



1400 Independence Avenue, SW
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TO: Dominic Mancini
Deputy Director
Office of Management and Budget

THROUGH: Levi S. Harrell
Departmental Clearance Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer

FROM: Melissa Bailey
Associate Administrator

SUBJECT: Request for Emergency Review and Approval for a New Information Collection Request

We are requesting emergency review and approval of an information collection package for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to administer a new discretionary grant program, titled the Farm and Food Workers Relief Grant Program (FFWR), authorized and funded under section 751 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CAA) (Pub. L. No. 116—260) in response to the ongoing 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The agency cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance procedures under the PRA due to the immediate need to provide financial assistance to farm and food workers impacted by COVID-19. Through this \$700,000,000 program, AMS will award discretionary grants to State agencies, tribal entities, and nonprofit organizations that will then support relief services to farmworkers, meatpacking, or front-line grocery workers for personal protective equipment (PPE) and costs associated with social distancing, transportation, vaccinations, and personal, family, or living expenses associated with quarantines and testing related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including foregone income and dependent care expenses. Recipients must demonstrate that they have experience in providing support or relief services to farmworkers, meatpacking workers, or grocery workers. Examples of providing support or relief services include, but are not limited to:

- Providing personal protective equipment such as masks to such workers,
- Hosting a COVID-19 vaccine clinic or outreach campaign, or
- Providing financial support to such workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FFWR program emerged as an Administration priority in late spring 2021 after hearing from stakeholders on our other emergency COVID relief grant programs (Pandemic Response and Safety (PRS) and Seafood Processors Pandemic Response and Safety (SPRS)). FFWR is derived from the same funding stream and the same context for emergency justification is being employed. Historically, USDA emergency relief programs provided aid to producers and

processors only. While workers were severely impacted by the loss of income due to emergencies such as crop-affecting droughts or diseases, emergency relief typically did not reach those workers. To correct this imbalance and support the critical worker population on which this sector depends, USDA created the Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program as a part of its pandemic relief package. AMS has received clear direction that we needed to fill the gap and serve this underserved constituency who kept the food supply chain going at the direst of times. The policy development for this effort encompassed many months due to the complexity of working with a new, underserved population, the need to build robust financial controls and ranking criteria for organizations who will be entrusted with significant government funds through this grant program, and the need to obtain guidance from Department of Treasury on the tax implications for payments to affected workers.

Recipients will issue flat-rate \$600 disaster relief payments to eligible workers. Up to 800,000 farmworkers, 500,000 meatpackers, and 42,000 grocery workers are expected to be eligible beneficiaries of these grants. The more limited number of grocery worker beneficiaries is due to the bulk of the funds being targeted to farmworkers and meatpacking workers; the grant program is allocating a limited pool of funding (at least \$20,000,000 of the \$700,000,000) for a grocery worker pilot. The pilot is intended to demonstrate the feasibility of building out a larger program in the future should additional funding become available.

Grants will be awarded in amounts of up to \$50,000,000, and recipients are not required to provide matching funds. The notice of funding opportunity will require the applicant to indicate the number and type of workers they intend to serve, and how they intend to communicate with “hard to reach” worker populations, including workers with low literacy and low English proficiency individuals, throughout the United States.

America’s farmworker, meatpacking and grocery workers have been on the frontlines since the pandemic began, risking their health to keep our food supply secure during this crisis. A 2020 study of deidentified data from the 2014-2017 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) indicates that of the 56.7 million to 74.3 million essential workers and their family members living with them who face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19, as many as 61% are at a heightened risk of severe COVID-19.

Farmworkers represent a population that has faced unique challenges related to health, housing, education, childcare, migration, among others. Labor laws exempt farmworkers in particular from minimum wage and overtime requirements, as well as allowing some exemptions to child labor restrictions. Many farmworkers, unlike other professionals, are not afforded the same safety nets that permit them to miss work, support them with health care, paid leave, or unemployment benefits. Though farmworkers are not necessarily more susceptible to COVID-19 than the general population, many farmworkers lack access to handwashing facilities at work, socially distanced transportation, and low-density housing options. Farmworkers often lack access to preventative medical care, health insurance, or the financial resources to travel to and seek care. The 2017 Census of Agriculture estimated that there are about 2.4 million farmworkers nationwide.

Meatpacking plants experienced some of the deadliest COVID-19 outbreaks when the pandemic first began. Across the country, meatpacking workers have had to use their own money to pay for personal protective equipment to stay safe on the job, shoulder the burden of increased childcare costs, take on expenses from COVID-19 testing and quarantining, and much more.

The meat and poultry industry employs approximately 500,000 workers and represents nearly 30 percent of food and beverage manufacturing employees (USDA-ERS 2020). This workforce is distributed over tasks spanning from the initial animal harvesting efforts in meat packing plants to subsequent tasks for further processing and packaging meat items in processing facilities. This diverse set of tasks involves a series of precise functions requiring training. While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in mass layoffs in several industries, the meat processing sector instead faced critical workforce shortages. Outbreaks of COVID-19 among workers at some facilities and social distancing, school and daycare closures, and measures to protect those people who are most at-risk limited the pool of workers to draw upon. The reserve pool of potential meat packing workers is negligible, even before accounting for these absentee issues. The disruptions presented by COVID-19 to-date have been historic and never experienced by most involved. COVID-19 has seemingly impacted every stage in the meat supply chain.

Like the other categories of essential workers referenced above, frontline grocery workers continue to face health risk during this COVID-19 Delta variant surge. A single-store study conducted in 2020 found that grocery store workers who interact with customers may be five times more likely to contract COVID-19 than their colleagues who don't have direct contact with customers. The Department of Labor estimates that there are about 2.6 million grocery workers nationwide.

The Farm and Food Workers Relief Grant Program is voluntary, and respondents will apply for this specific discretionary program. In doing so, they provide information, and AMS is the primary user of the information. The information collected is needed to certify that participants are complying with applicable program regulations in section 751 of the CAA and in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Guidance on Grants and Agreements (2 C.F.R. Part 200). The data collected is the minimum information necessary for AMS to effectively carry out the program requirements and to provide the respondents the support they request to address the financial costs for their pandemic response efforts.

In compliance with OMB regulations (5 C.F.R. Part 1320) which implement the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), the information collection and recordkeeping requirements that may be imposed by this action are submitted to OMB for emergency review and approval. The additional reporting requirements would not become effective prior to OMB review. Once approved the collection will be merged with OMB No. 0581-0240, AMS Grant Programs.

Attached are the OMB 83-I, the Supporting Statement, and AMS-71 spreadsheet.