

Alternatives Analyzed

The allocation of EQIP funds is the only major program decision made at the national level that has an impact on the quality of the human environment because of the authority and flexibility that must be given to the NRCS State Conservationists to meet the program purposes, and because funding affects where practices will be implemented. NRCS considered three alternatives describing ways to allocate EQIP funds to the States, including allocating EQIP funds based on a national allocation formula, allocating EQIP funds in equal amounts to all States, or a no action alternative. The 2002 Act authorized the expenditure of additional, separate funds for promotion of ground and surface water conservation, so a separate set of alternatives addressed allocation of those funds, including allocating Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC) funds based on an annual national evaluation of critical ground and surface water conservation needs, allocating the GSWC funds in equal amounts to all States, or a no action alternative.

The EA describes potential impacts associated with the alternatives described. The alternatives did not directly result in impacts to the quality of the human environment, but they do have an indirect effect on the geographic location of acres treated by EQIP funded conservation practices. The discussion under each alternative focused on the effects that the decision alternatives would have on where conservation practices would most likely be implemented. NRCS developed network diagrams depicting the chain of natural resource effects resulting from the application of each practice. Based on the analysis, NRCS determined that the use of a national allocation formula best ensured that funds were distributed in a manner that environmental benefits are optimized, and States and Territories with the most significant environmental and natural resource concerns can effectively address national conservation priorities.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Upon review of the analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the selected alternatives, the Chief of NRCS found that, from a national perspective, the program would not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, particularly when focusing on the significant adverse impacts that NEPA is intended to help decision-makers avoid and mitigate against. Because of the potential to

affect one type of resource while improving the condition of another resource, there may, at times, be minimal site-specific adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively. As in the past administration of EQIP, NRCS will continue to prepare documentation of an environmental evaluation on a site-specific level, and will consult with the appropriate entities to avoid, reduce, or mitigate adverse impacts on protected resources. NRCS will also comply with requirements protecting unique geographic features and other resources, as well as policies protecting natural resources. To the extent that other NRCS EQIP activities may result in significant effects to the quality of the human environment, a State or area-wide EA or Environmental Impact Statement may be prepared separately from the National EA. Therefore, a FONSI was issued and no environmental impact statement is required to support national implementation of the program.

Copies of the EA and FONSI may be reviewed at the following location: Conservation Operations Division, NRCS, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 5227-S, Washington, DC 20013-2890. The documents may also be accessed on the Internet, at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EnvAssess/EQIP/EQIP.html>.

Signed in Washington, DC, on May 8, 2003.

Bruce I. Knight,

Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) Inviting Applications for a University Value-Added Research Grant

AGENCY: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This Notice announces the availability of \$300,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2003 to fund a grant for research at a university concerning the effects of projects for value-added agricultural commodities or products on agricultural producers and the commodity markets. Only qualified universities are eligible to apply. This Notice lists the information needed to submit an application for these funds.

DATES: The deadline for receipt of an application is 4 p.m. EST on July 29, 2003. Comments regarding the

information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 must be received on or before July 21, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The address for hand-delivered applications or applications submitted using an express mail or overnight courier service is: Marc Warman, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Room 4016, Washington, DC 20250; Telephone: (202) 720-8460. Applications sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be sent to the following address: Marc Warman, USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service, STOP 3252, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-3252. Applications sent via email attachment must be sent to the following address: marc.warman@usda.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jim Haskell, Acting Deputy Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA, Stop 3250, Room 4016, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-3250, telephone: (202) 720-8460, or email: james.haskell@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Programs Affected

The research funded by this grant relates to a program listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program under the assigned number 10.352 (Value-Added Grants). This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials.

Paperwork Reduction Act

The information collection requirements contained in this Notice have received temporary emergency clearance by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under Control Number 0570-0046. However, in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, RBS will seek standard OMB approval of the reporting requirements contained in this Notice and hereby opens a 60-day public comment period.

Title: Value-Added University Research Grant.

Type of Request: New Collection.

Abstract: This program will be administered by Cooperative Services within the Rural Business-Cooperative Service. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Pub. L. 107-171, signed May 13, 2002) authorized the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to award a grant to support research at a university concerning the effects of projects for value-added agricultural commodities