I know a lot of counties are looking to purchase new computers this FY, perhaps motivated by the likelihood that next FY we’ll all be trying to trade the family cow for magic beans. (Note: Trading livestock for magic beans requires the prior permission of your District Director or department head.) With that in mind, let’s look at some suggestions for new technology you might need for your office.

New computers: We continue to mainly buy Dell computers because we are (on the whole) happy with their products and service. It may be helpful when evaluating Dell computers to understand the company’s nomenclature. For the Optiplex desktop line, the names are all “Optiplex [some number],” with the number portion starting with either 3, 7 or 9. (Examples: Optiplex 9010, Optiplex 745, Optiplex 320.) The thing to remember about these is that the 3, 7 or 9 tells you what grade of computer it is: A 3 means it’s the lowest grade, 7 is standard, and 9 is high-grade. These grades will apply to what sort of processor the computer has, how much memory it can have and so on. For our purposes this year, they can be considered as indications of how long the machines will last, in the sense of being useful and not painfully slow to use. (All of our Dell machines come with a four-year warranty, so if your Optiplex 3020 breaks in 2018, Dell will fix it; however, if your computer takes fifteen minutes (or longer) to start up in the mornings because of Windows or other program updates, Dell will say, ‘Tough.’) In general, I think the 3-class machines are good for a year or two, the 7-class are good for about 3 years, and the 9-class will work for five to six years. Obviously, this rating is highly subjective, but it’s something you want to consider.

Laptop nomenclature is murkier, sadly. Dell is (maybe?) transitioning to a new system, so right now there are two systems in place, and it’s hard to tell what the differences are. The business laptop line is the Latitude. Dell has used a system in which the number portion was a four-digit number, with the first digit (3, 4, 5 or 6) indicating quality, the second indicating screen size (2, 3, 4, 5 indicated 12-inch, 13-inch, 14-inch or 15-inch, respectively), and the last two indicating something else (chronological?). Now, the company uses a number for screen size and then a series name (e.g., Latitude 12 7000 series is a 12-inch Latitude). The series name indicates quality, with 3000 roughly equating to the 3-prefix in Optiplexes, 5000 to 7 and 7000 to 9. Could Dell make it more confusing? Let’s not ask that question. Something to remember as well: If the laptop will not be someone’s main computer, then its speed may not matter as much.

So what does this mean for us? The same as always: You’re better off buying the best computer you can afford. If you are thinking of replacing one or more of the machines in your office, talk to your support specialist and get a quote. We can help you find what you need. If you know what your budget is, let us know, and we can work with that to get you the best machine possible within those constraints. Remember that we will need to place orders no later than June 8 to guarantee that they will go on this FY.