Notes From the Chair...  
by Heiner Lieth

If you are living in California, then you have probably already heard about the dire budget situation facing the State’s public institutions. At this point budget cuts are inevitable. Supposedly the University is to be affected in a relatively minor way, but there is more to this than meets the eye. As this goes to press, “university research” is to absorb significant cuts beyond those for the rest of the University. Basically “university research” means “the Agricultural Experiment Station”. The same approach was taken in the early 1990s with both the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) and Cooperative Extension (CE) suffering major budget cuts. Neither AES nor CE ever recovered from the cuts a decade ago and the cuts which are proposed now will inevitably be in areas that are core to all departments in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and our academic programs. I’m sure you are aware of the many excellent programs we have in agricultural and environmental sciences addressing many of the most important problems facing California: Sudden Oak Death, Pierce’s Disease, environmental issues facing home owners and agricultural producers, watersheds and water issues, 4-H, youth-at-risk, nutritional programs, to mention just a few.

In a letter which Dean van Alfen sent to the Advisory Council of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, he explains the situation: “The proposed 10% cut to state-funded research will disproportionately affect our college, particularly the Agricultural Experiment Station budget. Approximately 55% of the state research funding that comes to the Davis campus is within our college which, coincidentally, represents about 55% of our total state-funded base budget. This funding provides faculty and staff salary and state-funded operating support for our core departmental programs. It is not flexible, discretionary dollars.” As you can see, all departments and academic programs in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences will be dealt a devastating blow by the proposed cuts.

We in the University are not trying to hide from cuts that all public institutions must obviously face, but all versions of the current budget proposals deal a crippling blow to us at a time when the intention is to have a relatively minor impact on the University. For Environmental Horticulture virtually half of our funds used for daily operations (excluding the salary of essential personnel) would have to be cut. We are hopeful that the decision-makers will be provided with an accurate analysis and that they then implement budgetary decisions which coincide with the intentions of the folks they represent.

If, however, no solution is forthcoming, then we will want to ask our friends to intercede on our behalf. Thus, as chair of the Environmental Horticulture Department, I am asking you whether you might be willing to contact state legislators on our behalf (when the time comes; if needed). If so, then please send me an e-mail message (jhlieth@ucdavis.edu) or drop me a letter. Please provide your full name, address, phone numbers, e-mail address and indicate the names of legislators that represent you (if you know). If you have contacts in the legislature or Governor’s office, then please indicate that as well.

In other news around the department, we have been very active in trying to develop public support for programs within the Department. I am currently working on two endowed chairs. We will begin fundraising for these this summer. If you would like to be involved in these efforts, then please contact me. We are also negotiating with the USDA to bring scientists working in environmental horticulture to California.

In the last Growing Points we appealed to you to provide some support for the Harry Kohl Scholarship Fund. For such a fund to begin paying out scholarships, a minimum balance of $10,000 must be reached. We would like to thank Dave Fujino & Sarah Schrupp, Steven & Melinda Thigpen, and Ray Hasek for their generous donations which have put the fund over the top and enabled us to begin planning awards for deserving students.

Student Accomplishments

Congratulations to undergraduates Kate Keck, Carolyn Norris, Rose Pearl and Melissa Rathje who will be graduating this June. We wish them the best in the next stage of their lives. Six graduate students in Environmental Horticulture were awarded Kubota Scholarships, ranging from $750 to $1,000. This year’s recipients were Fabrice De Clerck, Kimberly Hunter, Mikaela Huntzinger, Erin McDermott, Kathren Murrell, and Tom Rambo. The John and Terry Kubota Scholarship is funded primarily through gifts from Yoneo John Kubota, who worked in the Department of Environmental Horticulture from 1968 until his retirement in 1984. The scholarship is dedicated in memory of his late wife “in recognition of the encouragement scholarship can provide to outstanding students.” Melody Meyer, a graduate student in Environmental Horticulture, received a Monrovia Nursery/R. Fred Damm scholarship from the California Association of Nurserymen (CAN). Jackie Bergquist has also received a CAN scholarship. Steve Wathen, a Ph. D. candidate working with Michael Barbour, has received another $2000 grant from the Geological Society of America (GSA) to fund his research on the long-term vegetative, fire and geomorphological history of a high Sierra Nevada watershed. In addition, his work was recognized by the GSA as having “exceptional merit in conception and presentation”, a distinction given to only 5% of annual grant applicants. Jeffrey Clary, a Ph.D. student with Truman Young, has obtained a Fulbright Grant. Jeffrey’s research is entitled “Plant Succession and Restoration after Wildfire in Xeric Mediterranean Forests”. He will be collaborating with Dr. Robert Save of the Catalanian Horticultural Institute, Institut de Recerca i Tecnologia Agroalimentaries (IRTA), and Dr. Josep Maria Espelta of the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona. Congratulations, one and all!

Visiting Scholars

Don Hunter, who had been working with Michael Reid as a postdoc for the last four years, recently returned to New Zealand to take a position as Research Biochemist at the New Zealand Institute for Crop and
Food Research Ltd. in Palmerston. We wish him the best in his new career. Felicity Johnson, originally from Adelaide, Australia, has now joined Reid’s lab group as a postdoc working on the molecular aspects of flower senescence in *Mirabilis* (four-o’clock). Welcome, Felicity!

**Staff Activities**

Loren Oki, now a postdoc in my lab, will be teaching a two-day course entitled “Plant Propagation Basics” for UC Davis Extension. The class is designed for both professionals and gardening enthusiasts and will be held on June 25 and 26. For more information, visit the Extension website: www.extension.ucdavis.edu. Linda Dodge, Staff Research Associate, won a College Achievement Award for her help in coordinating the National Floriculture Forum tour of California in April. Jan Allen, EH’s Personnel/Budget Assistant, welcomed grandson, Taylor James, into the world on May 14th and, at nearly 8 pounds, her family has had their hands full ever since.

**OHECC 2002**

The Ornamental Horticulture Extension Coordinating Conference (OHECC) held its annual meeting in late March at the Doral Resort in Palm Springs. Organizers Dave Burger and Janet Hartin wanted to give the group a change of pace from the usual meeting places on the Davis and Riverside campuses. The four DANR workgroups under the umbrella of OHECC (floriculture/nursery, landscape, turfgrass and urban horticulture) consist of faculty, extension specialists and farm advisors working on similar research issues. They held separate meetings during the conference to share information on current projects and plan future collaborations. The highlight of the conference was a day-long bus tour of Coachella Valley horticulture guided by Jim Cornett, curator of the Palm Springs Desert Museum. Stops included a sod farm, a date palm orchard and specimen tree nursery, the beautifully maintained City of Palm Desert Civic Center Park and the spectacular indoor landscape at the Marriot Desert Springs Resort and Spa. GP