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Dr. Moss,

Please accept this submission as a formal application for the position of Oklahoma State University Professor/Assistant Director/State Program Leader with the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. It is an honor to have been nominated for this position and, in my opinion, it is a unique and rewarding position within the Cooperative Extension System. The remainder of this letter will explain my motivation for applying and the qualifications and experience that I feel should make me a viable candidate.

Over the course of my career, I have worked extensively in the areas of community economic development and production/value-added agriculture. My entire career has been spent with a 100 percent Extension appointment (from 1993-2003 I served as an Assistant Professor and Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Agricultural [and Resource] Economics at the University of Tennessee and from 2003 to the present I have served as an Associate Extension Professor and Extension Professor in the Community Resource Development (CRD) unit and the Department of Agricultural Economics at Mississippi State University). While I have had the opportunity to have taught several classes at Mississippi State University and have engaged in various different types of applied research projects, these activities have been utilized to strengthen my Extension programming efforts. In addition, I served as the unit leader of the Mississippi State University Extension Service's Community Resource Development unit (CRD unit) from 2003-2005 and as the Associate Director of the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) from 2003-2010. Both positions had unique administrative responsibilities that I believe have bearing on this position.

During my time at the University of Tennessee, my Extension programming efforts were primarily focused on business development and management, particularly financial management and feasibility. A major component of this work involved developing computerized financial management teaching materials for various types of businesses, the majority of which were production agriculture firms ranging from row crop operations to dairies to nursery/greenhouse horticultural operations. In addition, I assisted over 200 businesses with business planning, feasibility, and management assessment issues; a large number of these businesses were assisted through my role as a faculty member associated with the then Agricultural Development Center (now the Center for Profitable Agriculture).

When I joined the Mississippi State University CRD unit as its leader, the unit had six personnel positions (three faculty positions, two professional staff positions, and one support staff position), but four of these were vacant due to retirements, resignations, and administrative position changes. Through a collaborative effort with the unit's existing faculty and staff (as these positions were filled) and with the support of the Mississippi State University Extension Service administration, we filled one faculty position and the three staff positions with individuals who were excited to develop educational programs in healthcare economics, public infrastructure

management and economics, entrepreneurship and small business development (including value-added agriculture), regional economic analysis, community planning, and leadership.

In addition, the unit's level of extramural funding was increasing and the faculty and staff were becoming well known throughout the state as professionals who could assist Mississippi's communities in addressing an exceptionally wide variety of issues due, in no small part, to the ability to work across agency, disciplinary, and appointment (Extension and research) lines to secure assistance and collaboration when it benefitted the community. However, the CRD unit was merged into the Department of Agricultural Economics in 2005 when university administration moved most of the Extension Service's "stand-alone" units (the CRD unit, the Food and Fiber Center, and the Program and Staff Development unit) into academic departments.

At the same time that I was serving as the leader for the CRD unit, I also served as the Associate Director for the SRDC. While my initial primary task was to develop the Rural Community College Initiative program (see below), I was also responsible for the majority of the center's administrative duties (while the SRDC is housed at Mississippi State University, the director at that time lived in Florida and had, as his primary focus, a goal of securing grants and contracts for the center) and for the development and coordination of many of the center's Extension and applied research programs in collaboration with an extremely diverse and constantly changing group of faculty and professional staff from the Southern region's land-grant universities. As with the CRD unit, I was primarily responsible for the majority of administrative tasks associated with the center, including the SRDC budget, addressing personnel issues, and other tasks associated with the conduct of a university-based unit. I also collaborated with regional Extension faculty and professional staff to develop curricula for community leadership training and planning, home-based and small business development (including youth entrepreneurship and value-added agriculture), and regional economic analysis (including, but not limited to economic impact and contribution analysis and community competitiveness analysis). In addition, I helped to coordinate investigation into applied research questions including a region-wide set of community-based listening sessions dealing with rural entrepreneurship across the Southern region (this was replicated by the other regional rural development centers as well), an in-depth analysis of federal and philanthropic community and economic development funding efforts in the Mississippi River Delta, and developing a set of foundational practices that describes critical characteristics of teaching, research, and Extension efforts in community and economic development.

As evidenced by the accompanying vita, my Extension programs have covered a wide variety of topics and involved significant multidisciplinary efforts which I feel offer the breadth of experience necessary for the successful Assistant Dean candidate. I have developed/offered educational programs and technical assistance in several areas of community economic development including business and entrepreneurship development; public infrastructure economics, pricing, and management; community strategic planning; economic impact/contribution analysis for agricultural industries and the agriculture sector, chronic disease conditions and behaviors, specific industries or organizations (e.g., the John C. Stennis Space Center), and educational programs; community leadership; and many areas of small/medium business and entrepreneurship development including community-based business retention and expansion programs, financial management, business plan and feasibility development, human resource management, and marketing. In addition, I have continually strived to expand the scope and influence of these programs. Three examples of these efforts include the computerized financial record keeping program that I developed and implemented at the University of Tennessee and the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) and the Public Water System Assistance Program at Mississippi State University.

When I joined the University of Tennessee in 1993, there was a demand for computerized financial record keeping and management education from production agriculture farms across the state of Tennessee and these activities were initially offered using the Quicken software. While these workshops were extremely valuable to the farms that participated, there was a gap between the needs of some producers/businesses and the capabilities of the Quicken software, particularly for businesses that payrolls or substantial accounts receivables.

To address this gap, I worked with Extension faculty and staff, as well as producers, to develop a set of teaching examples that utilized the QuickBooks Pro software to demonstrate needed concepts. Specific sectors that were addressed included dairies, nurseries, greenhouses, general business, tobacco, and row crops. The teaching materials utilized specific situations found in each sector (for examples, nurseries typically have high accounts receivables and payrolls while dairy reimbursements consist of multiple checks for a particular milking). These materials were utilized in three- to five-day workshops for which participants were charged a registration fee (dozens of these workshops were held across the state over an approximately six-year time frame) and participants were also able to receive individualized technical assistance for specific company setup and bookkeeping issues. More importantly, the computerized financial record keeping instruction provided a segue into a more important topic – namely, business financial management for increased profitability and sustainability.

The point that I'm trying to make with this example concerns the type of educational programming in which Extension professionals engage. I've often heard it said that Extension faculty and professional staff address the same issues by teaching the same "content" over and over. And, as one might imagine, the contexts in which this belief was uttered were not complimentary to Extension. I take a different view. In many cases, the problems that our clientele (whether it be agricultural producers or some other type of business or a governmental unit) remain the same. New clients appear as older clients retire or move on and much of the value that we can provide for economic sustainability at all levels involves ensuring that clients have a basic grounding of fundamental issues.

The RCCI was an initiative funded by the Ford Foundation that endeavored to enable rural community college faculty and administrators and Extension faculty (both agents and specialists) to become more involved in their region's community and economic development efforts. While this program had begun by the time that I joined the SRDC as its Associate Director, it became my primary responsibility for the first four years of my employment with the SRDC. This effort involved a significant multidisciplinary effort (primarily economics and sociology, but also the myriad of disciplines taught in the community college setting that also included workforce development) to (1) demonstrate the importance of community and economic development to both the community college and Extension leaders; (2) share the relevant components of the practice of development with these entities and provide "best practices" that could be used in the local region; and (3) provide a platform for Extension and community college leaders to not only work together, but to also work with local economic developers to enable more sustainable development for the region.

The SRDC was responsible for local areas in Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, Virginia, and Texas. The results of these efforts were significant and included the development of customer service educational curricula that was used by businesses of all types and sizes in western North Carolina, the development of a unique community strategic planning platform that has been used to great success by many communities both in the RCCI program and after the program ended, the integration of workforce development efforts into business recruiting efforts, and forming unique and sustained partnerships between several community colleges and Extension, some of which endured at least for several years after the RCCI program ended.

In my opinion, a great deal of the success of this program was due to efforts that encouraged the participants to “think outside the box” and envision working partnerships that had not been explored before the advent of the program. Unique tools were developed and implemented that provided user-friendly access to educational programs, socio-economic information, and methodologies that had not been used by community colleges or, in many cases, Extension faculty before this effort began.

Though I have defended the “addressing the same concept by teaching the same thing” criticism of Extension educational programming, there are many opportunities (hopefully, most of our opportunities) that invite a new concept to be introduced into a specific situation or condition. The RCCI was a successful attempt at more fully integrating community colleges into the economic development activities of their service areas (rather than just being providers of workforce development programs) as well as forming lasting partnerships between the community colleges and Extension. While a number of the partnerships that were formed during this program were relatively short-lived, a number have existed for several years.

A third example is the Public Water Assistance program that I “inherited” as the unit leader of the CRD unit and transformed into a comprehensive program serving public water/wastewater system boards and operators across the state. This program consisted of maintaining an educational curriculum and coordinating a technical assistance program when I began, but was transformed into a comprehensive educational effort that dealt with a large number of operational and managerial aspects of maintaining a public water/wastewater system. These aspects included pricing, asset management, financial management, human resource management, and efficient operations. Several of these program components involved using analytical research methods to develop more accurate pricing strategies and involving a number of disciplines, including engineering, to develop effective tools for use by system operators and board management members. This program resulted in well over \$2 million in contract funds being awarded to Mississippi State University; these funds were used to not only perform the specific tasks included in the program, but to develop additional programmatic components that added value to the original effort. This is a program that afforded a new opportunity for Extension to highlight its talents in new areas. Rather than “just” being involved in teaching leadership and management concepts to public utility governing boards, our team was able to provide in-depth technical assistance that now only served the water utility, but also allowed Extension to expand its horizons.

These examples provide the basis for my vision of the Assistant Director and State Program Leader position and my commitment to Extension programming efforts. OSU Extension has a mission of providing research-based educational programming to clientele across the state in both existing and new situations. To accomplish this, I believe that the Assistant Director and State Program Leader will have to understand the issues and challenges being faced by agricultural producers, agribusinesses, and the rural communities across the state. In my view, this will require the development of relationships and collaborations with producers, businesspeople, and community leaders to (1) determine what issues and challenges exist in the state and (2) to continue to “prove” to those stakeholders that OSU Extension has specific, targeted expertise that is valuable in addressing their issues of concern. In my opinion, this relates to advice that my first department head gave me: “People don’t really care what you know; what they care about is if you can help them or not.” There is no doubt in my mind that stakeholders know that OSU Extension knows a lot, particularly in the areas of production agriculture, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community economic development; it should be the goal of the Assistant Director and State Program Leader to facilitate the demonstration to stakeholders that there are specific areas of expertise that are able and willing to help solve their problems.

A strategy that has worked well in the past in cultivating SRDC applied research projects has been to secure resources that can provide seed funding for the development of research projects that can lead not only to targeted educational efforts, but can also lead to refereed journal articles by university faculty, a prime concern

particularly for junior faculty members. Prime examples of this included the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) program that addressed food insecurity issues across the nation and the publication “The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America.” I would think that this type of effort could prove fruitful if seed funding resources could be made available or secured.

While the preceding presents a snapshot of the vision that I have for the roles of Assistant Director and State Program Leader, I also feel that I possess the qualities to implement this vision. First, I have always been eager to take on new challenges and stretch the boundaries not only of my efforts, but also the traditionally viewed role of Extension (and, to a much more limited extent, applied research) in serving new audiences and developing new educational products. However, I have been in many situations where these new programs did not prove successful. In those cases, I have more than willingly transitioned to other efforts which would hopefully prove to be more successful.

I believe that this trait translates well to all aspects of Extension. OSU Extension has a tremendous wealth of expertise that could be applied to the issues faced by rural areas of the state. Discovering new opportunities for targeted collaboration would lead to positive benefits not only for distressed rural areas, but also for a university with the goal of expanding knowledge. I firmly believe that these types of efforts can be further leveraged by involving faculty and professional staff to expand existing Extension programming models used in the state.

Second, I set extremely high standards for the work with which I am associated. I feel that I am able to assemble and encourage quality teams and individuals to develop the best product possible given the views that I have previously expressed. For the advancement of efforts to further the goal of the making Tennessee a better place to live and work, I harken to the words of former U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill: “All politics are local.” The building and maintenance of individual relationships with all Extension faculty and professional staff is critical to the success of OSU Extension. To accomplish this, I feel that it takes a mixture of being able to see the “big picture” of how the effort would benefit the partnering faculty/professional staff and a willingness to support those professionals to see a specific effort through to the best possible conclusion. I also feel that the optimal conclusion often means that the effort delivers more than is promised to not only add value to the effort, but to also prove to stakeholders (not only the traditional local, state, and federal stakeholders, but also potential extramural funders) that an investment in both time and other resources will bring about a higher return than they expected; in my experience, this has proven to lead to repeat funding.

Third, while there has obviously been a widespread and effective effort at marketing OSU Extension as a valuable resource to the state, I feel that marketing efforts should never be considered complete. However, I feel that the most effective marketing for the initiative should just as much covert as overt. While this strategy may seem counter-intuitive, it has been my experience that the work and products that arise from faculty efforts should speak for themselves and that the expertise demonstrated by that work is the best marketing strategy that could be employed. This work should include transparent and detailed reports not only individual programs and research efforts, but also the total body of work performed under the OSU Extension umbrella on at least an annual basis. And it is imperative that these reports include descriptions of full credit to individual faculty members and professional staff along with an appropriate estimation of the impact (either economic or otherwise) of the realized or potential impacts of the research or educational program.

Finally, I feel that my past experience as the SRDC’s Associate Director and the leader of the CRD unit, as well as my career of Extension programming and applied research, has given me a unique perspective that has shaped my vision of what I believe is the vision for the future of OSU Extension. This is particularly true in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. I have had extensive experience working with 1890 land-grant institutions on

various projects and issues. For example, I served on the planning committee of the Professional Ag Workers Conference at Tuskegee University during my tenure as the SRDC Associate Director and I feel that the presence and offered assistance of the SRDC did help to strengthen the conference. Another prime example concerned a combined entrepreneurship/ business retention and expansion educational workshop that Kent Wolfe (University of Georgia) and I conducted for combined Extension faculty of Tuskegee University and Alabama A&M University. Anecdotal evidence indicated that there were several successes that resulted in Alabama from this opportunity. Finally, I worked with several 1994 land-grants in the Rural Community College Initiative and helped these institutions to become more involved in the economic development activities of their individual regions.

Furthermore, I believe that any public university, particularly one that has a land-grant component, should make its programs and products available to all residents of the state (and beyond) without regard to physical challenge, racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, or any of the other categorizations that have resulted in actual or perceived discrimination or exclusion.

Thank you for allowing me to submit my application for this position and for the opportunity to express my views regarding the role of Assistant Director and State Program Leader. I look forward to talking with you further about my specific views and how I might fulfill this role.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Barefield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a distinct "B".

Alan Barefield