5 Year Planning Effort
UF/IFAS-Information Technologies Office

1) Mission statement of unit

The mission of the UF/IFAS IT office is to provide support systems and services that are based on modern information technologies in order to facilitate and further the UF/IFAS mission. This includes:

A system in which teaching is strongly supported by information technologies to improve the learning experience of students and facilitate teaching. One in which new forms of education emerge, unconstrained by current formal structures and perceptions of education.

A system that provides high levels of computational power for research purposes, allows fast access to information, and enables dynamic interdisciplinary communication among peers. A research program in information technologies that results in applied tools and techniques for the implementation of information delivery systems addressing UF/IFAS constituents' needs.

A system that delivers knowledge through electronic means, without spatial or temporal constraints. One that allows dynamic interdisciplinary communications between and among UF/IFAS extension faculty, extension constituents, and peers within and beyond the institution. Also, a system that facilitates long term planning and the production of knowledge deliverables.

A system that continually improves UF/IFAS's ability to fulfill its mission by locating funding, obtaining funding, managing resources and developing partnerships with the public and private sectors. One that enhances the institute's competitive edge in the recruitment of superior faculty, students and staff. One that provides effective, timely and accurate decision support without placing an undue burden upon those who must report information.

A system that facilitates the accountability process through tools that minimize faculty and staff effort while maximizing access to quality information for stakeholders. One that integrates accountability activities more fully into broad programmatic and management processes in teaching, research and extension.

2) Major functions of unit

OIT is composed of 5 functional areas. By area, each of the functions are listed below.

OIT-Director's Office provides a unified IT vision for the institute; comprehensive strategic planning; centralized coordination of efforts and funding; effective dialog

between IT implementers and UF/IFAS policy makers; integrated, cooperative IT efforts on a sustained basis; and acquisition of extramural funding for IT.

OIT-Business Systems provides computerized information resources to support the administrative and business functions of UF/IFAS. It is responsible for comprehending, planning and directing the implementation of the total administrative computing system application needs for UF/IFAS such as the departmental accounting, travel, inventory control and accountability systems. Also, it is a liaison to other UF administrative computing centers.

OIT-Customer Support has three functions: a) Maintain and operate a help desk that provides comprehensive support to all IFAS faculty and staff, b) conducts training programs on IT relates tools and techniques to leverage UF/IFAS faculty and staff, and external constituents, and c) provides on-site support to off-campus units.

OIT-Software Systems develops and maintains information delivery systems for UF/IFAS programs such as CDROM, EDIS and FAWN. Develops standards and guidelines for system sorftware and database development. It researches and develops new and applied technologies that improve ITO's abilities to provide UF/IFAS faculty and staff with tools and services. This area also conducts academic courses on IT related topics.

OIT-Network Systems operates a Wide Area Network (WAN) that extends to 90 off-campus units ([67 County Extension Offices](#) and [23 Research Centers](#)) and 44 on-campus units (College of Veterinary Medicine, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, 22 academic departments and 20 support units). Network Systems provides all remote management for communications, maintenance and back-end software services such as e-mail and Web.

3) Staffing/organizational structure (include organizational chart) and how it relates to major functions.

Organizational areas are delineated by function as described above. By design, none of the areas in OIT operate in a vacuum. While each area is custodian of its own domain, they all operate in tandem. A philosophy of cooperation and communication underlies our model's, so that each function serves as a supporting player on the larger information technology team. In such a context the attached organizational chart has little meaning because it does not reflect the dynamic nature of the role that different members and areas in OIT play in fulfilling the IT needs of UF/IFAS.

4) An analysis of major trends in the unit for the past five years (trends may include function, staffing, technology, relationship with other IFAS and UF units).

This unit was created in October, 1997, per recommendations of the Infostructure Task

Force. The purpose was to integrate IT related units into a single effective and efficient service unit that addresses current and future needs of UF/IFAS internal and external constituents. An executive summary of the Task force is attached.

5) An analysis of key trends that will effect the unit over the next five years.

Factors that will affect the ability of this unit to perform in the near future are:

Rapid evolution of computer and communication technologies with a trend towards increasing levels of complexity. Although tools for development of IT applications will become more powerful, they will also require a substantial investment in human resource development in order for them to be effectively deployed.

Shrinkage of traditional funding source. As resources continue to shrink, IT will have to compete with other UF/IFAS mission critical components for the necessary resources to provide the services and products demanded by constituents.

No appropriate budgetary alternatives. Yearly cycle budgets for software and hardware systems is difficult to implement and manage, other more appropriate alternatives, such as life cycle budgeting need to be explored.

Increasing stakeholder expectations. Users are becoming more sophisticated, they demand more complex and user-friendlier applications, reliable network systems and the associated training and support. This further increases the need for better human resources and tools.

Inertia of legacy systems, methodologies and applications. Many of the current mission critical systems are running on outdated platforms that need to be ported to new technologies in order to meet stakeholder expectations.

High industry demand for IT professionals that will drain human resources due to the inability of the State system to compete salary wise.

6) If you could select performance or statistical measures that would best describe the contributions of your unit to IFAS and the unit's overall effectiveness, what would they be? Indicate how these measures reflected your unit in 1993 and in 1998.

This unit did not exist in 1993, however its performance needs to be gauged by the following scopes:

Short Term: The ability of IT to resolve the issues of connectivity, training and support.

Medium Term: The ability of UF/IFAS IT to integrate the diverse corporate-level

information systems currently being handled within the institution.

Long Term: The ability of UF/IFAS IT to exploit the power of new and developing technologies that leverage the ability of faculty and staff to carry out their role in fulfilling the UF/IFAS mission. Also, the ability of IT to design information systems that survive technology changes.