

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Federal Crop Insurance Corporation
OMB NUMBER: 0563-0065

TITLE: REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

A. JUSTIFICATION

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this request to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is for approval of a revised Information Collection Burden package submitted by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC), operating through the Risk Management Agency (RMA). The package concerns specific information that interested parties are to provide RMA when responding to a Request for Applications (RFA) for Applications for Research Partnerships. RMA funds (annually) various partnerships (competitive) from funds provided under the Federal Crop Insurance Act

1. Circumstances making collection of information necessary

Section 522(d) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act of 2002 authorizes the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to enter into partnerships with public and private entities for the purpose of increasing the availability of risk management tools for producers of agricultural commodities. The authority identifies qualifying partners to broadly include other Federal agencies and "other appropriate public and private entities with demonstrated capabilities in developing and implementing risk management and marketing options for producers of specialty crops and underserved agricultural commodities".

To implement this authority, the Risk Management Agency (RMA) has further defined its purpose and has developed procedures for the preparation, submission, and evaluation of applications. As a basis for evaluating applications and awarding partnership agreements, applicants are required to submit materials describing their qualifications and the nature of the proposed research. Most information collected from applicants, beyond the narratives and statement of work, will utilize standard forms already approved by OMB or newly developed forms patterned after forms previously approved by OMB.

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

The information collected by applicants will be used by RMA and a review panel of independent reviewers to determine applicant eligibility and to evaluate the applications. Applicants will be scored on each of five criteria: research objectives; RMA involvement/non-financial benefits; research methodology, development, and implementation; management; and bonus points for proposals that address RMA priorities and/or are submitted by applicants representing a geographically diverse area. The scores for qualifying applicants are totaled, listed in rank order of their total scores, and submitted to the manager of the FCIC for a final decision on awards.

The application package available to applicants will include general information and instructions; the requirements for the program narrative statement describing how the applicant will address the program objectives (R&D Form 1); a description of the budget (R&D Form 2); Standard Forms (SF) 424,424A, 424B, LLL which requests basic information, budget information and assurances; and certifications. OMB has separately approved the information collection burdens for SF-

424, 424A, 424B, and LLL. The application package will be available electronically or will be sent to potential applicants in response to a request.

3. Use of improved technology

All application materials are posted on the RMA web site. There is also a link to the application materials on the Grants.gov web site, so all application materials are available for download. Application packages can also be requested by telephone, fax, or e-mail. Applicants are required to submit an electronic copy of the submission for use in the distribution of materials to the evaluation and review panels.

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

Nearly all of the information provided in response to the Request for Applications will be unique to the individual application and not available from other sources.

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

Several actions have been taken to minimize the burden on all applicants, especially smaller organizations. First, most applicant information will be collected using standard forms that have already been approved by OMB or are in established use as required by regulation. Each form is accompanied by an item-by-item instruction sheet that also explains the purpose of the form.

Second, the written narrative describing details of the proposed research is limited to 10 pages. A sample narrative and statement of work template are provided to assist applicants who lack experience in the preparation of proposals.

Third, applicants determine both the nature and scale of the project they propose to undertake. Thus, smaller organizations can propose projects consistent with their capabilities and scale of operation.

Finally, by nature of the partnership with RMA, the applicant has an opportunity (with RMA concurrence) to define the supporting role that RMA will play in the project. The opportunity to use the experience and skills of RMA staff makes it possible for smaller entities to define a reduced role for their organizations.

6. Consequences if information collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently

The information collected from applicants is required both to confirm the applicants' eligibility and to provide a basis for judging the merits of the applications. The ultimate consequence of not collecting this information (and, therefore, not awarding partnership agreements) would be a missed opportunity to improve and/or develop new risk management tools for agricultural producers. This impact would be most acute among those segments of agriculture lacking access to existing risk management tools. Among others, this includes livestock producers, forage and rangeland producers, producers of specialty crops, organic crops, and an array of other underserved commodities. To the extent this outcome would contribute to the perpetuation of existing agricultural disaster assistance programs, it would result in higher Federal outlays of unknown magnitude.

7. Special circumstances

There are no special circumstances that would cause the information collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with the general information guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

8. Federal Register notice and consultation with persons outside the agency

In designing the forms to be used in collecting information from applicants, the Agency has consulted with administrators of similar grant programs operating in other agencies in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In particular, we have consulted with staff in the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service since the audience and functions of the Research Partnerships closely parallels those of the CSREES grant program.

The Federal Register Notice soliciting comments on the Risk Management Agency's intent to seek approval to conduct an information collection was published on September 19, 2008, Volume 73, Number 183, pages 54364-54365. No comments were received.

9. Payments or gifts to respondents

There will be no payments or gifts to respondents.

10. Assurance of confidentiality to respondents

Awarded partnership agreements are available to the public, on request. However, information in the agreement that the applicant considers confidential, privileged, or proprietary will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. All other proposals will be released only with the express written consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law.

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 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.

11. Questions of a sensitive nature

There are no questions of a sensitive nature

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated.

Task	Burden Estimate		
	Minutes per applicant	Number of applicants	Burden hours
Read Federal Register Notice	45	100	75
Proposal Narrative	1,400	100	2,333
Budget Narrative	45	100	75
R&D Form 1	30	100	50
R&D Form 2	600	100	1,000
TOTAL	2,120	100	3,533
OMB Forms			
OMB Standard Form 424	45	100	75
OMB Standard Form 424-A	180	100	300
OMB Standard Form 424-B	15	100	25
OMB Standard Form LLL	10	100	17
AD 1047	10	100	17
AD 1049	<u>10</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>17</u>
TOTAL	270	100	451

Total burden hours: 3,533. The 451 hours are accounted for on a previously approved OMB information collection package (OMB Approval No. 4040-0004; OMB Approval No. 4040-0006; OMB Approval No. 4040-0007; and OMB Approval No. 0348-0046).

Total annual cost of burden to respondent

In estimating the annual cost burden to applicants, hourly rate estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey have been used. A blended rate for level 11 economists (\$38.57/hour) and level 9 social scientists (\$32.31/hour) has been used with a weight of 0.5 applied to each category. A blended rate of \$36.15/hour in 2007 was derived by inflating wage data collected in 2001 and 1998, respectively, by 2.5 percent per year. Applying this hourly rate to the burden hour estimate yields a total annual cost of \$81,554.

13. Provide estimates of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information (do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in items 12 and 14). The cost estimates should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component annualized over its expected useful life, and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.

There are no capital start-up or operation and maintenance costs.

14. Annualized cost to the federal government

RMA estimates that the average amount of time required by RMA, or designated review panel members, to process and evaluate an application under both the Commodity Partnerships and Targeted States of RMA's risk management education programs is 20 hours. This estimate includes time spent by RMA staff to process an application (2 hours) and time spent by review panel members to conduct a thorough technical review (3 persons x 6 hours). Assuming 110 applications will be received in FY 2009, RMA estimates that 2,200 hours will be needed to process and review all applications. Assuming that the hourly cost of staff and reviewers is \$45 per hour, then the annual cost to the Federal Government is \$99,000 (2,200 hours x \$45).

RMA estimates that the average amount of time required by RMA, or designated review panel members, to process and evaluate an application under the Commodity Partnerships Small Sessions risk management education program is 8 hours. This estimate includes time spent by RMA staff to process an application (2 hours) and time spent by review panel members to conduct a thorough technical review (3 persons x 2 hours). Assuming 110 applications will be received in FY 2009, RMA estimates that 880 hours will be needed to process and review all applications. Assuming that the hourly cost of staff and reviewers is \$45 per hour, then the annual cost to the Federal Government is \$39,600 (880 hours x \$45). The total annual cost to the Federal Government for all three programs is \$138,600. The agreement awards resulting from the applications are expected to total about \$10 million for the three education programs.

15. Reasons for change in burden

There was no change in burden.

16. Tabulations, analysis, and publication plans

There will be no tabulation, analysis, or publication of the information collected.

17. Request of approval of non-display of expiration date

The RMA office orders or creates these forms in bulk processing to ensure lowered costs and to ensure a more efficient management. This will ensure that the users of this form will have access to it in a more timely manner. If RMA needs to order more forms prior to an OMB submission for extension of approval, there are no guarantees that a requested expiration date will be used by OMB. We are requesting not to display the expiration date due to confusion to respondents thinking their annual applications are good for the length of time noted in the expiration date rather than expiring at the end of the application submission.

18. Exceptions to certification statement

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

No statistical methods will be used.