

# 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

### Commodity Credit Corporation

#### Conservation Farm Option Pilot Programs

**AGENCY:** Commodity Credit Corporation, United States Department of Agriculture.

**ACTION:** Notice of Request for Proposals (RFP) to establish Conservation Farm Option (CFO) Pilot Programs.

**SUMMARY:** Section 335 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (the 1996 Act) established the Conservation Farm Option (CFO) Pilot Programs. The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) administers the CFO under the general supervision of a Vice President of the CCC who is the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), with concurrence throughout the process by the Executive Vice President of the CCC who is the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA). CCC is requesting proposals from individuals, States or subdivisions thereof, Tribes, universities, and other organizations to cooperate in the development and implementation of CFO pilot programs for producers of wheat, feed grains, upland cotton, and rice.

**DATES:** Proposals must be received by June 1, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Please send proposals to one of the following individuals: Gary Nordstrom, Director, Conservation Operations Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, P.O. Box 2890, Attention CFO, Washington, DC 20013-2890; or George T. Denley, Director, Conservation and Environmental Programs Division, Farm Service Agency, Mail Stop 0513, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20013-0513; Attention: CFO.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dan Smith, Water Issues Team Leader,

Conservation Operations Division, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, phone 202-720-3524; fax: 202-720-4265; e-mail: dan.smith@usda.gov, Attention: CFO; or Edward Rall, Economic and Policy Analysis Staff, Farm Service Agency, phone 202-720-7795; fax: 202-720-8261; e-mail: erall@wdc.fsa.usda.gov, Attention: CFO.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Availability of Funding in Fiscal Year 1998

Congress authorized a \$15 million CFO pilot program for fiscal year 1998. Effective on the date of publication of this notice, proposals will be accepted from individuals, States, Tribes, universities, and other organizations to establish CFO pilot programs for producers of wheat, feed grains, upland cotton, and rice who have production flexibility contracts under the Agricultural Market Transition Act. The proposals must be for the purpose(s) of conserving soil, water, and related resources; protecting or improving water quality; restoring, protecting and creating wetlands; developing and protecting wildlife habitat; or other similar conservation purposes. Other requirements set forth in this notice must also be met. Proposals must be received by June 1, 1998. Contracts for FY 1998 funds need to be executed by September 30, 1998.

#### Background

Traditional agricultural conservation programs provide farmers and ranchers with cost-share and land retirement payments as incentives to protect and conserve soil, water, and other natural resources, and provide technical assistance to implement conservation practices. In certain cases, however, these traditional programs lack sufficient flexibility to allow farmers and ranchers to operate in a manner they consider optimal or to address natural resource concerns for which warrant innovative solutions. The CFO is intended to promote innovative and environmentally-sound methods for addressing these concerns. CFO pilot programs should address resource problems and needs that are well documented and on a scale that will facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of the systems/practices installed, as well as that of the entire program. CFO pilot programs are

intended to be simple, flexible, and should reward sustainable agricultural production practices and support locally led conservation goals. The CFO pilot program will substitute a single payment for the different types of payments available under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), provide an incentive for coordinated, long-term natural resource planning, and be flexible enough to allow farmers and ranchers to operate in economically efficient, but innovative ways. The CFO provides for a locally led approach by allowing individual farmers and ranchers or groups of farmers and ranchers to implement innovative solutions to natural resource problems and encourages implementation of sustainable agricultural production practices. The CFO is a program that permits farmers and ranchers to maximize environmental benefits with minimal land retirement, while maintaining agricultural production.

#### Overview of the Conservation Farm Option Pilot Program

In accordance with the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended (1985 Act), CCC will establish CFO pilot programs for producers of wheat, feed grains, upland cotton, and rice. Only those owners and producers that have a farm with contract acres enrolled in production flexibility contracts established under the 1996 Act are eligible to participate in the CFO. Producers accepted into the CFO must enter into 10-year contracts which may be extended an additional 5 years. The purposes of CFO pilot programs include: (1) Conservation of soil, water, and related resources; (2) water quality protection or improvement; (3) wetland restoration, protection, and creation; (4) wildlife habitat development and protection; and (5) other similar conservation purposes. To enroll in the program, the 1985 Act requires producers to prepare a conservation farm plan which becomes part of the CFO contract. The plan describes all conservation practices to be implemented and maintained on acreage subject to contract. An important goal is to promote the adoption of resource conserving crop rotations while maintaining agricultural production and maximizing

environmental benefits. The 1985 Act also requires the plan to contain a schedule for the implementation and maintenance of the practices, comply with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements of Title XII of the 1985 Act, and contain such other terms as the Secretary may require. Producers must also agree to forgo payments under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In lieu of these payments, the 1985 Act requires the Secretary to offer annual payments under the contract that are equivalent to the payments the owner or producer would have received had the owner or producer participated in the CRP, the WRP and the EQIP. CCC will determine the CFO payment rates taking into consideration the payments that would have been received under the CRP, WRP, and EQIP, as applicable. CRP payments will not exceed the maximum bid price accepted for similar land in the vicinity.

The CFO pilot program will substitute a single annual payment for the different types of payments available under the CRP, the WRP, and EQIP, provide an incentive for coordinated, long-term natural resource planning, and be flexible enough to allow farmers and ranchers to operate in economically efficient, but innovative ways. The CFO provides for a locally-led approach by allowing individual farmers and ranchers, or groups of and ranchers to implement innovative solutions to natural resource problems and encourages implementation of sustainable agricultural production practices. The CFO is a program that permits farmers and ranchers to maximize environmental benefits with minimal land retirement, while maintaining agricultural production.

CCC will determine CFO participation in a two step process: First, CCC will select CFO pilot project areas based on proposals submitted by the public; then, CCC will accept applications from eligible producers within the selected pilot project areas.

#### **CFO Pilot Projects**

CFO pilot projects will address resource problems and needs that are well documented and on a scale that will facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of the systems and practices installed, as well as that of the entire program. CFO pilot projects are intended to be simple, flexible, and should encourage sustainable agricultural production practices and support locally led conservation goals.

CCC will select CFO pilot project areas based on the extent the proposal:

1. demonstrates innovative approaches to conservation program delivery and administration;
2. demonstrates innovative conservation technologies and systems;
3. creates environmental benefits in a cost effective manner;
4. addresses conservation of soil, water, and related resources, water quality protection or improvement; wetland restoration, protection, and creation; and wildlife habitat development and protection;
5. ensures effective monitoring and evaluation of the pilot effort;
6. considers multiple stakeholder participation (partnerships) within the pilot area; and
7. provides additional non-Federal funding.

An interdepartmental committee made up of representatives of several Federal agencies will review the proposals and make recommendations to the Chief, NRCS, who is a Vice President of the CCC, based on criteria available to the public in the CFO proposal package. The CFO proposal package includes the CFO Pilot Proposal Form CCC-1210, instructions for completion of the CCC-1210, and the criteria for evaluating proposals. The CFO proposal package is available from any FSA or NRCS local office. CCC will give preference to proposals that have high ratings based on the criteria upon which proposals will be evaluated.

Pilot projects can involve either an individual or a group. In either case, to be considered for enrollment in CFO, each individual or entity within an approved pilot project area must submit an application which is the basis for the contract between the participant and CCC.

#### **Payment Eligibility**

Producers of wheat, feed grains, upland cotton, and rice who have farms with contract acres enrolled in production flexibility contracts established under the Agricultural Market Transition Act are eligible for payment.

No funds will be paid or transferred to any group, or entity or individual other than through the CFO contracts with the individual producers.

#### **Pilot Project Area Proposal Submission**

Any individual, organization, or entity may submit a proposal for a CFO pilot program. Proposals must be submitted according to instructions found in the CFO proposal package available from any FSA or NRCS local office.

#### **Responsibilities**

For group proposals, the individual, organization, or entity submitting the proposal will be responsible for providing leadership in the overall local planning effort which may include education, information delivery, monitoring and coordination with local, state or subdivisions thereof, tribal, and Federal agencies.

Individual CFO pilot program participants will be responsible for meeting CFO pilot program requirements on their farm or ranch, including development and implementation of a comprehensive, long-term conservation farm plan, and will be responsible for education, information delivery, and monitoring, if included in the proposal.

#### **Minimum Requirements of CFO Pilot Program Proposals**

A completed CFO pilot proposal form. Participation in CFO projects shall be open to all production flexibility contract holders without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status.

#### **Monitoring and Impact Assessment**

An important goal of the CFO pilot programs is to assess the impacts of the systems/practices applied by monitoring key environmental indicators. Individuals may seek assistance from NRCS in meeting any applicable assessment and/or monitoring requirements. Results from impact assessments will be used to develop and modify existing and future conservation systems, practices, and programs.

#### **Compliance**

If a participant fails to carry out the terms and conditions of a CFO contract, CCC may terminate the CFO contract. If the CFO contract is terminated by CCC: the participant shall forfeit all rights to further payments under such contract and may be requested to refund all payments previously received with interest and pay liquidated damages to CCC for CRP and WRP type practices in the amount specified in such contract.

#### **Selection of CFO Pilot Program Proposals/Inter-Departmental Review**

The most important aspect of the program is its capacity to test new approaches to achieving environmental benefits, through either program design or new technology. Preference will be given to proposals that could not be funded by other programs, such as CRP, WRP or EQIP.

Proposals will be reviewed by an interdepartmental committee which will

make recommendations to the Chief, NRCS based on criteria set forth in the CFO proposal package. The review committee may be drawn from the Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Cooperative Extension Service, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, Department of Energy, Economic Research Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Farm Service Agency, Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. The Chief, NRCS, will select proposals for funding. Upon selection of pilot project proposals, all producers with production flexibility contracts under AMTA within project areas will be eligible to participate in the CFO. CFO conservation farm plans will be approved by NRCS and the CFO contracts will be approved and payments made by the local FSA office.

Signed in Washington, D.C. on April 14, 1998.

**Pearlie S. Reed,**

*Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.*

[FR Doc. 98-10511 Filed 4-20-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-16-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Rural Business—Cooperative Service

#### Notice of Request for Approval of New Information Collection

**AGENCY:** Rural Business—Cooperative Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Proposed collection; comments requested.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces RBS' intention to request approval of information collection in support of the Intermediary Relending Program (IRP), Rural Business Enterprise Grant Program, and Rural Economic Development Grant Program.

**DATES:** Comments on this notice must be received by June 22, 1998.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** M. Wayne Stansbery, Loan Specialist, Rural Business—Cooperative Service, USDA, STOP 1521, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: (202) 720-6819.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

*Title:* Survey of revolving loan funds capitalized by USDA Rural Development.

*Type of Request:* New Information Collection.

*Abstract:* The Rural Business—Cooperative Service (RBS), an agency within the Rural Development mission area of the United States Department of Agriculture, operates several programs that provide funds to intermediary organizations (intermediaries) to be used for loans to third-party recipients (ultimate recipients). RBS has entered into a cooperative agreement with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA Tech) to develop an automated data base of information on ultimate recipient loans.

Information will be collected from intermediaries about each ultimate recipient loan, to identify the borrower, date of the loan, loan size, terms, interest rates, collateral, repayment history, location, type of business, jobs impacted, other funds leveraged, and minority owned businesses assisted.

The first reason for developing the data base is to analyze the feasibility of secondary market sales of the loans held by the intermediaries. The data will help to determine whether the loans are salable and, if so, under what terms and conditions. If determined feasible, secondary market sales of loans will allow intermediaries that have received and used money to establish revolving funds to recapitalize almost immediately with private funds, rather than waiting for term loans to be repaid over time.

The second reason for creating the data base is to give RBS better measures and more accurate and complete information for measuring program impact, in accordance with the National Performance and Results Act. Without more data on the ultimate recipients, RBS is limited in its ability to measure the full impact of programs that operate through intermediaries and ultimate recipients.

*Estimate of Burden:* Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 3 hours per response.

*Respondents:* Non-profit corporations, public agencies, Indian tribes, and cooperatives.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 550.

*Estimated Number of Annual Responses per Respondent:* 1.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents:* 2750 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Cheryl Thompson, Programs Team Information Collection Coordinator, (202) 720-9750.

## Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to Cheryl Thompson, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, STOP 0743, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-0743. Comments may be submitted via the Internet by addressing them to "Comments@rus.usda.gov" and must contain the word "revolving" in the subject. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will become a matter of public record.

Dated: April 9, 1998.

**Dayton J. Watkins,**

*Administrator, Rural Business—Cooperative Service.*

[FR Doc. 98-10433 Filed 4-20-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-XY-U

## COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

### Hearing on Schools and Religions

**AGENCY:** Commission on Civil Rights.

**ACTION:** Notice of hearing.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given pursuant to the provisions of the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994, section 3, Public Law 103-419, 108 Stat. 4338, as amended, and 45 CFR 702.3, that a public hearing before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will commence on Wednesday, May 20, 1998, beginning at 9:30 a.m., in the YWCA Building, Conference Room 540, located at 624 Ninth Street, NW., Washington, DC 20425.

The purpose of the hearing is to collect information within the jurisdiction of the Commission, under 45 CFR 702.2, to examine the operation of the Equal Access Act and similar