

# Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 98-020-1]

#### Fruit Fly Cooperative Eradication Program Environmental Impact Statement

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

**ACTION:** Notice of intent.

**SUMMARY:** We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service intends to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Fruit Fly Cooperative Eradication Program. The environmental impact statement will analyze the potential environmental impacts of programs to eradicate various fruit fly species from the United States mainland. We are seeking comments from the public, as well as government agencies and private industry, concerning issues that should be addressed in the environmental impact statement. Our request for comments is the first step in the development of an environmental impact statement.

**DATES:** Consideration will be given only to comments received on or before April 20, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Please send an original and three copies of your comments to Mr. Harold Smith, Environmental Protection Officer, Environmental Analysis and Documentation, PPD, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737-1237. Please state that your comments refer to Docket No. 98-020-1. Comments received may be inspected at USDA, room 1141, South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Persons wishing to inspect comments are requested to call

ahead on (202) 690-2817 to facilitate entry into the comment reading room.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mr. Harold Smith, Environmental Protection Officer, Environmental Analysis and Documentation, PPD, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737-1237, (301) 734-8565.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Background

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has authority and responsibility for the interdiction, detection, and eradication of various exotic agricultural pests, including fruit flies that are not native to the United States. Many of these species are found now in other parts of the world, including Africa, the Mediterranean, Europe, Oceania, South America, and Central America. Some have managed to establish footholds in Hawaii. If these pests became established on the United States mainland, agricultural losses and resulting costs to the consumer would be devastating.

One such pest, the Mediterranean fruit fly (Medfly), has been introduced to the United States mainland intermittently since its initial introduction in 1929; however, eradication programs have prevented it from becoming established. Medfly eradication programs have taken place in California, Florida, and Texas, and have been conducted as cooperative efforts between the United States Department of Agriculture and State departments of agriculture. Cooperative eradication programs have taken place also for the Mexican fruit fly, Oriental fruit fly, and others. Although some of the programs may use the same or similar control methods, the same control methods are not adaptable to all of the fruit fly species of concern.

The magnitude of these programs, their sometimes controversial natures, and the evolution of new exclusion, detection, and eradication strategies have prompted APHIS to develop, or cooperate in the development of, a programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS) that will review and analyze the potential environmental effects of these Cooperative Fruit Fly Eradication Programs. Also, because many of the programs must be implemented in an emergency manner, it is imperative that APHIS and

cooperating government entities prepare in advance an EIS that accurately predicts and comprehensively analyzes the range of environmental effects that may be expected from program activities. Pursuant to section 1501.7 of the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1501.7), we are issuing this notice of intent to prepare such an EIS.

#### Scoping Process

The initial step in the process of EIS development is scoping. Scoping includes solicitation of public comments and the evaluation of those comments. This process is used for determining the scope of issues to be addressed. We are, therefore, asking for written comments that identify significant environmental issues that should be analyzed in the EIS. We invite comments from the interested public, from Federal, State, and local agencies that have an interest in the Fruit Fly Cooperative Eradication Program, and from Federal and State agencies that have jurisdiction either by law or special expertise regarding any national program issue or environmental impact that should be discussed in the EIS. We will review any comments that are received, taking them into account in the development of the draft EIS.

#### Alternatives

We will consider all reasonable and realistic action alternatives recommended in the comments we receive. The following alternatives have been identified already for comprehensive analysis in the EIS:

- (1) Exclusion,
- (2) Detection,
- (3) Control, and
- (4) No action.

#### Major Issues

It is APHIS' intent to examine the Cooperative Fruit Fly Eradication Program for the primary purpose of reducing risk to public health and to the environment. Following are some of the major issues that will be discussed in the EIS:

- (1) Improving risk reduction strategies,
- (2) Emergency communication strategies,
- (3) Selection of program control components,
- (4) Exploitation of new or evolving technologies,

- (5) Environmental justice considerations, and
- (6) Environmental monitoring.

#### Preparation of the EIS

Following scoping, we will prepare a draft EIS for the Fruit Fly Cooperative Eradication Program. A notice published in the **Federal Register** will announce that the draft EIS is available for review and will announce the dates and locations of public meetings to review the draft EIS.

Done in Washington, DC, this 16th day of March 1998.

**Craig A. Reed,**

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

[FR Doc. 98-7331 Filed 3-19-98; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Commodity Credit Corporation

### Natural Resources Conservation Service

### Farmland Protection Program

**AGENCY:** Commodity Credit Corporation and Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

**ACTION:** Notice of request for proposals (RFP).

**SUMMARY:** Section 388 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (the 1996 Act) established the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). The FPP is administered under the supervision of the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) who is a Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). CCC is requesting proposals from States, Tribes, and units of local government to cooperate in the acquisition of conservation easements or other interests in prime, unique, or other productive soil that is subject to a pending offer from a State, Tribal, or local government for the purpose of limiting conversion to nonagricultural uses of that land.

**DATES:** Proposals must be received in the NRCS State Office by June 18, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Proposals are to be sent to the appropriate State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture. The telephone numbers and addresses of the NRCS State Conservationists are attached in the appendix of this notice.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Humberto Hernandez, Director,

Community Assistance and Rural Development Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, phone: (202) 720-2847; fax: (202) 690-0639; e-mail: cardd.nrcs@usda.gov. Subject: 98FPP.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Background

According to the 1987 Census of Agriculture, one-third of the Nation's agricultural products are produced in metropolitan counties adjacent to large cities. Another one-fourth of these agricultural products are produced in counties adjacent to significant urban populations. Historically, American settlements were located in areas where the land was the most productive. Consequently, some of the Nation's most valuable and productive farmland is located in urban and developing areas. Nearly 85 percent of domestic fruit and vegetable production and 80 percent of our dairy products come from urban-influenced areas.

These areas are continually threatened by rapid development and urban sprawl. Several social and economic changes over the past three decades have influenced the rate at which land is converted to urban and industrial uses. Population growth, shifts in age distribution, inexpensive energy cost, transportation, and economic development have contributed to increases in agricultural land conversion rates. Urban development has been a major cause of farmland conversion. Since 1960, farmland has been converted to other uses at a rate of approximately 1.5 million acres per year.

The gross acreage of farmland converted to urban development is not necessarily the most troubling concern. A greater cause for concern is the quality and the pattern of farmland being converted. In most States, prime farmland is being converted at 2 to 4 times the rate of other less-productive land. Most urbanization takes place as sprawl instead of orderly growth management. In addition, remaining farmland is placed under greater environmental, economic, and social strain as agrarian and urbanizing interests compete. For the agricultural producer, increased costs of production and liability risks are negative side effects of urban development. Agricultural producers are also induced by the development pressure to farm the remaining acreage more intensively, thus, generating adverse impacts on water quality and soil health. For urban dwellers, the loss of open space, and issues related to agricultural production such as pesticide overspray, animal

nutrient odors, dust, and noise are conflicting concerns.

There is, therefore, an important national interest in the protection of farmland. Once developed, productive farmland with rich topsoil is lost forever, placing future food security for the Nation at risk. In addition, agricultural lands are important components of environmental quality, historic landscapes, and are equally important simply for their scenic beauty.

In fiscal years 1996 and 1997, the CCC signed cooperative agreements with 41 State and local government entities in 18 States and obligated \$16.2 million in funds to partner in acquiring conservation easements or other interests in land to limit conversion to nonagricultural uses of the land. Once acquisitions of the pending easement offers are completed, approximately 80,000 acres of valuable farmland on about 230 farms with an estimated easement value of \$134 million will be protected in part with Federal funds.

#### Availability of Funding in Fiscal Year (FY) 1998

Effective on the date of publication of this notice, the CCC is announcing the availability of up to \$17.28 million for the FPP for FY 1998. Selection will be based on the FPP criteria established in this notice. Government entities responding to this RFP must have an existing farmland protection program, have pending offers, and be able to provide funds for at least 50 percent of the fair market value of the pending offers. CCC will evaluate the merits of the requests for participation utilizing the FPP criteria described in this notice and will enter into cooperative agreements with the States, Tribes, or units of local government that have proposals that CCC determines will effectively meet the objectives of the FPP. CCC must receive proposals for participation by June 18, 1998.

#### Overview of the Farmland Protection Program

CCC will accept proposals submitted to the NRCS State Offices from States, Tribes, and units of local government that have pending offers with landowners for the acquisition of conservation easements or other interests in lands that contain prime, unique, or other productive soils. The pending offers must be for the primary purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting conversion to nonagricultural uses of the land. Reference information regarding the FPP can be found in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance #10.913.