

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Federal Crop Insurance Corporation  
OMB NUMBER: 0563-NEW

**Organic Transition Simulation Model (OTSM) and Online Training Course**

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Circumstances making collection of information necessary**

Under the provisions of section 522 (d) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) operating through the Risk Management Agency (RMA) authorized a partnership with The Rodale Institute for the development of risk management tools for use directly by agricultural producers (Appendix I). The goal of this partnership is to develop: (1) an Organic Transition Simulation Model (OTSM) to help farmers analyze a variety of risk factors and costs assessing the relative economic benefits of organic versus conventional systems over time; and (2) a transition to organic course for farmers and Extension specialists to train producers and educators in the basics of organic production and marketing.

The partnership is consistent with The Rodale Institute's mission to promote a worldwide regenerative food system that improves environmental and human health. The partnership serves to further The Rodale Institute's mission by *educating* farmers on the economic and environmental benefits of organic and regenerative agriculture and by *promoting the adoption* of farming practices that reduce health and environmental risks to farmers, their families, and the broader communities.

Information collection for this study is required for purposes of (1) product development and Beta testing<sup>1</sup>, and (2) program evaluation as specified in Section VII, Tasks 5c, 5f, 6d, and 7 of Signed Partnership Agreement # 03IE08310147 (Appendix II). The product development data collection is necessary to solicit feedback from experts and potential users for testing and perfecting the tools prior to launch.

Data collected from users of the model is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the OTSM and the training course in educating farmers and Extension Specialists about the economic and environmental benefits of organics.

Collection of registration information is necessary to provide secured account access to OTSM and the training course. Individual registration is essential for optimal use of the full range of the tools' resources in a secure environment.

The evaluation information will be used to assess (1) the quality, usability, and effectiveness of OTSM and the training course as risk management tools for farmers.

**2. How, by whom, and for what purpose information is to be used**

All information collected will be used for product development and research purposes only. Data will be reported in the aggregate and no individual information will be disclosed.

Information collected from the Beta testing surveys will be used by The Rodale Institute® project team to revise and improve the tools during the product development phase following recommendations from experts and potential users.

Registration information will be required for farmers and Extension specialists to obtain secure and convenient access to OTSM and the training course. Assigning each user a unique account with password will allow them to compare economic modeling results over time, track progress in completing course modules, and develop a custom-made, working farm plan for transitioning to organic. The data required for registration is limited, additional information is requested which will provide information on the demographic characteristics of the registrant. The data will be used to identify targeted populations such as socially disadvantaged producers and market the tool to diverse audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Test for a computer product prior to commercial release. Beta testing is the last stage of testing, and normally can involve sending the product to *beta test sites* outside the company for real-world exposure or offering the product for a free trial download over the Internet. Beta testing is often preceded by a round of testing called alpha testing. It serves the same purpose as pre-testing a survey, though it can be somewhat more involved. (Retrieved from [http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/B/beta\\_test.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/B/beta_test.html))

The evaluation information collected in this study will be used by The Rodale Institute research and evaluation teams to assess the quality and effectiveness of the OTSM and the online course as educational and risk mitigating tools for farmers and as resources for Extension specialists. Given the scarcity of national data addressing individual producer's needs for education, information, and technical support in transitioning to organic, this data collection provides a unique research opportunity.

Data collected for this evaluation study will also be used by The Rodale Institute's research, training and outreach team for the design and development of further educational and risk mitigating tools for farmers and Extension specialists.

### **3. Use of improved technology**

Given that both OTSM and the training course are online applications, all data collections will be conducted electronically using an automated web-survey system. Perseus Survey Solutions, DreamWeaver, PhotoShop, and Lectora, will be used to generate the questionnaire forms, build the response database and manage the data collection process. Statistical analysis and reports will be prepared using SPSS.

The questionnaires will be designed to minimize data entry time by using close-ended questions whenever possible. Drop-down response choices and other templates will be used to reduce response time.

### **4. Efforts to identify duplication and possibility of modification of similar information**

This data collection is conducted to evaluate two newly-developed online tools and is unique in nature.

### **5. Methods of minimizing the burden on small businesses or entities**

Nearly all farmer respondents to the surveys in this evaluation study will be small businesses. The USDA defines "small farms" as farms with gross sales of less than \$250,000. According to the Small Business Administration definition, crop producers with annual sales of \$750,000 or less are considered "small business". The most burdensome feature of the surveys will be to elicit current information about acreage, products, and the use of organic practices. There is no requirement to provide historical empirical data or to extract information from records. Most survey questions ask for respondent opinions and attitudes, requiring minimal time for reply.

### **6. Consequences if data or account information is not collected**

In the absence of this information (1) the tools cannot be effectively tested prior to launch; (2) individual users will not be able to use all functional features of the tools most effectively and (3) the program evaluation cannot be carried out as specified in the partnership agreement.

### **7. Special circumstances**

There are no special circumstances that would cause the information collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with any known guidelines.

## **8. Federal register notice and consultation with persons outside the agency**

The Federal Register notice was published by the Department of Agriculture, Risk Management Agency on Monday, May 22, 2006, Volume 71, No. 98, page 29301, as a Notice of Intent to Seek Approval to Conduct an Information Collection. No comments or questions were received in response to the Federal Register Notice.

The data collection for this project has been designed by The Rodale Institute® project team. The survey forms have been pilot-tested with farmers and Extension specialists, following consultations with faculty at Pennsylvania State University and with the RMA.

## **9. Payments or gifts to respondents**

Beta testers will receive a token payment of up to \$150 for their time depending on their level of involvement. Survey respondents will receive a \$10 gift certificate for use in The Rodale Institute online bookstore.

The payment is a token amount as an incentive for users of OTSM to become beta testers and provide in depth comments concerning the function and utilization of the OTSM. The gift certificate will allow participants to purchase educational materials related to organic production and management. There will be no Federal funds expended for this incentive.

## **10. Assurance of confidentiality**

U.S. Code Title 18, Part I, Chapter 93, Section 1905, and U.S. Code Title 7, Chapter 36, Section 1502 and Chapter 55, Section 2276 (appendix III) provide for the confidentiality of reported information. These regulations require that all information collected by surveys can only be used for the purpose in which it is intended and in a way that conceals the respondent's identity. Standard disclaimers that all information will be used for research purposes only and will be presented only in the aggregate will be displayed on all survey forms. Data will be stored on a secure server with access authorized for IT management personnel only.

## **11. Questions of a sensitive nature**

There are no questions of a sensitive nature.

## 12. Estimates of burden

As noted above, data collection will be done electronically and designed to require minimal entry time. The annual respondent burden in the collection of this information is estimated as follows:

### Farmers

Nature of contact	Number registered	Frequency	Respondents			Non-Respondents		
			Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours	Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours
Response								
Registration Form	1,420	1	1,136	3	57	284	1	5
Baseline Survey	1,420	1	1,136	10	189			
Satisfaction surveys for OTSM	1,420	1	1,136	7	133			
Satisfaction surveys – for course	1,420	1	1,136	7	133			
Total		4	4,544		512		1	5

### Educators

Nature of contact	Number registered	Frequency	Respondents			Non-Respondents		
			Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours	Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours
Response								
Registration Form	580	1	464	3	23	116	.05	1
Baseline Survey	580	1	464	10	77			
Satisfaction surveys for OTSM	580	1	464	7	54			
Satisfaction surveys – for course	580	1	464	7	54			
Total		4		27	209			1

### Beta Testers

Nature of contact	Number contacted	Frequency	Respondents			Non-Respondents		
			Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours	Number	Minutes/Response	Burden hours
Response								
On-line Course Survey	75	1	60	45	45	15	2	.05
Beta testing survey (OTSM)	75	1	60	45	45	--	--	--
Total		2	120		45	15	2	.05
GRAND TOTAL					769			*

\* Insignificant burden estimated at less than 1 minute per non-response

\*\*All surveys are optional and we anticipate 80% response rate given that incentives are offered.

Using farm income data estimated by USDA's Economic Research Service, we estimate a wage rate of \$21.97/hour in 2006 for the farmer participants. The average wage of agricultural educators was derived from DOL's wage estimate for farm and home management advisors and is estimated at \$22.94/hour in 2006. Based on the mix of farmers and agricultural educators to be contacted, we estimate a blended wage rate of \$22.16/hour yielding an estimated annual cost burden of \$17,169.

## 13. Total annual cost burden to respondent

Based on the mix of farmers and agricultural educators to be contacted, we estimate a blended wage rate of \$22.16/hour yielding an estimated annual cost burden of \$17,169. There are no start-up or maintenance costs for the respondents.

#### **14. Annualized cost to the federal government**

Beta testers—60 testers @ \$150ea. = \$9,000

The Rodale Institute® staff time:

80 hours to create surveys @ \$40 per hour = \$3,200

320 hours to tabulate and report survey results @ \$40 per hour = \$12,800

Total Federal government cost = \$25,000

#### **15. Reasons for change in burden**

This is a new data collection.

#### **16. Tabulation, analysis and publication plans**

All data will be tabulated and analyzed using SPSS and will be reported in the aggregate. The primary use of information collected by this study will be to assess and improve the effectiveness of OTSM and the online course as risk-mitigation and educational tools for farmers and as educational resources to Extension specialists. Survey results will be aggregated and frequency distributions will be displayed in tables and graphs. Descriptive statistics and multivariate techniques will be used to identify determinants of farmer interest in transitioning to organic and their commitment to the educational process. The analysis will address Extension specialists' interest and use of the tools as educational resources.

Results of this research will be used for The Rodale Institute® internal reports, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

#### **17. Request for approval for non-display of expiration date**

There is no request.

#### **18. Exceptions to certification statement.**

There are no exceptions.