impact on privacy of individuals, they are either necessary for carrying out the agency mission and minimizing waste, fraud, and abuse, are required by law, or benefit the subjects of the records. On balance, the needs of the agency and the benefits to the individuals of these disclosures justify the minimal impact on privacy.

All hard copy records are maintained in secured locked file cabinets in agency offices which are locked during non-duty hours. All electronic information is maintained in a web-based database and stored and backed-up on secured servers. Computer access to information on individuals in the system is limited to the individual, contractor, and the system manager. The review of records retrieved is limited to the individual, supervisor, approved contractors, and system manager.

A copy of the form, used to collect the information from individuals, is attached to this report. The system of records is not exempt from any provisions of the Privacy Act.

[FR Doc. 2011–7722 Filed 4–6–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3410–11–P**

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

**[Docket No. APHIS–2010–0117]**

### Solicitation of Letters of Interest To Participate in National Environmental Policy Act Pilot Project

**AGENCY:** Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is soliciting letters of interest from entities subject to the regulations governing the introduction of genetically engineered (GE) organisms in 7 CFR part 340 to participate in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Pilot Project. The NEPA Pilot Project will test new approaches to developing environmental analyses and documents required under NEPA to determine the extent to which these approaches improve the quality, timeliness, and cost effectiveness of such analyses and documents. The pilot project will focus only on NEPA analyses and documents associated with petitions for nonregulated status for GE organisms.

**DATES:** Letters of interest may be submitted through April 8, 2013 to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mr. David Reinhold, Assistant Director, Environmental Risk Analysis Programs, BRS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 146, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238; (301) 734–0660; *e-mail: david.reinhold@aphis.usda.gov.*

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

#### Background

The regulations in 7 CFR part 340, "Introduction of Organisms and Products Altered or Produced Through Genetic Engineering Which Are Plant Pests or Which There Is Reason to Believe Are Plant Pests," regulate, among other things, the introduction (importation, interstate movement, or release into the environment) of organisms and products altered or produced through genetic engineering that are plant pests or that there is reason to believe are plant pests. Such genetically engineered organisms and products are considered "regulated articles." The regulations in § 340.6(a) provide that any person may submit a petition to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) seeking a determination that an article should not be regulated under 7 CFR part 340, also referred to as a request to grant nonregulated status or to deregulate an article.

Before APHIS determines whether an article can be deregulated, APHIS prepares a plant pest risk assessment (PPRA) to assess the plant pest risk of the article. In accordance with The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), APHIS also prepares an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) to examine potential environmental impacts that may result from an Agency determination of nonregulated status.

The regulations in § 340.6(c)(1) through (c)(5) require the petitioner to submit specific information to meet regulatory requirements and inform APHIS' evaluation of the petition. While petitioners may submit much of the necessary information, APHIS retains primary responsibility for researching and analyzing all the data necessary to prepare the environmental documents. APHIS also evaluates all comments received on the environmental documents. APHIS has, on occasion, used consultants and contractors to perform some of these functions under APHIS guidance and oversight. In APHIS' experience, the cost of a draft EA generally ranges from $60,000–$80,000, and the cost of a complete EIS can exceed $1,000,000.

To explore ways to enhance APHIS' NEPA compliance, APHIS is implementing a NEPA Pilot Project that will involve working with petitioners and outside experts to develop high-quality environmental analyses and documents in a timelier manner. This pilot project is part of a larger effort to improve the petition evaluation process and is one of the strategies identified in USDA's High Priority Performance Goal for biotechnology regulation in the President's Performance Agenda.[1]

The pilot project will explore two voluntary mechanisms: (1) A petitioner-submitted environmental report based upon which APHIS would develop an EA or an EIS; and (2) an EA or EIS prepared by a contractor, funded by a cooperative services agreement between the petitioner and APHIS.[2] This project is consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), which allow Federal agencies to obtain relevant information from applicants for the purpose of conducting a NEPA analysis and to contract for services by an independent contractor (chosen and directed by the Agency) to prepare environmental analyses and documents that are paid for by the petitioners.

The petitioner-submitted environmental reports should contain information necessary to develop a draft EA or EIS, including, for example, a description of the geographic area that will be affected and potential impacts on the environment, such as effects on water quality and sensitive wildlife species.

Under the contractor-prepared EA or EIS alternative, petitioners will provide funds for the environmental analyses and documents, while APHIS will select and direct the contractor. In addition, with this alternative, analyses and documents may be prepared for the entire NEPA process or only part of the process, *i.e.,* for the draft EA or EIS, for the evaluation of comments, and/or for the final EA or EIS.

APHIS will independently evaluate all information and references in the environmental documents, supplement the information and analysis in the environmental reports as necessary, and make its own evaluation of the environmental issues and the adequacy of the analyses of those issues to ensure that the scope and content of the environmental analyses meet all requirements of CEQ's regulations and APHIS' NEPA implementing regulations (7 CFR part 372).

NEPA compliance is an important Agency responsibility, and the pilot project is designed and intended to

[1] To learn more about the President's Performance Agenda, visit *http://www.performance.gov/.*

[2] APHIS will continue to conduct environmenanalyses and prepare environmental documents for regulated entities that are unable or choose not to participate in the pilot project.

assist APHIS in developing more effective methods for the NEPA process. APHIS intends to create mechanisms for early and frequent interactions between APHIS' Biotechnology Regulatory Services program staff and participants in the pilot project to identify and thoroughly evaluate the potential environmental impacts pertinent to the Agency's NEPA analysis. This pilot will also include mechanisms to identify NEPA-related issues early in the process involving both the petitioners and interested partners. APHIS also intends to use the pilot project to develop guidance for all petitioners that clearly identifies the information needed to initiate and complete the required NEPA analysis.

APHIS will evaluate the overall results of the pilot project, including the effectiveness of using environmental analyses and documents prepared by petitioners (environmental reports) as compared to environmental analyses and documents prepared using an independent contractor (EAs and EISs), and a cost analysis of the two approaches in relationship to the quality and timeliness of the final product.

APHIS is soliciting letters of interest from regulated entities interested in participating in the NEPA Pilot Project; no limit has been set on the number of participants. APHIS anticipates that the pilot project will run for 2 years. However, APHIS is interested in advancing the pilot project in the next few months and therefore encourages interested entities to submit letters of interest as soon as possible. Interested entities may submit letters of interest by mail or e-mail through April 8, 2013 to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. APHIS will promptly contact all entities that submit letters of interest to discuss their participation in the NEPA Pilot Project.

**Authority:** 7 U.S.C. 7701–7772 and 7781–7786; 31 U.S.C. 9701; 7 CFR 2.22, 2.80, and 371.3.

Done in Washington, DC, this 1st day of April 2011.

**Kevin Shea,**

*Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.*

[FR Doc. 2011–8329 Filed 4–6–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3410–34–P**

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Farm Service Agency

### Information Collection; Certified State Mediation Program

**AGENCY:** Farm Service Agency, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) is seeking comments from all interested individuals and organizations on an extension of a currently approved information collection that supports the Certified State Mediation Program. The information collection is necessary to ensure the grant program is being administered properly. The collection of information by mail, phone, fax, in person, and by the internet is utilized by FSA initially to determine whether the State meets the eligibility criteria to be a recipient of grant funds. Lack of adequate information to make these determinations could result in the improper administration and appropriation of Federal grant funds.

**DATES:** We will consider comments that we receive by June 6, 2011.

**ADDRESSES:** We invite you to submit comments on this notice. In your comments, include date, volume, and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- *Mail:* Carol Wagner, Certified State Mediation Program Manager, USDA, FSA, Appeals and Litigation Staff, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Ag Stop 0570, Washington, DC 20250–0570.
- *E-mail: Carol.Wagner@wdc.usda.gov.*
- *Fax:* (202) 690–3003.

You may also send comments to the Desk Officer for Agriculture, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Washington, DC 20503. Copies of the information collection may be requested by contacting Carol Wagner at the above addresses.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Carol Wagner, FSA, Appeals and Litigation Staff, telephone (202) 720–4966.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

*Title:* Certified State Mediation Program.

*OMB Control Number:* 0560–0165.

*Expiration Date of Approval:* August 31, 2011.

*Type of Request:* Extension.

*Abstract:* This information is needed for FSA to effectively administer the Certified State Mediation Program in accordance with Subtitles A and B of Title V of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 (7 U.S.C. 5106). FSA requires some of the collected information to be reported in a standard manner. Although other institutions, public and private, generally require and collect information similar to that requested by FSA, there is a wide diversity in reporting practices.

The information to be collected includes an application for certification, re-verification for subsequent annual approval, SF–424, SF–424A, and SF–424B Application for Federal Assistance, financial management systems and reporting requirements, and audit reports. The information collection request has not changed since the last OMB approval.

The information requested is reported annually and is necessary for the FSA to determine eligibility and administer the mediation grant program in an equitable and cost-effective manner.

*Estimated of Annual Burden:* The public reporting burden for this information collection is estimated to average 34 hours per respondent.

*Respondents:* State Agencies.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 35.

*Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent:* 5.

*Estimated Total Annual of Reponses:* 175.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden hours:* 1190 hours.

We are requesting comments on all aspects of this information collection to help us to:

(1) Evaluate whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility;

(2) Evaluate the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;

(3) Enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected;

(4) Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

All comments in response to this notice, including names and addresses when provided, will be a matter of public record. Comments will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval.

Signed at Washington DC, on April 1, 2011.

**Carolyn B. Cooksie,**

*Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.*

[FR Doc. 2011–8320 Filed 4–6–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3410–05–P**