

UF/CRDF Path Forward Reached



By Rick Dantzer, CRDF chief operating officer

Last month, this column discussed a dispute the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) was having with the University of Florida (UF) over CRDF's status as a direct support organization (DSO). Two issues drove the conflict: whether CRDF would be required to spend all of its research money with the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), and what level of review the university would have over CRDF contracts.

I am pleased to report that a path forward to resolve the conflict has been reached in principle.

UF had taken a narrower view of the statute and postulated that all spending had to be with IFAS. CRDF respected this interpretation, but concluded it had no choice but to fund the best research projects, regardless of origin, in order to get research answers as quickly as possible. The agreement would allow CRDF to continue funding the most meritorious proposals. If the parties agree later that it is necessary to seek legislative clarification on this point, they will, jointly, approach legislators regarding changes in the statute that would be necessary to make this clear.

Because of liability concerns, UF wanted greater oversight of CRDF research contracts. CRDF did not oppose greater oversight but could not agree to allow the university to substitute its scientific judgment for the CRDF board's judgment — something which would have made the CRDF board, essentially, advisory. The agreement would allow greater university oversight for regulatory compliance matters but not for scientific judgment.

CRDF would accept a bylaw stating it is compliant with UF governance standards, many of which CRDF is already following. The others are reasonable.

UF had suggested it have greater representation on the CRDF board. By law, there are two persons from IFAS on the board. This same statute pins the board at 13 members, which we currently have. To add another would affect the balance on the board and potentially cause someone currently serving to have to step down. CRDF is willing to work with the university on its concerns regarding board membership, but there are laws that are prescriptive.

The parties are hopeful that talk of decertification will cease, but if decertification should happen, the university would provide CRDF with a reasonable wind-down period. If decertification should occur, research funds under the control of CRDF would remain with CRDF.

Several years ago, UF began charging 12 percent on contracts to recoup its costs of providing administrative services. While this amount is lower than that charged by other states and the federal government, CRDF was told in 2009 by university administrators that such a charge would not be assessed. Consequently, talks are revolving around locking in the rate at 12 percent as a reasonable compromise.

The parties will sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) documenting this arrangement. I am happy with the framework of this agreement and appreciate UF's willingness to work it out. I hope we can institutionalize at least an annual meeting between the CRDF board and senior-level university officials to help prevent future dustups.



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