation 1.15), the number of necessary units will be evident.

- 1.15 Establish a clearly defined mission for each Research and Extension Center and assign each branch station to an appropriate Research and Extension Center.**

The mission of each Research and Extension Center must be clarified and each branch station assigned to an R&E Center if resources are to be used in the most effective manner.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted with the understanding that the Alcorn Branch Station holds a unique position relative to the developing Research and Extension Center System.

**1.16 Increase the use of limited-term contracts to hire individuals to fill short-term needs in all units of the Division.**

Given the increased reliance on competitive grants and other soft monies as sources of funding, all units of the Division must have a more flexible workforce than in the past. One method of establishing such a workforce is to increase the use of individuals who are hired on limited-term contracts and are employed in support of specific short-term projects or teaching commitments. The use of such contracts will allow the Division to make rapid adjustments in its workforce as personnel needs or sources of funding change.

**Response:** Recommendation accepted.