DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

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

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the Commodity Credit Corporation's intention to request an extension for and revision to a currently approved information collection in support of the Market Access Program.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by February 15, 2000 to be assured of consideration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS: Contact Denise Huttenlocker, Deputy Director, Marketing Operations Staff, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250–1042, (202) 720–4327.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Market Access Program.

OMB Number: 0551–0227.

Expiration Date of Approval: April 30, 2000.

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

Abstract: The primary objective of the Market Access Program is to encourage the development, maintenance, and expansion of commercial export markets for U.S. agricultural products through cost-share assistance to eligible trade organizations that implement a foreign market development program. Financial assistance under this program is made available on a competitive basis. Currently, there are more than 70 organizations participating directly in the program with activities in more than 100 countries. The Market Access Program is administered by personnel of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

Prior to initiating program activities, Participants must submit detailed applications to FAS which include country strategies, constraints, goals and benchmarks, proposed activities, estimated budgets, and performance measurements. Each Participant is also responsible for submitting: (1) Reimbursement claims for approved costs incurred in carrying out approved activities, (2) an end-of-year contribution report, (3) travel reports, and (4) program evaluations. Participants must maintain records on all information submitted to FAS. The information collection is used by FAS to manage, plan, evaluate and account for Government resources. The reports and records are required to ensure the proper and judicious use of public funds.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 24 hours per response.

Respondents: Non-profit organizations, state groups, cooperatives, and commercial entities.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 70.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 41.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 62,830.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Kimberly Chisley, the Agency Information Collection Coordinator, at (202) 720–2568.

Request for Comments

Send comments regarding the accuracy of the burden estimate, ways to minimize the burden, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology, or any other aspect of this collection of information, to:

Kent D. Sisson, Director, Marketing Operations Staff, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW., STOP 1042, Washington, DC 20250–1042.

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 records.

Signed at Washington, DC on December 8, 1999.

Timothy J. Galvin,

Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Service and Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.

[FR Doc. 99–32731 Filed 12–16–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–01–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

Higher Education Challenge Grants Program for Fiscal Year 2000; Request for Proposals and Request for Input

AGENCY: Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of request for proposals and request for input.

SUMMARY: The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is announcing the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2000. Proposals are hereby requested from eligible institutions as identified herein for competitive consideration of Challenge Grant awards. CSREES also is soliciting comments regarding this request for proposals from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next request for proposals for this program. Such comments will be forwarded to the Secretary or his designee for use in meeting the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998.

DATES: Proposals must be received on or before February 14, 2000. Proposals received after the closing date will not be considered for funding. Forms indicating intent to submit a proposal are due on January 17, 2000. User comments are requested within six months from the issuance of the request for proposals. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

ADDRESSES: Hand-delivered proposals (brought in person by the applicant or through a courier service) must be received on or before March 6, 2000, at the following address: Challenge Grants Program; c/o Proposal Services Unit; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 303, Aerospace Center, 901 D Street, SW; Washington, DC 20024. The telephone number is (202) 401–5048. Proposals transmitted via a facsimile (fax) machine will not be accepted.

Proposals submitted through the U.S. mail must be received on or before February 14, 2000. Proposals submitted through the U.S. mail should be sent to the following address: Challenge Grants Program; c/o Proposal Services Unit, Office of Extramural Programs, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 2245, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250–2245.

Form CSREES–711, ''Intent to Submit a Proposal,'' is requested for the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program and is due February 7, 2000. Applicants may either mail Form CSREES–711 to Higher Education Programs, Mail Stop 2251; CSREES–USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250–2251, or fax Form CSREES–711 to the Higher Education Programs office at (202) 720–2030.

Written user comments should be submitted by first-class mail to: Policy and Program Liaison Staff, Office of Extramural Programs, USDA–CSREES, STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250–2299; or via e-mail to: RFP–OEP@reeusda.gov. In your comments, please include the name of the program and the fiscal year of the request for proposals to which you are responding.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jeffrey L. Gilmore, Ph.D., Higher Education Programs, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 2251, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250–2251; telephone: (202) 720–2211; e-mail: jgilmore@reeusda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

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A. Administrative Provisions and Legislative Authority

This Program is subject to the provisions found at 7 CFR Part 3405. These provisions set forth procedures to be followed when submitting grant proposals, rules governing the evaluation of proposals and the awarding of grants, and regulations relating to the post-award administration of grant projects.

This program is authorized by section 1417(b)(1) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)(1)).

B. Program Description

Proposals may be submitted by land-grant and other U.S. colleges and universities offering a baccalaureate degree or first professional degree in at least one discipline or area of the food and agricultural sciences and having a demonstrable capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of food and agricultural sciences generally and to the specific need and/or subject area(s) for which a grant is requested. For FY 2000, grants will be made to U.S. colleges and universities to strengthen their baccalaureate-level teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Proposals directed to the first professional degree in veterinary medicine also are requested for this program. Other projects directed to the graduate level of study will not be supported. An institution eligible under this program includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university. For the purposes of this program, the individual branches of a State university system or public system of higher education, that are separately accredited at the college level as degree granting institutions, are treated as separate institutions. It is intended that projects supported by the program will: (1) Address a State, regional, national, or international educational need; (2) involve a creative or nontraditional approach toward addressing that need which can serve as a model to others; (3) encourage and facilitate better working relationships in the university science and education community, as well as between universities and the private sector, to enhance program quality and supplement available resources; and (4) result in benefits which will likely transcend the project duration and USDA support.

CSREES anticipates that the total amount available for project grants under this program in FY 2000 will be approximately $4,082,000. Projects may be for 18–36 months duration. Grant awards must be matched on a one-for-one basis from a non-Federal source(s). Awards may be up to $100,000 for regular or complementary projects, and up to $250,000 for a joint project. (Please refer to the Administrative Provisions at 7 CFR 3405.2 for the definitions of complementary and joint project proposals.)

Pursuant to section 1462 of NARETPA, 7 U.S.C. 3310, indirect costs charged against a grant award under this program may not exceed 19 percent of the total Federal funds provided under the award. An alternate method to calculate this limit is to multiply total direct costs by 23.456 percent.

For FY 2000, a maximum of two grants may be awarded to any one institution under the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program. This ceiling excludes any subcontracts awarded to an institution pursuant to other grants issued under this program. In FY 2000, there are no limits on the total funds that may be awarded to any one institution. The award of any grants under this program is subject to the availability of appropriations.

The Administrative Provisions require applicant institutions receiving grant awards for joint project proposals to transfer at least one-half of the awarded funds to the two or more other colleges, universities, community colleges, or other institutions assuming a major role in the conduct of the project. For FY 2000, the applicant institution submitting a joint project proposal must retain at least 30 percent of awarded funds to demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project.

For a joint project proposal, each cooperating institution also must provide a project budget for each year of support under the grant as well as a summary budget using Form CSREES–713.

Proposals for FY 2000 must address one or more of the following targeted need areas: (1) Curricula Design and Materials Development; (2) Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching; (3) Instruction Delivery Systems; and (4) Student Experiential Learning.

C. Evaluation Criteria

NARETPA requires that certain priorities be given for teaching enhancement projects in awarding grants under section 1417(b). CSREES considers all applications received in response to this solicitation as teaching enhancement project applications. To implement the NARETPA priorities for proposals submitted for the FY 2000 competition, the evaluation criteria used to evaluate proposals, as stated in the Administrative Provisions (7 CFR 3405.15), have been modified to include new criteria or extra points for proposals demonstrating enhanced coordination among eligible institutions and for proposals focusing on innovative, multidisciplinary education programs, material, or curricula.

Evaluation Criterion andWeight

(a) Potential for addressing a State, regional, national or international need: 65 points.

This criterion assesses the potential of the project to add value by advancing the quality of food and agricultural sciences higher education and producing graduates capable of strengthening the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional work force. This criterion includes the following elements: impact, innovation, multidisciplinary, expected products and results, and continuation plans.

(1) Impact—Does the project address a significant and clearly documented State, regional, multistate, national, or international need? Will the benefits to be derived from the project transcend the applicant institution and/or the grant period?

(2) Innovative and Multidisciplinary Focus—Does the project focus on innovative, multidisciplinary education programs, material, or curricula? Is the project based on a non-traditional approach toward solving a higher

education problem? Is the project relevant to multiple fields in the food and agricultural sciences? Will the project expand partnership ventures among disciplines at a university?

(3) Products and results—Are the expected products and/or results of the project clearly explained? Will the project contribute to an improvement in the quality or diversity of the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional expertise base?

(4) Continuation plans—Are there plans for continuation or expansion of the project beyond USDA support? Are there indications of external, non-Federal support? Are there realistic plans for making the project self-supporting?

(b) Potential of submitting institution(s) to successfully complete project objectives: 70 points.

This criterion assesses the soundness of the proposed approach, the adequacy of human and physical resources available to carry out the project, the institution's commitment to the project, partnerships and collaborative efforts involving all types of institutions, its cost-effectiveness, and the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project.

(1) Proposed approach—Are the objectives achievable, logical, and based on review of literature? Is the plan of operation managerially, educationally, and/or scientifically sound? Is the overall plan integrated with or does it expand upon other major efforts to improve the quality of food and agricultural sciences higher education? Is the timetable realistic?

(2) Resources—Are there adequate institutional resources to carry out the project? Do the project personnel possess requisite expertise to complete successfully the project? Have personnel committed adequate effort to achieve stated objectives and anticipated outcomes? Will the project have adequate administrative support to carry out the proposed activities? Will the project have access to needed resources such as instrumentation, facilities, computer services, library, and other instruction support resources?

(3) Institutional commitment—Is there evidence to substantiate that the institution has a long term commitment to support the result(s) and/or product(s) produced by this project, that it will help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives, or that the project is supported by the strategic plans?

(4) Coordination and partnership efforts—Will the project demonstrate enhanced coordination between the applicant institution(s) and other colleges and universities with food and agricultural sciences programs eligible for grants under this program? Will the project expand partnership ventures among eligible colleges and universities, or with the private sector, that are likely to enhance program quality or supplement resources available to food and agricultural sciences higher education? Will the arrangements for partner(s) and/or collaborator(s) enhance dissemination of the result(s) and/or product(s)?

(5) Budget and cost-effectiveness—Is the budget request justifiable? Are costs reasonable and necessary? Will the total budget be adequate to carry out project activities? Are the source(s) and amount(s) of non-Federal matching support clearly identified and appropriately documented? For a joint project proposal, is the shared budget for three or more institutions explained clearly and in sufficient detail? Is the proposed project cost-effective? Does it demonstrate a creative use of limited resources, maximize educational value per dollar of USDA support, achieve economies of scale, leverage additional funds or have the potential to do so, focus expertise and activity on a targeted need area, or promote coalition building for current or future ventures?

(c) Effectiveness of evaluation plan and potential for dissemination of the result(s) and/or product(s) to other institutions and for utilization by other institutions: 65 points.

This criterion assesses the adequacy of the evaluation strategy, the quality of outcome measures, the expertise and availability of human resources to conduct the evaluation, the record of the key personnel is disseminating advancements in education, e.g., publishing educational articles in peer reviewed journals, the adequacy of the plan for dissemination, and the potential for utilization by other institutions.

(1) Evaluation—Does the proposal contain a well-designed plan to evaluate results of the project? Will this plan provide conclusions suitable for convincing a peer review audience of the accomplishment? Does it allow for continuous and/or frequent feedback during the life of the project? Does the evaluation plan contain outcome measures? Are the outcome measures capable of assessing the quality and usefulness of project results and products? Are the individuals involved in project evaluation skilled in evaluation strategies and procedures? Can the outcome measures provide an objective evaluation? Is the outcome assessment designed in such a way that it can assist faculty at other institutions in deciding whether to use project results or products?

(2) Dissemination—Is there a commitment to submit the results of the project evaluation to peer review by the academic community in the food and agricultural sciences? Does the proposed project include clearly outlined and realistic mechanisms that will lead to widespread dissemination of project results, including national electronic communication systems, publications, presentations at professional conferences, and/or use by faculty development or research/teaching skills workshops?

(3) Utilization—Is it probable that other institutions will adapt the result(s) and/or product(s) of this project for their own use? Can the project serve as a model for others? If successful, is the project likely to lead to education reform? Is the product(s) and/or result(s) likely to provide a significant contribution to the advancement of higher education in the food and agricultural sciences? Are partner(s) and/or collaborator(s) committed to utilize the product(s) and/or result(s)?

D. How to Obtain Application Materials

An Application Kit containing program application materials will be made available to eligible institutions upon request. These materials include the Administrative Provisions, forms, instructions, and other relevant information needed to prepare and submit grant applications. Copies of the Application Kit may be requested from the Proposal Services Unit, Office of Extramural Programs, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 2245; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250–2245. The telephone number is (202) 401–5048. When contacting the Proposal Services Unit, please indicate that you are requesting forms for the FY 2000 Challenge Grants Program.

Application materials may also be requested via Internet by sending a message with your name, mailing address (not e-mail) and telephone number to psb@reeusda.gov that states that you wish to receive a copy of the application materials for the FY 2000 Challenge Grants Program. The materials will then be mailed to you (not e-mailed) as quickly as possible.

E. Submission of a Proposal

An original and seven (7) copies of a proposal must be submitted. Proposals should contain all requested information when submitted. Further information regarding proposal submission is provided in the Program

Announcement in the FY 2000 Application Kit.

F. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under No. 10.217, Higher Education Challenge Grants Program.

G. Stakeholder Input

CSREES is soliciting comments regarding this solicitation of applications from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next request for proposals for the program. Such comments will be forwarded to the Secretary or his designee for use in meeting the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Written comments should be submitted by first-class mail to: Policy and Program Liaison Staff, Office of Extramural Programs, USDA–CSREES; STOP 2299, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250–2299; or via e-mail to: RFP–OEP@reeusda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving stakeholder input comments regarding this RFP, and not for requesting information or forms.)

In your comments, please indicate that you are responding to the FY 2000 Higher Education Challenge Grants Program. Submissions of comments are requested within six months from the issuance of the solicitation of applications. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

Done at Washington, D.C., this 10th day of December 1999.

Charles W. Laughlin,

Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

[FR Doc. 99–32732 Filed 12–16–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 99–052N]

Equivalence Evaluation Process for Foreign Meat and Poultry Food Regulatory Systems; Response to Comments

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice, response to comments.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) published a notice in the **Federal Register** of March 12, 1999 (64 F.R. 12281) announcing the availability of a document that describes the Agency's process for evaluating foreign meat and poultry inspection systems to determine whether they are equivalent to the United States' inspection system. FSIS solicited public comments on this document and held a public meeting on April 14, 1999, to discuss the equivalence evaluation process. The comment period ended May 11, 1999. This notice responds to the comments received from the public.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the comments are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk, Room 102 Cotton Annex, 300 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20250–3700.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Clark Danford, Acting Director, International Policy Division; Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation; (202) 720–6400, or by electronic mail to clark.danford@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The equivalence concept was introduced in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the ''SPS Agreement''), which appears in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations signed in Marrakech on April 15, 1994. The SPS Agreement became effective in January 1995, concurrently with establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which superseded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as the umbrella organization for international trade. The United States is a signatory to the SPS Agreement and is a member of the WTO.

Under Article 4 of the SPS Agreement, an importing member nation must accept an exporting member's SPS measures as equivalent to its own measures if the exporting member has objectively demonstrated that its measures achieve the importing member's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection (ALOP). In other words, each member nation of the WTO, including the United States, must accept as equivalent to its own food regulatory system the food regulatory system of another member that has been demonstrated to furnish the same level of public health protection. However, the burden of demonstrating equivalence is on the exporting country.

Equivalent regulatory systems need not be identical. The specific SPS measures applied by an exporting nation may differ from those required by an importing nation. On the other hand, though WTO members are encouraged to adopt international food standards in order to ''harmonize'' the world's food regulatory systems and facilitate trade, an importing country has the right to decide whether a food regulatory system employed by an exporting country is equivalent to its own or is adequate to achieve the importing country's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection. The importing country also has the right to decide whether the evidence provided to demonstrate equivalence is adequate.

FSIS Equivalence Evaluation Process

FSIS has developed a process for evaluating whether a foreign country's meat and poultry food regulatory system and specific sanitary measures are equivalent to the U.S. system and measures. This process is described in a January 1999 document entitled ''FSIS Process for Evaluating the Equivalence of Foreign Meat and Poultry Regulatory Systems'' (hereafter cited as ''FSIS Process''). Copies of this document are available at the location indicated above in **ADDRESSES.** An electronic copy may be found at the following Internet address www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/news/equiv.htm.

FSIS published a notice in the **Federal Register** of March 12, 1999 (64 F.R. 12281) announcing the availability of this document and soliciting public comments. The Agency also held a public meeting on April 14, 1999, to discuss the equivalence evaluation process. FSIS announced that the comments received would be the basis for further development of this Agency's equivalence evaluation process. The substance of those comments and FSIS responses follows.

Response to Comments

The **Federal Register** notice comment period closed on May 11, 1999. Four organizations commented. Following is a summary of themes presented in the public comments and responses from FSIS.

One commenter expressed support for the FSIS equivalence evaluation process with a caveat that prior notification of which establishments FSIS will visit during a system audit allows establishments to alter their processes and procedures in preparation for the visit and to revert to ''normal'' operations thereafter. This commenter recommended that establishment audits be unannounced.

FSIS responds that foreign inspection system audits are, by necessity, cooperative events. For example, FSIS must first request permission from a