



December 16, 2025

Dr. Jan E. Leach
Distinguished Professor
Department of Agricultural Biology
Colorado State University

RE: Professor & Head, Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture

Dear Dr. Leach and Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiasm for the position of Professor & Department Head in the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture at Colorado State University. With a robust academic background, a sustained record of scholarship in research, teaching, and Extension, a strong service mentality, and commitment to adhere and enhance CSU's Principles of Community, I am excited about the opportunity to lead this transdisciplinary department.

I am currently a Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Plant Pathology at The Ohio State University, where I have responsibility for research, teaching, and Extension in environmental horticulture crop diseases. This three-way split appointment has allowed me to pursue an active research career, mentor graduate and undergraduate students, teach the next generation of agricultural workforce, and engage with a diverse group of stakeholders. From the laboratory to the classroom and extending to the producers, my work proudly integrates all pillars of the land-grant mission. Through my experiences, I have developed a deep understanding of the critical challenges and opportunities facing today's agricultural sector, positioning me to effectively guide a department dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, Extension and outreach.

The Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture is a truly transdisciplinary unit, and effective leadership must understand and support the diversity that lies within it. I believe I have the necessary scientific background, understanding of pertinent industries, meaningful life experiences, and a comprehensive set of leadership, management, and interpersonal skills, to succeed in this endeavor.

I have a sustained record of research scholarship as evidenced by both my publication record and extramural funding. Over the course of my career, I have tackled problems involving taxonomy, ecology, epidemiology, diagnostics, population genetics, and plant-microbe interactions, and I have worked across pathogen groups in economically important horticulture crops (grapevines, stone fruits, and ornamentals) in both controlled environments and field production systems. My research approaches span the continuum from applied to fundamental and organismal to molecular, with the goal of translating knowledge into practical solutions that producers can implement to prevent crop losses. Because of my experiences, I see value in everyone's research across disciplines, which is important for a Department Head of faculty with diversity that spans different fields of agricultural science. I have experience writing proposals to federal, state, and commodity entities. I recognize the critical importance of collaborating with commodity boards, industry, state and federal governments, agricultural leaders and stakeholders, as well as research and Extension faculty. If given the opportunity, I would focus on building and enhancing these interactions to support faculty members in the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture in their pursuit of funding.

I am passionate about teaching and mentoring and energized by opportunities to support people's growth and development. This extends well beyond my classroom teaching responsibilities and is exemplified by my leadership within the OSU Department of Plant Pathology, College, and University. As chair of the Department Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies committees I have had a significant role in the redesign of our graduate curriculum by leading focus groups, facilitating discussion sessions, developing course proposals, and creating assessment plans. I have successfully applied for federal funding in partnership with three other faculty across



the College to develop a training program for under-represented minority faculty and doctoral students to engage in culturally responsive mentoring. This program was designed to support mentors to develop culturally responsive practices and to support mentees to develop the skills needed to navigate the university system and prepare for future faculty careers. My experience in curriculum development and assessment, combined with my passion for student mentorship, has allowed me to create a positive and productive academic environment.

Beyond my sustained record of scholarship in research, teaching, and Extension, I bring unique leadership experiences to the table, and I believe that I am strategically well positioned to succeed as an administrator. Leadership is often measured by a leader's vision for the future. However, one's vision cannot be implemented without effective management skills. Unlike many who take on administrative jobs based on their career seniority, I have actively invested in preparing for an administrative position early on. I have attended five different leadership development programs, such as the nationally recognized LEAD 21 program, the President and Provost Leadership Institute, and the Academic Leadership Framework Program at OSU. Through these highly intensive experiences, I acquired and enhanced competencies in all areas of leadership, including those directly linked to department administration.

Over the course of my career, I have taken on many and varied service positions and engaged in leadership roles both at Ohio State and within my professional society (American Phytopathological Society). Most recently, I have been elected to the presidential lineage of the society, currently serving as Vice-President. This opportunity has allowed me to contribute to the vision and strategic directions of the society, exercise financial oversight, and work closely with the Public Policy Board to strengthen our advocacy efforts, ensuring that our discipline is recognized by policymakers, regulators, and funding agencies as a critical component of sustainable development initiatives. My vision to fulfill the goals of the society includes: (1) championing innovative educational programs that integrate fundamental principles of plant pathology with technological advancements; (2) exploring interdisciplinary collaborations with other scientific societies in related disciplines to identify curriculum building opportunities and resources that we can leverage to ensure our trainees are well-rounded scientists; (3) widening access to educational resources and experiential learning opportunities for a variety of audiences, from students to practitioners to the general public; and (4) strengthening relationships between academia, industry, and government to promote diverse career opportunities and bridge the gap between scientific discovery and application.

I am thrilled about the possibility of contributing to the Horticulture and Landscape Architecture department and leading its faculty, staff, and students towards achieving excellence in teaching, research, creative scholarship and Extension, and fostering collaborations across CSU and with external partners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Francesca Peduto Hand, Ph.D.
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