UNISYS Review of IT

Copy of 03/02/01 e-mail from Joe Joyce,

Several weeks ago the IFAS Department Chairs requested that Dr. Martin authorize a review, by an outside consultant with no ties to UF/IFAS-Information Technology (IT), of the FAS to determine the soundness of the database and to make recommendations for improving interaction with the databases. There was also a strong desire to optimize procedures and systems for generating required supports. The Vice President and Deans met with Dr. Howard Laedwig, Director of the Program Development and Evaluation Center (PDEC), to discuss the nature of such an effort. Subsequent to that discussion we contracted with Bill Larsen and Paul Mannis with UNISYS to conduct a review of the FAS system. Howard Laedwig is heading up national accountability effort for USDA and was familiar with the work and expertise of the UNISYS personnel. They visited with various groups during February 19-21 and provided an outbrief on February 21 with a more detailed written report to follow. Briefly, they indicated:
*   FAS database is sound. In fact, they indicated that we have quite an innovative system for data capture and storage.
*   It has done an excellent job at capturing the data, but a better interface is needed between the object database (which contains the data) and what we need out of the FAS for reports and ad hoc inquiries. It was noted that IFAS-IT and PDEC are aware of this and is working on this requirement.
*   There are minor adjustments that can be made to increase the user friendliness of the input of data. Some of the problems we have encountered relate to inadequate participation in the training sessions.
*   IFAS-IT has four major functions that are similar to all organizations that require comprehensive IT services, i.e. Help Desk, Network Systems Management, Training, and Software Development. Every organization needs to determine the level of effort and prioritization of each.
Upon receipt of the formal report we will evaluate the requirements and options for making the necessary refinements. We will also conduct an internal/external review of our IT functions, evaluate the progress made as a result of the Infostructure Task Force report, and attempt to provide direction for future IT needs and priorities. We would like to thank all involved in this recent effort and appreciate the openness and candor of all involved in the discussion, in particular the UF/IFAS IT staff.