

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.

JOINT BOARD FOR THE ENROLLMENT OF ACTUARIES

Renewal of Advisory Committee on Actuarial Examinations

AGENCY: Joint Board for the Enrollment of Actuaries.

ACTION: Renewal of advisory committee.

SUMMARY: The Joint Board for the Enrollment of Actuaries announces the renewal of the Advisory Committee on Actuarial Examinations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Darryl Carter, 202-401-5845.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Joint Board on examinations in actuarial mathematics and methodology. The Joint Board administers such examinations in discharging its statutory mandate to enroll individuals who wish to perform actuarial services with respect to pension plans subject to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. The Committee's advisory functions will include, but will not necessarily be limited to: (1) considering areas of actuarial knowledge that should be treated on the examinations; (2) developing examination questions; (3) recommending proposed examinations and pass marks; and (4), as requested by the Joint Board, making recommendations relative to the examination program.

Dated: October 2, 1998.

Paulette Tino,

Chairman, Joint Board for the Enrollment of Actuaries.

[FR Doc. 98-27886 Filed 10-16-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4830-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency

National Food and Agriculture Council; Request for Approval of a New Information Collection

AGENCY: Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), this notice announces the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) intent to request approval of a new information collection in support of the USDA's National Food and Agriculture Council's (FAC) customer service initiative.

DATES: Submit written comments on the collection of information by December 18, 1998, to be assured consideration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS: Contact Leonard Covelto, Quality Customer Service Team Leader, Service Center Implementation Team, Farm Service Agency (FSA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), STOP 0512, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-0512, telephone (202) 720-7796; FAX (202) 690-3434; e-mail leonard-covelto@wdc.fsa.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Generic Information Collection.
OMB Control Number: New submission.

Type of Request: Approval of a new information collection.

Abstract: President Clinton's Executive Order 12862, "Setting Customer Service Standards," September 11, 1993, requires agencies to annually survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services. Executive Order 12862, and ensuing memoranda: "Improving Customer Service," March 22, 1995; and Conducting "Conversations with America" to Further Improve Customer Service, March 3, 1998, require, among other things, that agencies, on an ongoing basis, measure results achieved against published customer service standards and report the results annually. Agencies are directed to provide significant services directly to the public to make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible,

and to provide a means to address customer complaints. The proposed information will enable USDA Service Center and their partner agencies (Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD)) to comply with Executive Order 12862 and the above referenced memoranda.

The types of information collection instruments the FAC Service Center Implementation Team plans to use for the next 3 years are written surveys, focus groups, comment and complaint cards, customer call backs, benchmarking studies, telephone surveys, and structured interviews.

FAC and the USDA Service Center partner agencies will use the information collected to meet requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) and to improve USDA's Service Center operations. The proposed collections will provide current performance and trend data in support of GPRA performance requirements and USDA's National FAC's Strategic and Annual Performance Plans.

Survey data has been collected since 1994 and has been used for creating GPRA initiatives, to support the Service Center and the three partner agencies' strategic plans, and to obtain customer service baseline, as well as, to measure performance against established baselines.

Written and telephone surveys will be designed and conducted in accordance with appropriate sampling design principles. The design and implementation of the surveys will meet the requirements and guidelines of OMB as set forth in the OMB manuals, "The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995: Implementing Guidance" and "Resource Manual for Customer Surveys."

Focus groups have and will continue to be a useful and productive data collection activity. They will be used to explore what our customers view as important service attributes. Focus groups are also very useful for getting customer views of new proposed ways of doing things. In 1996, USDA employees from the three partner agencies conducted 37 focus group meetings across the country. States were selected to insure a balance of programs and farming regions. The goal was to find out what kinds of service customers want and how USDA might best deal

with customer complaints. This qualitative data was compared with our quantitative data from our previous surveys. Customers' views were instrumental in developing USDA Service Center Customer Service Standards and in designing a nationwide comment and complaint process that is now in the pilot test phase. Both of these accomplishments implement mandates of Executive Order 12862 and the above referenced memoranda.

Comment/complaint card participation is voluntary. Cards are given to customers at time of service or are available at the service point of contact. Customers will be able to use the card to submit complaints, compliments, and comments. Use of comment cards was developed as a system for resolving complaints in the minimum amount of time and is an integral part of the comment/complaint process.

Customer callbacks (commonly called service quality calls) will be used to obtain continuous feedback from customers. Specially trained Service Center employees will place telephone calls to a random sample of customers who have received service within the past 24–48 hours. Customers' comments will be entered into a database and

summarized. Reports will be produced for the service provider and management concerning the quality of service being provided. This data will also identify points in our work processes in need of review.

As part of the 3-year plan, benchmarking studies will be conducted when needed and appropriate to ensure that our customers get service that is equal to "best in business." These studies will examine business practices and performance in both the private sector as well as in other governmental entities. Such studies need not be restricted to companies that are in the same general business as the Federal Government.

Structured or personal (one-on-one) interviews will be conducted as needed to obtain information from potential or existing customers. This data will be used as an indicator of potential problems, areas of concern, or areas for improvement.

Information collection requests will be designed to produce valid results that will be generalized, when applicable, to the target participants. All collection instruments will collect reactions, recollections and opinions, not statistical or archival data.

No information collection activity will ask respondents to submit trade

secrets or other confidential information. No information collection activity will contain questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.

The target population is customers who receive or might be eligible to receive service in, from, or through a USDA Service Center. Customers include, but are not limited to, all producers and participants in single and multi-family housing, business and community development, and water and waste programs. USDA will collect data mostly during off-season times, generally from December through early April. This will minimize interference with customers' crop planting and other concentrated agri-business activities, while hopefully, maximizing response rates. Burden estimations for the information collection are based on a 3-year timeframe.

The attached Table is an explanation of the various data collection instruments with regard to Estimate of Burden; Respondents; Estimated Number of Respondents; Estimated Number of Responses Per Respondent; and Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents.

Data collection instrument	Frequency	Estimated number of respondents	Estimated time for responses per respondent	Estimated total annual burden on respondents (hours)
Written surveys	Annual	27,000	15 minutes	6,750
State surveys (15 States)	As appropriate ..	57,000	15 minutes	14,250
Focus groups	As appropriate ..	500	120 minutes	2,400
State focus groups (6 States)	As appropriate ..	288	120 minutes	576
Comment and complaint cards (all States)	Ongoing	58,500	5 minutes	4,875
Customer call backs (6 States)	As appropriate ..	22,500	5 minutes	1,875
Benchmarking studies	As appropriate ..	120	4 hours	480
Telephone surveys (1 national)	As appropriate ..	500	10 minutes	84
Structured interviews (6 States)	As appropriate ..	4,500	30 minutes	2,250

Proposed topics for comments are: (1) whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the USDA Service Center function, including whether the information will have practical utility; (2) the accuracy of the USDA Service Center estimate of burden, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) ways to 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.

Comments should be sent to Leonard Covello, Quality Customer Service Team Leader, Service Center Implementation Team, Farm Service Agency, Department of Agriculture, STOP 0512, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250–0512.

OMB is required to make a decision concerning the collection contained in these proposed regulations between 30 and 60 days after publication of this document in the **Federal Register**. Therefore, a comment to the OMB is best assured of having its full effect if it

is received within 30 days of publication.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for the OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Signed at Washington, DC, on October 14, 1998.

Gregory L. Carnill,

Executive Officer, USDA, National Food and Agriculture Council.

[FR Doc. 98–28065 Filed 10–15–98; 1:09 pm]

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