



Department of Agricultural & Biological Engineering
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Re: Application for the Department Chair Position in Agricultural and Biological Engineering at The University of Florida.

Dear Search Committee:

I am enthusiastically submitting my letter of interest for the Department Chair Position in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering at The University of Florida. This opportunity excites me as it perfectly aligns with the next phase of my professional and academic journey. I am eager to translate my research, teaching, and leadership training and experiences gained in the last three decades to further enhance the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering at The University of Florida. Through this position, I aim to serve as a committed leader, further enabling me to support and guide others as I have been supported throughout my career. I believe my academic journey and experiences, particularly my tenure at Penn State makes me a strong candidate for this role.

I received my B.S. degree in Food Engineering from the Middle East Technical University in Turkey in 1987, followed by a Ph.D. degree in Food Science and Technology with a minor in Chemical Engineering from Iowa State University in 1992. In the last twenty-five years, I have been a part of the Agricultural & Biological Engineering Department at Penn State, starting as an Assistant Professor in 1999, achieving tenure as an Associate Professor in 2005, and then to Full Professor in 2009. My teaching and research focus within Microbiological Engineering involves *i)* Bioprocessing/Fermentation processes for the production of value-added products (including biofuels, organic acids, enzymes, and antibiotics) from raw agricultural products and *ii)* Food Safety Engineering to control spoilage and pathogenic microorganisms in foods and environment by novel non-thermal processing methods. Throughout my tenure at Penn State, I have served as PI or co-PI on funded projects totaling around \$5M in funding, advised or co-advised 11 M.Sc. and 15 Ph.D. students, and supervised 10 visiting scientists/ postdocs, further illustrating my dedication to mentoring and leading in academia. I have also served on 40 Ph.D. and 16 M.Sc. students' committees over the years. I genuinely enjoy assisting and mentoring graduate students and scholars to do their research, which enabled me to have an even better appreciation and passion to expand what I have been doing in my own research programs into a formal servant leadership position.

My significant administration experience at Penn State includes: I have been serving as the Professor-in-Charge of [the CSL Behring Fermentation Facility](#) since 2009 and served as the founding academic program chair for the Online [Intercollege Master of Professional Studies in Renewable Energy and Sustainability Systems \(iMPS-RESS\) program](#). Particularly, chairing

iMPS-RESS program is a good example of my administration skills because this was an interdisciplinary program, which involved forty faculty from nine departments in four Colleges at Penn State. This was a challenging task to do with different departments, backgrounds, culture, and expectations. When I stepped down in 2018, the student population reached to about 250 students from all over the world. As the Professor-in-Charge of the CSL Behring Fermentation Facility, I don't only involve in the administration of facility, but I was also closely involved in the design and relocation of the facility to our new Agricultural Engineering Building, which is a clear example of my ability for the improvement of a research facility.

My teaching contributions include developing and teaching two undergraduate and three graduate courses. These courses enable me to bring my research experiences into the classroom to educate the next generation of engineers, scientists, and educators. My current position at Penn State does not include extension responsibility, but it is worth noting that I have also actively collaborated with industry partners, contributing to research and outreach efforts that not only provided solutions to real-world problems but also attracted additional research funding. I also provide hands-on or virtual workshops for professionals from the industry. Furthermore, I closely follow the extension faculty as a colleague as well as the member/chair of the Department's Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee and appreciate their efforts to provide services for our stakeholders.

Academically, I have contributed significantly to the field, authoring or co-authoring approximately 180 refereed journal articles, and 40 book chapters, co-editing three books and holding two U.S. patents with a third under review. My commitment to academic service is evident in my roles on the editorial boards of *Journal of Food Protection* and *Journal of Food Biotechnology*, *Journal of Industrial Biotechnology*, and *Journal of Mediterranean Agricultural Sciences*. Also, I have been an associate editor for *Journal of the ASABE* (American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers) since 2008 and the editor of *Journal of Food Engineering Reviews* since 2020. I have received several prestigious internal and external awards, including [the ASABE's International Food Engineering Award](#) last summer and [the Fellows](#) in 2021, which is the highest honor given by ASABE.

All these activities demonstrate my scholarship, leadership and administrative capabilities, as does my service in numerous departmental, college, and university committees. Currently, I am serving as the director of our graduate program in the department since the summer of 2023. Furthermore, I have served as the chair of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education in the College of Agricultural Sciences between 2021-2023. I also served as the faculty senator in the University Faculty Senate to represent the College of Agricultural Sciences between 2020-2024, which enables me to understand how our university is operated through the process of shared governance.

My leadership skills have been refined through participation in significant programs like [the Leadership Program for the 21](#) and [the Big Ten Academic Alliance \(Formerly known as "Committee on Institutional Cooperation"\) Leadership Program](#), preparing me for roles in academic administration and service at broader levels. [en Academic Alliance \(Formerly known as "Committee on Institutional Cooperation"\) Leadership Program](#), preparing me for roles in academic administration and service at broader levels.

I have also closely collaborated with the Agricultural Sciences' Global Office for several years to enhance international research collaborations at Penn State. My latest effort with them was to launch a research and training initiative in Saudi Arabia, focusing on Agriculture, Food, and Biotechnology. Additionally, I have actively participated in Penn State's Biotechnology Training Programs and have extensively taught fermentation workshops for professionals in the Biotech Industry since joining Penn State. These workshops were also conducted internationally in Turkey, Switzerland, and Germany during my sabbaticals. I am also pleased to share that I have been approved for the Fulbright Specialist Program for future opportunities, should my expertise be required worldwide.

Since starting my academic journey in 1982, my career has been enriched with diverse experiences across research, teaching, and service. This foundation was not only built on my hard work alone, but also the exemplary mentorship, guidance, and support I received from colleagues and administrators along the way. I am now at a juncture in my career where I feel prepared and eager to offer the same level of support and leadership within an esteemed academic institution. My interest in this Department Chair position for the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering at The University of Florida stems from a desire to contribute to its further growth and success significantly.

Below are some of my general philosophy for leadership, vision, and growth strategy for this position, which align with the responsibilities and expectations detailed in the job description:

Management of Faculty and Staff: I believe this area is the first leadership characteristic of any successful leader, because no one can do all. Team effort is the key to any successful organization. Micromanagement is not an effective way of achieving success. Allocation of responsibilities and giving the assigned team members freedom to do their jobs should be always methods of a successful leadership. If everyone assumes ownership of their work, success will be inevitable.

Faculty Evaluation and Development: Actively participate in the tenure and promotion process and committees in my current Department at Penn State. I can leverage this experience to ensure effective and fair faculty evaluations, promotions, tenure decisions, and contract renewals alongside the Dean and Associate Deans in the college.

Undergraduate Programs and Recruitment: Successful undergraduate programs are the foundation of any successful Department. Graduating students are the ones who convey the knowledge forward to the field. Therefore, we need to educate the students with the highest level of knowledge and enhance the existing programs while looking for new opportunities to attract incoming students.

Graduate Student Recruitment and Mentoring: With over 25 years of experience in recruiting and advising undergraduate and graduate students, I plan to share my insights with faculty, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, through workshops and training programs.

Management of Budget: I am always in favor of a "balanced" budget. Having said that, there should be always room for strategic investments and leveraging funds for the opportunities. I

have shown this repeatedly within my research budgets.

Leadership in Research Programs: My aim is to lead research programs in collaboration with key figures such as the Dean, Associate Deans, Department Chairs, and external government and industrial partners and foster collaboration among the faculty.

Leadership in Extension Programs: My current position at Penn State does not include extension roles, but I closely follow the extension faculty as a colleague as well as the member/chair of the Department's Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee and appreciate their efforts to provide services for our stakeholders. I truly believe that extension is the heart of the Land-grant University system. As the Department Head, I will be a strong supporter of extension faculty and extension programs.

Working with Agricultural Experiment Station: My tenure at Penn State, particularly my involvement with the Agricultural Experiment Station, has equipped me with valuable insights into its operations. This background will be valuable in my efforts to foster collaboration within the university and beyond as well as supporting the Dean's efforts in advancing the station's mission.

Management of Research Facilities: As the professor-in-charge of Penn State's Fermentation Facility for the past 15 years and with experience in managing my own BSL2 laboratory, I am well-versed in the coordination of research centers and adherence to laboratory regulations. This experience will allow me to support other researchers in the department effectively.

Representation of Department on Committees in the College and University: My recent roles, including chairing the advisory committee to the Research Dean at Penn State, participating in multi-state research projects, and serving at the faculty senate, improve my ability to represent the Department at various levels effectively as needed for this position.

I anticipate that further goals and initiatives will emerge as I familiarize myself with the specific needs and mission of the Department, College, University, and the broader agricultural industry and agricultural community.

In conclusion, my passion for research, teaching, service, and commitment to educate the next generation of engineers not only within the State of North Carolina and the U.S. but also globally. It would be an honor to be considered by the selection committee for this pivotal role in the Department Head Position in Agricultural and Biological Engineering at NC State. For additional details regarding my qualifications, please refer to my attached C.V. Should you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Ali Demirci, Ph.D.
Professor