



TO: Elke Hodson, Desk Officer, Office of Management and Budget

FROM: Carlos Rodriguez-Franco, Deputy Chief, USDA Forest Service, Research and Development

William Hohenstein, Director, Climate Change Program Office and Office of Environmental Markets, Office of the Chief Economist, USDA

SUBJECT: Request for Emergency Processing and Approval of a New Information Collection Request for Post-Hurricane Research and Assessment of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Communities in the U.S. Caribbean

DATE: April 16, 2018

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requests emergency processing and approval of a new information collection to investigate the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on agriculture, forestry, and rural communities in the U.S. Caribbean and the effectiveness of resilience and response measures by USDA and other governmental, civil society, and private sector entities. Information from agricultural producers, rural residents, and other key stakeholders regarding their exposure, experiences, practices, program participation, and plans before, during, and after the storms will be collected through interviews and focus groups under the direction of USDA Caribbean Climate Hub, located at and led by USDA Forest Service International Institute of Tropical Forestry in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico.

We request emergency processing and approval of this new information collection given the lack of information about the hurricanes' effects on agriculture, forestry, and rural communities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, how these communities coped with and are recovering from the storms, and which factors contributed to their resilience or risks. Results from this collection of information will contribute to comprehensive post-hurricane assessments, to the identification of key factors that enhanced community resilience or increased their vulnerabilities to related risks, and to ongoing response and reconstruction efforts being carried out by USDA, Forest Service, and others throughout the region.

Emergency approval of this information collection by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will permit the timely collection of data from farmers, forest owners, and other citizens, which is critical to data validity and precision, particularly given the potential for the decay of

the quality, detail, and accuracy of recollections over time<sup>1</sup>, and in advance of the onset of the next hurricane season. Moreover, timely data collection and analysis will provide critical information in near real-time for ongoing recovery and restoration efforts by USDA, Forest Service, and other entities and will help to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of our and others' investments in recovery, restoration, and resilience in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. At this point, following normal review and approval procedures, including an initial 60 day notice through the federal register, consideration of comments received, and a subsequent 30 day comment period of the final proposed project would hinder our ability to collect data that could inform post-disaster response and recovery efforts and positively influence longer-term resilience initiatives in the region. This is new research that responds to important knowledge needs that have emerged since the hurricanes and it has taken significant time under challenging conditions to develop a robust research proposal, gain the support of partners, incorporate initial feedback from key stakeholders, and be ready to commence once the proposal is approved. Concurrent with submission of this information collection request, we have published the required 30-day Federal Register Notice announcing this request for emergency processing and seeking public comment.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused widespread and significant damages to farm infrastructure, major crops (e.g., plantains, coffee, ornamentals), livestock (e.g., poultry and milk production), and forested systems (e.g., urban trees, community forests) in the U.S. Caribbean, significantly compromising local livelihoods, food security, and economic stability.<sup>2</sup> Emergency and recovery situations persist in much of the U.S. Caribbean, including places where power sources remain unreliable and limited. Recovery from the extensive impacts of these storms is expected to take a decade or more and considerable human, financial, logistical, and technological resources. Thus, it is imperative for USDA, Forest Service, and our partners to understand the risks to agriculture, forestry, and rural communities from hurricanes and other major disturbances and the effectiveness of risk-reducing strategies, and to incorporate these lessons learned not only into response and reconstruction efforts but also mitigation and adaptation strategies towards enhanced community resilience. As USDA, Forest Service, and others invest in recovery, restoration, and resilience efforts in the region, results from this collection will help to determine related best practices for agriculture, forestry, and rural communities and to ensure effective and efficient decision- and policy-making in the near and long term in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, as well as in other areas preparing for, responding to, and recovering from

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Slovic, P. 1987. Perception of risk. *Science* 236(4799):280–285; Collentreu, R.A., de Moel, H., Jongman, B., Di Baldassarre, G. 2015. The failed-levee effect: Do societies learn from flood disasters? *Natural Hazards* 76(1): 373-388; Wei, J., Wang, F., Lindell, M. 2016. The evolution of stakeholders' perceptions of disaster: a model of information flow. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 67(2): 441-453.

<sup>2</sup> Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture (2017) estimates more than US\$180 million in agricultural production losses and an additional US\$1.825 billion in agricultural infrastructure losses in Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.





natural disasters and disturbances.

USDA Caribbean Climate Hub (CCH) is uniquely positioned to design, develop, and carry out this research project. CCH is one of ten regional USDA Climate Hubs whose mission is to develop and deliver science-based, region-specific information and technologies by USDA agencies and partners, to agricultural and natural resource managers. CCH is located at and led by USDA Forest Service International Institute of Tropical Forestry, whose mission to develop and disseminate scientifically-based knowledge that contributes to the conservation of forests, wildlife, and watersheds of the American tropics in the context of environmental change.

OMB OIRA approval of this new information collection is requested within 5 days of the close of the associated Federal Register Notice. USDA Forest Service R&D and USDA CCH intend to follow this emergency processing request for information collection with a request for a 3-year approval of information collection on disturbance risks, vulnerabilities, and resilience in agriculture, forest, and rural communities in the U.S. Caribbean to be processed under OMB's normal clearance procedures.

In compliance with OMB regulations (5 CFR Part 1320), which implements the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), the information collection and recordkeeping requirements imposed by this section are submitted to OMB for emergency processing and approval. Attached are Supporting Statements A and B and related information collection guides in Appendices I and II.