

Dr. K. Ramesh Reddy
Chair, Search and Screen Committee
Soil and Water Sciences Department
2181 McCarty Hall, PO Box 110290
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

July 26, 2016

Dear Dr. Reddy:

Please accept this letter and the enclosed supporting material as my application for the position of Director of the School of Forest Resources and Conservation (SFRC) within the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida (UFL). I believe that these materials provide evidence of my capability to serve as an effective Director and I respectfully request an opportunity to visit with the search committee, faculty, staff, students, and administration of the SFRC and IFAS to discuss this possibility.

I have spent the last six years as Chair of the Department of Forestry in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment (CAFE) at the University of Kentucky (UK). Recently, I was re-appointed to a second six-year term with very strong faculty, staff, and administrative support, demonstrating the success I have had and my ability to manage and lead a multi-faceted academic unit at a land-grant university. During this period, undergraduate and graduate student enrollment, competitive extramural funding, and total gift dollars increased significantly. We have improved recruitment and retention, dramatically expanded our student services functions (including increasing scholarships, hands-on internship opportunities, and career counseling), and created the UK Fire Cats, a student wildland firefighting team that is *employed* by the Kentucky Division of Forestry. We also developed the Forest Health Research and Education Center, expanding our research capacity and grantsmanship significantly and attracting full-time USFS research scientists to UK's campus for the first time. I am very proud of the external relationships and reputation we have grown over the last six years; we developed an advisory board for the department, initiated an annual, and very successful, economic analysis of the forest industry in KY, and deepened our relationships with industry, agencies, and organizations throughout the region. Alumni relationships and participation have flourished and we have endowed several alumni-based scholarships in the last two years. Despite implementing a number of budget cuts during my tenure as Chair, we have been able to grow the department, including hiring 6 new faculty members (nearly 50% of faculty in department), expanding our research expertise and productivity and setting the department on a new trajectory. I cannot accept credit for these accomplishments – they should be attributed to the excellent faculty and staff who are dedicated to the advancement of their department. People are the most important asset of any organization and I have enjoyed harnessing their many accomplishments to effectively advocate for and promote the great work they do every day. Please refer to my attached CV for more details regarding my administrative experience and accomplishments.

One might fairly ask why, when things are going so well in Kentucky, I would consider pursuing a different position. I was deeply honored to be nominated for the SFRC Director position, and though I am quite happy at UK, it draws me for three reasons. First and foremost, as a native Floridian, I view this as an ideal opportunity to return home and invest my professional time and energy to a place that I love. I grew up in central Florida and spent much of my time camping, fishing, boating, hunting, and exploring the many incredible natural resources throughout the state. These experiences not only molded and led me to pursue a career in natural resource management, but they familiarized me with places like Wakulla, Sopchoppy, Homosassa, Steinhatchee, Chassahowitzka, Islamorada, Panacea, Okeechobee, Goodland, the “Lump”, Ichetucknee and Juniper Springs, and dozens of other places that are uniquely Florida. I am confident that my knowledge of and love for Florida would enable me to quickly become a sincere, energetic, and effective

ambassador for the SFRC, IFAS, and UFL. Second, I am motivated by the history, importance, and excellent reputation of Florida's land-grant university. The SFRC's vision to be a national leader in the program areas it serves is a worthy goal and the school is already respected nationally for its effective teaching, research, and Extension enterprises across an impressive array of subjects. Joining the SFRC team to serve students, clientele, partners, and friends throughout the great state of Florida would be a privilege and long-term proposition for me. The third reason I am drawn to the SFRC Director position is the school's current trajectory. It is clear that the SFRC has already developed a very strong foundation and can now focus on growing, partnering, and evolving to become an even more effective operation for its diverse clientele. I believe the SFRC is at a point on its journey where my particular experiences and strengths match its current needs and opportunities.

It is nearly impossible for a candidate to try and present a detailed vision for the future of an academic unit without hearing from, and significantly involving, individuals within that unit. There are, however, a few general observations I can make regarding strategies for maintaining and enhancing the SFRC and its role in the state, region, and global community. Part of the job of an administrator is to create a process for developing a shared vision of success for the school into the future. It is important to include the customers, partners, and friends of our land-grant institutions in these conversations; doing so develops a sense of ownership and keeps the unit relevant. An important part of my efforts in the Director's job would be to help maintain existing relationships throughout the state and region, and to seek new and exciting opportunities and partnerships that enhance the reach, the reputation, and the relevance of the institution. Many of us have noticed the increasing importance of forming partnerships, often in new and non-traditional places and ways, in order to stay relevant and stretch limited resources. These partnerships are frequently outside of the academic institution but we should not overlook opportunities to develop additional partnerships within our institutions for the same reasons. I have considerable experience serving as an "ambassador" in my current and previous roles, and would be enthusiastic about dedicating time, travel, and energy on behalf of the SFRC and all of its components in that capacity at UFL. With seafood and forest industries representing approximately \$30 billion combined, it is clear the SFRC represents some of the most significant and successful economic sectors in Florida. And, as is so often the case, this does not appear to reflect all of the contributions made by recreation, tourism, and various ecological services. These are impressive numbers and the SFRC's importance to these industries needs to be shared widely and frequently. Visibility is an important feature of most successful enterprises and I would work hard to achieve that visibility for the SFRC. Millions of people come to Florida (myself included for the last 30-plus years) to avail themselves of the incredible array of natural resource-oriented activities throughout the state. I believe the SFRC can be a resource for many people as they experience, *and learn*, about Florida's exceptional natural resources and multiple-use landscape. Whether aquatic or terrestrial, consumptive or non-consumptive, the subject matters addressed by SFRC personnel are relevant to everyone in the region. It would be an honor to help increase the school's visibility and carry that message to folks throughout the state of Florida and well beyond.

I am a true admirer of the land-grant university system and my approach to administering an academic unit draws heavily from my love for and experiences in that system. At the core of my administrative philosophy is service. The SFRC serves students through a diversity of majors; the union of fisheries, forestry, and geomatics, combined with its contributions to the interdisciplinary natural resources major and partnerships with the wildlife department, as well as other agricultural disciplines, makes the school a unique and exciting enterprise. Service to businesses, industries, graduate students and others through the university's research mission is also an incredibly important aspect of the land-grant university. Through my leadership roles in NAUFRP, and currently as Research Chair and leading the 2016 McIntire-Stennis strategic planning process, I have learned a great deal about the challenges that threaten the research capacity of our natural resource management disciplines. The Director of the SFRC needs to be engaged and active at the national level to understand the challenges facing our universities and to help develop solutions that make sense for our institutions and clientele. Service to community is a hallmark of the land-grant university system. During my years as an Extension Specialist at New Mexico State University, I learned the value that the community places on land-grant university service, which occurs primarily through the Cooperative Extension Service, though not exclusively. I spent most of those early years there on the road and in the field, learning how to serve, many times from the ranchers and farmers themselves. It is worth noting that I had very little experience working in ranching, farming, or any other agricultural pursuits until that experience. I discovered

that listening, mutual respect, a love of learning, and a dedication to service opens many doors and engenders incredible generosity and appreciation. A final aspect of service that is often overlooked is that within the institution itself. Each and every one of us in a land-grant university has the opportunity and a responsibility to serve. This includes the administrators, whose role it is to serve the faculty, the staff, the students, as well as the customers of the institution. It is my clear belief that when we approach our jobs in a service-oriented fashion, our universities become far more effective and enjoyable places to work. I also place tremendous value on the institution's most valuable resource – its people. It is important to create an entrepreneurial atmosphere where people have the resources and freedom to succeed. I try to foster communication, openness, and teamwork – building a team of givers, not takers. Faculty and staff should feel comfortable trying new things and exploring new frontiers; a good administrator recognizes their successes and helps them to overcome their failures. As much as possible, I try to maintain an open-door policy, the impromptu meetings that result are often some of the most rewarding and productive. I try to solve problems while they are small, before they become larger and more difficult to address. Honesty, integrity, and respect are characteristics that were instilled in me at a very young age; I try to embody these and ask others to do the same. While I value hard work and faculty and staff productivity, I also emphasize a healthy work-life balance.

I imagine one thing that unites all of the SFRC is a love for Florida's unparalleled natural resources. I share that passion and find motivation in the sustainable management of those resources – not only for current, but also future uses and generations. I also share an appreciation for how important the Director position is to the school and its future, and to the state of Florida. I would like you to know that the prospect of accepting that responsibility is something I take very seriously. I am honored to have been nominated for this position and would be very interested in having a more detailed discussion about my candidacy during an interview.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Terrell T. "Red" Baker III
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