

OMB Control Number: 0572-0032.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) was established in 1994 by the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-354, 108 stat. 3178, 7 U.S.C. 6941 *et seq.*) as successor to the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) with respect to certain programs, including the electric loan and loan guarantee program authorized under the Rural Electrification Act (RE Act) of 1936. The RE Act authorizes and empowers the Administrator of RUS to make and guarantee loans to furnish and improve electric service in rural areas. These loans are amortized over a period of up to 35 years and secured by the borrower's electric assets and/or revenue. RUS will collect information including studies and reports to support borrower loan applications.

Need and Use of the Information: RUS will collect information to determine the eligibility of applicants for loans and loan guarantees under the RE Act; monitor the compliance of borrowers with debt covenants and regulatory requirements in order to protect loan security; ensure that borrowers use loan funds for purposes consistent with the statutory goals of the RE Act; and obtain information on the progress of rural electrification and evaluate the success of RUS program activities. Without the information RUS would be unable to accomplish statutory goals.

Description of Respondents: Not-for-profit institutions; Business or other for-profit.

Number of Respondents: 625.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: On occasion; Annually.

Total Burden Hours: 52,130.

Ruth Brown,

Departmental Information Collection Clearance Officer.

[FR Doc. 2018-01004 Filed 1-19-18; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS-2017-0102]

Third-Party Inspection Programs Under the Animal Welfare Act; Public Meetings

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health

Inspection Service (APHIS) will host a series of public meetings to solicit data and information from the public to aid in the development of criteria for recognizing the use of third-party inspection and certification programs as a positive factor when determining APHIS inspection frequencies at facilities licensed or registered under the Animal Welfare Act.

DATES: The meetings will be held in Santa Clara, CA, on January 18, 2018; Riverdale, MD, on February 8, 2018; Kansas City, MO, on February 22, 2018, and Tampa, FL, on March 8, 2018. The public meetings will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., local time, except for the meeting in Maryland, which will be held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., local time. A virtual listening session will be held on March 14, 2018, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. EST. We will accept written statements regarding the use of third-party inspection and certification programs until March 21, 2018.

ADDRESSES: The public meetings will be held at the following locations:

- *January 18:* Santa Clara Marriott, 2700 Mission College Boulevard, Santa Clara, CA 95054;
- *February 8:* USDA Center at Riverdale, 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737;
- *February 22:* USDA, Beacon Building, 6501 Beacon Road, Kansas City, MO 64133; and
- *March 8:* Renaissance Tampa Hotel International Plaza, 4200 Jim Walter Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33607.

You may also submit written statements using one of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2017-0102>.

- *Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery:* Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS-2017-0102, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Mike Tuck, Management Analyst, Animal Care, APHIS, USDA 4700 River Road Unit 84, Riverdale, MD 20737; (301) 851-3747; James.M.Tuck@aphis.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is announcing a series of meetings to solicit data and information from the public to aid in the development of criteria for recognizing the use of third-party inspection and certification programs as a positive factor when determining APHIS inspection frequencies at facilities licensed or registered under the Animal

Welfare Act (AWA). APHIS already recognizes inspections performed by other government agencies with animal welfare oversight and accreditation by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums as a positive factor when determining the frequency of Federal inspections through the use of a risk-based inspection system, and APHIS is seeking public comment on expanding this consideration to include other types of third-party inspections and certifications.

The risk-based inspection system, initiated in 1998, uses several objective criteria, including but not limited to past compliance history, to determine the minimum inspection frequency at each licensed and registered facility. With this system, APHIS has been able to provide more in-depth inspections and improve its interactions with licensees and registrants—an approach that APHIS firmly believes makes better use of its inspection resources.

The public may submit their comments in response to this notice in writing and/or at in-person and virtual listening sessions. The meetings will be held in various locations across the country and will include an internet-based virtual meeting to facilitate attendance. Participants will have the opportunity to offer written and oral comments.

Specifically, APHIS is seeking data and information regarding the following topics and questions:

1. APHIS is considering recognizing the use of qualified, third-party programs when determining APHIS inspection frequencies at regulated facilities. Would a potential reduction in the frequency of APHIS inspections be a sufficient incentive for regulated facilities to use third-party programs to support compliance under the AWA? Are there other incentives that could be offered to attract participation of regulated entities in the program? Please explain.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of voluntary, third-party programs to support compliance under the AWA? What potential benefits and costs might accrue to regulated facilities that elect to use a third-party program? What are the risks associated with using a third-party program?

3. Are third-party programs likely to be effective in practice? Is there potential for a well-functioning market for third-party programs to develop? Please explain. What existing third-party programs are already used by regulated facilities to help support their AWA compliance?

4. When assessing whether to recognize a third-party program, what

criteria should APHIS consider to assure its independence, determine whether the scope of its services support and align with the AWA, and mitigate potential conflicts of interest and other potential risks? In addition, what information should a regulated facility provide so APHIS may verify its use of a third-party program?

5. Aside from recognizing the use of qualified, third-party programs, what are other methods APHIS could use to encourage facilities to achieve and sustain compliance with the AWA? Also, where do you see the greatest opportunity for APHIS to improve the consistency and effectiveness of its AWA program?

Registration instructions for the listening session are available by contacting the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** or by following the instructions available via the APHIS website at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalwelfare/sa_animal_welfare_news/third-party-inspection-certification-programs.

If you require special accommodations, such as a sign language interpreter, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

Done in Washington, DC, on January 16, 2018.

Kevin Shea,

Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2018-00966 Filed 1-19-18; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

National Agricultural Statistics Service

Notice of Intent To Seek Approval To Revise and Extend a Currently Approved Information Collection

AGENCY: National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the intention of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to request revision and extension of a currently approved information collection, the Agricultural Resources Management Survey and Chemical Use Surveys. A revision to burden hours will be needed due to changes in the size of the target population, sampling design, and/or questionnaire length.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by March 23, 2018 to be assured of consideration.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by docket number 0535-0218, by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* ombofficer@nass.usda.gov.

Include docket number above in the subject line of the message.

- *eFax:* (855) 838-6382.

- *Mail:* Mail any paper, disk, or CD-ROM submissions to: David Hancock, NASS Clearance Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 5336 South Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-2024.

- *Hand Delivery/Courier:* Hand deliver to: David Hancock, NASS Clearance Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 5336 South Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kevin L. Barnes, Associate Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, (202) 720-4333. Copies of this information collection and related instructions can be obtained without charge from David Hancock, NASS—OMB Clearance Officer, at (202) 690-2388 or at ombofficer@nass.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Agricultural Resources Management Survey and Chemical Use Surveys.

OMB Control Number: 0535-0218.

Expiration Date of Current Approval: July 31, 2018.

Type of Request: Intent to revise and extend a currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The Agricultural Resource Management Survey(s) (ARMS) are the primary source of information for the U.S. Department of Agriculture on a broad range of issues related to: Production practices, costs and returns, pest management, chemical usage, and contractor expenses. Data is collected on both a whole farm level and on selected commodities.

ARMS is the only source of information available for objective evaluation of many critical issues related to agriculture and the rural economy, such as: Whole farm finance data, including data sufficient to construct estimates of income for farms by: Type of operation, loan commodities, income for operator households, credit, structure, and organization; marketing information; and other economic data on input usage, production practices, and crop substitution possibilities.

Data from ARMS are used to produce estimates of net farm income by type of

commercial producer as required in 7 U.S.C. 7998 as amended and estimates of enterprise production costs as required in 7 U.S.C. 1441(a) as amended. Data from ARMS are also used as weights in the development of the Prices Paid Index, a component of the Parity Index referred to in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, as amended. These indexes are used to calculate the annual federal grazing fee rates as described in the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 and Executive Order 12548 and as promulgated in regulations found at 36 CFR 222.51, as amended.

In addition, ARMS is used to produce estimates of sector-wide production expenditures and other components of income that are used in constructing the estimates of income and value-added which are transmitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) for use in constructing economy-wide estimates of Gross Domestic Product. This transmittal of data, prepared using the ARMS, is undertaken to satisfy a 1956 agreement between the Office of Management and Budget and the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce that a single set of estimates be published on farm income.

Chemical Use Surveys: Congress has mandated that NASS and ERS build nationally coordinated databases on agricultural chemical use and related farm practices; these databases are the primary vehicles used to produce specified environmental and economic estimates. The surveys will help provide the knowledge and technical means for producers and researchers to address on-farm environmental concerns in a manner that maintains agricultural productivity.

In this approval request, there is only one significant program change. The annual Microbial Food Safety Practices—Packer Survey will be discontinued.

The commodities that are scheduled to be included in this approval are in the following table.

Year	Survey	Target commodity
2018	ARMS Phase II (PPCR).	Soybeans.
	ARMS Phase II (PPR).	Corn and Peanuts.
	Chemical Use .. ARMS Phase III	Vegetables. Soybeans and Cow-Calf.
2019	ARMS Phase II (PPCR).	Cotton, Barley and Sorghum.
	ARMS Phase II (PPR).	Wheat.