

# 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

### Agricultural Marketing Service

[Docket No. FV96-501-N]

#### Notice of Request for Extension and Revision of a Currently Approved Information Collection

**AGENCY:** Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), this notice announces the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) request for comments from the fruit, vegetable and ornamental industry to improve or change the procedures for collecting information used to compile and generate new and expand existing fruit, vegetable and ornamental reports to assist the trade in making production and marketing decisions.

**DATES:** Comments on this notice must be received by December 13, 1999, to be assured of consideration.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS:** Contact Terry C. Long, Chief, Fruit and Vegetable Market News Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS-USDA, Room 2503 South Building, PO Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; Telephone: (202) 720-2745, Fax: (202) 720-0547.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

*Title:* Fruit and Vegetable Market News.

*OMB Number:* 0581-0006.

*Expiration Date of Approval:* February 29, 2000.

*Type of Request:* Extension and revision of a currently approved information collection.

*Abstract:* Collection and dissemination of information for fruit, vegetable and ornamental production and to facilitate trading by providing a

price base used by producers, wholesalers, and retailers to market product.

The Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1621-1627), section 203(g) directs and authorizes the collection and dissemination of marketing information including adequate outlook information, on a market area basis, for the purpose of anticipating and meeting consumer requirements, aiding in the maintenance of farm income and to bring about a balance between production and utilization.

The fruit and vegetable industry provides information on a voluntary basis, and is gathered through confidential telephone and face-to-face interviews by market reporters. Reporters request supplies, demand, and prices of over 400 fresh fruit, vegetable, nut ornamental, and other specialty crops.

The fruit and vegetable market news reports are used by academia, but are primarily used by the fruit, vegetable and ornamental trade, which includes packers, processors, brokers, retailers, and producers. The fruit and vegetable industry requested that the Department of Agriculture issue price and supply market reports for commodities of regional, national and international significance in order to assist them in making immediate production and marketing decisions and as a guide to the amount of product in the supply channel.

Many government agencies use the reports to make their market outlook projections. Data from these reports is included in the information forwarded to the Secretary's office as well, as his staff, as needed, to keep them apprised of the current market conditions and movement of fruit, vegetable, and ornamental commodities in the United States. Economists at most major agricultural colleges and universities use the reports to make both short and long term market projections. The data is used extensively by consulting firms and private economists to aid them in determining available supplies and current pricing.

The information is collected, compiled, and disseminated by an impartial third party, in a manner which protects the confidentiality of the reporter. Further, since the Government is a purchaser of fruits and vegetables,

a system to monitor the collection and reporting of data is needed.

*Estimate of Burden:* Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average .033 hours per response.

*Respondents:* Fruit, vegetable, and ornamental industry, or other for-profit businesses, individuals or households, farms, or Federal Government.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 18,361.

*Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent:* 200.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents:* 121,010.

Comments are invited on: (1) 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; (2) 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; (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 may be sent to: Terry C. Long, Chief, Fruit and Vegetable Market News Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS-USDA, Room 2503 South Building, PO Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456.

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

Dated: October 7, 1999.

**Robert C. Keeney,**

*Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.*

[FR Doc. 99-26803 Filed 10-13-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Commodity Credit Corporation

#### Total Quality Systems Audit Implementation

**AGENCY:** Commodity Credit Corporation, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of institution of "Total Quality Systems Audit" program for Commodity Credit Corporation food purchases.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) is phasing in the Total Quality Systems Audit (TQSA) program for CCC's purchases of food for humanitarian food assistance programs. This program is being implemented to ensure that CCC purchases meet customer requirements and needs. Vendors offering processed commodities covered by TQSA for sale to CCC will have to be approved under the TQSA standards which involve inspecting the vendor's quality control system and relying on that system to assure the quality of the end product. TQSA will reduce Government oversight of the commercial sector, but can increase confidence in the final product. The TQSA program is a fee-for-service program, and will be primarily administered for CCC by the Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) through FSA's Warehouse Licensing and Examination Division, Kansas City Commodity Office. All vendors must consult individual procurement announcements to determine whether their commodity is subject to TQSA procedures.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** July 1, 1999.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dean Jensen, Chief, Contract Management Branch, Procurement and Donations Division, Farm Service Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 0555, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-0551, telephone (202) 720-2115, fax (202) 690-1809; or Timothy Mehl, Chief, Warehouse Licensing and Examination Division, Kansas City Commodity Office, 9200 Ward Parkway, Kansas City, Missouri 64114, telephone (816) 926-6843, fax (816) 926-1774.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** TQSA is a new method of identifying suppliers who are considered sufficiently responsible to supply foods for CCC food purchases. The program relies on audits by FSA of the vendor's quality control system. Those audits will be conducted against an established standard. Not all products procured under CCC food assistance programs will be evaluated using TQSA procedures. Vendors should consult the applicable commodity purchase announcement, invitation, Notice to the Trade, or contact the Kansas City Commodity Office to determine whether their product is covered.

The audit program will be conducted in lieu of or will reduce the need for traditional full-scale end-item inspections where only the final product is checked for conformance to product specifications. Under TQSA suppliers are instead required to establish and maintain a quality management system that addresses all aspects of production. By auditing this quality management system, the absolute amount of Government oversight in this process can be substantially reduced while increasing confidence in the quality of the final product.

The audit program will apply specific criteria that a supplier must meet to establish bidder eligibility. During an audit, the supplier's quality management system will be given a rating of "meets," "partially meets," or "does not meet" on multiple criteria. Once all required questions have been addressed by the vendor and the audit team, a score is generated which will provide FSA with a numerical rating. FSA will establish the minimum score necessary for bidder eligibility. If a supplier fails to meet this minimum, they will be considered ineligible to bid until the score is improved to an acceptable level. FSA will phase in TQSA requirements on a commodity by commodity basis, and vendors will be provided sufficient notification in order to meet TQSA requirements before TQSA compliance is incorporated in the applicable commodity contract terms.

Also, by reducing Government oversight and approving vendors prior to awarding contracts, the costs associated with inspecting commodities procured for food assistance programs can be substantially reduced. Also, by decreasing the likelihood of product non-conformance and subsequent rejection, costs associated with reacquiring and replacing product are further reduced. These cost reductions benefit the food assistance programs by allowing higher quality products to be procured more economically.

Annually, more than 825 million pounds of food products valued at approximately \$850 million are purchased by CCC and distributed for use in domestic and international food assistance programs. CCC and its suppliers have spent over \$5 million annually on inspection of those products. TQSA aims to reduce the cost of inspection by a minimum of 30-50 percent.

During the initial months that a supplier is subject to TQSA requirements, they will be required to submit samples to the appropriate commodity testing laboratory for

compliance testing. This requirement is intended to provide supplemental verification of program effectiveness and supplier compliance with TQSA. If deemed appropriate by the contracting office and TQSA staff, the required final product testing by a third party laboratory may be eliminated or reduced.

The development of TQSA started in 1997, when CCC began a pilot program to develop a quality management program that would replace traditional end-item inspection. During the two years of the pilot program, FSA staff worked with members of academia, industry, and Government to develop the criteria and determine the effectiveness of the TQSA program.

Prior to the implementation of the TQSA procedures, CCC relied almost entirely on end-item inspection to ensure that food purchased for domestic and international food assistance programs met the needs and requirements of the program recipients. Traditional statistical sampling methods and finished product testing gives little consideration to the conditions under which a product is produced, only to the characteristics of the final product. This approach only finds nonconforming product and allows it to be removed from the system, it does not prevent the nonconformance from occurring which avoids problems of non-detection that might apply where there was reliance on end-item inspection.

TQSA is based on the proven premise that product conformance can be attained by allowing the supplier to define how production, delivery, and service are handled. USDA's role is to verify that the methods chosen are effective and meet applicable regulatory and contractual requirements, and that the supplier adheres to its stated policies and procedures.

Signed at Washington, DC, on October 6, 1999.

**Keith Kelly,**

*Executive Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.*

[FR Doc. 99-26802 Filed 10-13-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-05-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Food and Nutrition Service

**Agency Information Collection Activities: Proposed Collection; Comment Request—School Breakfast Program**

**AGENCY:** Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.