Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 78, No. 25

Wednesday, February 6, 2013

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Economic Research Service

Notice of Intent To Request New Information Collection

AGENCY: Economic Research Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice invites the general public and other public agencies to send comments regarding any aspect of this proposed information collection. This is a new collection for the Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (also known as National Survey of Business Competitiveness).

DATES: Written comments on this notice must be received on or before April 8, 2013 to be assured of consideration.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments concerning this notice to Tim Wojan, Resource and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Mail Stop 1800, Room 6–135B, Washington, DC 20250–0002. Comments may also be submitted via fax to the attention of Tim Wojan at 202–694–5756 or via email to *twojan@ers.usda.gov*.

All written comments will be open for public inspection at the office of the Economic Research Service during regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday) at 355 E St. SW., Room 6–135B, Washington, DC 20024–3221.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for Office of Management and Budget approval. All comments and replies will be a matter of public record. Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information contact Tim Wojan at the mailing address in the preamble. Tel. 202–694–5419.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: *Title:* Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (aka National Survey of Business Competitiveness)

OMB Number: 0536–XXXX.

Expiration Date: Three years from the date of approval.

Type of Request: New collection.

Abstract: This survey of business establishments, funded through USDA's Rural Development Mission Area, will be conducted over a 6-month period with up to 30,000 respondents to collect information on rural tradable business sectors such as manufacturing and professional services. This information will contribute to a better understanding of how rural businesses and their communities are dealing with the increasing competitive pressures and opportunities associated with the spread of new information technologies through our economy and the business and community characteristics associated with effective response to these pressures and opportunities. This information is critical to the Rural Development Mission Area's aim of creating jobs, developing new markets and increasing competitiveness for rural businesses and communities.

The information to be collected by the Rural Establishment Innovation Survey is necessary to understand: (1) The adoption of innovative practices and their contribution to firm productivity; (2) the availability and use of local and regional assets (such as workforce education, local financial institutions, strong local business and other economic associations, and transportation infrastructure) and the association of these assets with successful adjustment; and (3) the extent and importance of participation in Federal, State and local programs designed to promote rural business vitality and growth. This need is made more urgent by increased international competition in goods and some service markets, particularly from low labor cost countries. The traditional cost advantage of domestic rural establishments has been significantly eroded by these developments, requiring emphasis on new products, new processes, new marketing channels and improved customer service. A thorough understanding of the viability of the rural business sector requires collecting information on the capability for innovation.

As the first collection of information devoted specifically to innovation in rural business establishments, the proposed survey will complement other Federal efforts in gauging innovative activity in the private sector. Information on formal research and development (R&D) activities is collected by the National Science Foundation using the Business R&D and Innovation Survey. While some of this formal research and development activity takes place in nonmetropolitan counties, it is anticipated that the great majority of rural innovation occurs less through the creation of new patentable products than through the adoption of new practices and niche marketing. The emphasis of the proposed collection will be on understanding the process of innovation in business establishments as opposed to measuring R&D inputs.

Another difference between this and other Federal surveys on innovative activity will be the focus on constraints to innovation stemming from nonmetropolitan locations. Information on the availability of skilled workers and the ability to recruit managers and professionals will inform possible human capital impediments to innovation. Information on access to credit needed for business formation and development will allow for assessing financing impediments to innovation. Information on the availability of broadband Internet service and how this capability affects business strategy will allow assessing infrastructure impediments to innovation. Information on interaction with suppliers, customers, competitors, business associations and other local institutions providing real services to the establishment will inform the importance of regional clusters to innovation.

The survey will collect data from about 30,000 business establishments in tradable sectors that will include mining, manufacturing, wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing, information, finance and insurance, professional/scientific/technical services, arts, and management of businesses. Only businesses with 5 or more employees will be included in the sample. While the focus of the survey will be on establishments in nonmetropolitan counties, establishments from metropolitan counties will be sampled in adequate numbers to allow comparative analysis. Businesses will be selected at random from strata defined by establishment size categories, industry and metropolitan or nonmetropolitan status of the county. The sample will be selected from the business establishment list maintained by state employment security departments where state approval is granted, and from a proprietary business establishment list frame for those states where approval is not granted. The much more comprehensive coverage of new and small establishments available in state administrative data provides a compelling argument for this hybrid sample frame approach, as these establishments are critical to examining processes of entrepreneurship and innovation.

The interview protocol will include a screening interview to identify the most knowledgeable person in the establishment to respond to questions regarding innovative activities of the entity. Screening greatly improves the quality and effectiveness of the contact information. The most appropriate phone number, email address and mailing address will be collected at this time to allow efficient distribution of a multi-modal survey instrument to the most appropriate respondent for the business. Respondents will have the flexibility to respond to a web questionnaire, a mail questionnaire, or a telephone survey based on their personal preference. This protocol will reduce respondent burden by using the survey mode which is most efficient for a given respondent. Past research has demonstrated that multi-modal surveys also increase survey response rates. A limited number of control surveys will be used to assess any mode bias.

Social exchange theory will also be invoked as this is seen as integral to the tailored design methodology (Dillman et al., 2009) that will be employed in this study to increase response rate. In addition to offering mixed survey modes, the design will integrate multiple and mutually supportive ways to appeal to the diversity of respondents in this business population. The following are some examples of these design elements:

- The survey request will be distinguishable from other surveys and will emphasize how the information will be used and describe the benefits back to the population for responding to the survey.
- Survey appeals in contacts will show positive regard and call on the norms of social responsibility by asking for respondents' help and advice as some respondents feel rewarded when they know they have helped others.
- Survey contacts will be personally addressed, toll free numbers will be provided for answering questions and providing help. Confidentiality of responses will be ensured and respondents will know how to contact the surveyor if they have questions on security or other issues.
- All contacts will be personalized and will emphasize why the study is important and express appreciation for respondents' help. They will be formally thanked for promptly completing questionnaires.
- Small tangible token rewards provided in advance and at the time of the survey request will be further tested with small businesses to encourage response. Previous survey research has shown that small cash token incentives provided with the survey significantly increase response rates and do much better than promised rewards or nonmonetary rewards.

A key component of tailored survey design is considering and balancing how features of questions, questionnaires, mailings, interviewing, and the context of the survey will influence trust, cost, and rewards associated with the survey circumstances and respondents.

All study instruments will be kept as simple and respondent-friendly as possible. Responses are voluntary and confidential. Responses will be used to produce statistics and for no other purpose. Data files from the survey will not be released to the public.

Affected Public: Respondents include business establishments with at least 5 employees in both nonmetropolitan and metropolitan counties.

Estimated Number of Respondents: The survey is cross-sectional and will be completed at one point in time. The survey will have a complex mixed survey administration to include telephone screening, pre-notification letter with web access, multi-contact telephone interviewing, follow-up nonrespondent mail questionnaires, and simultaneous web questionnaires offered during all contacts. Completion time for each questionnaire, based on comparisons with similar mixed modes is estimated at 33.5 minutes per completion, including time for reading correspondence, returning an eligibility postcard or responding to a screening call, reviewing instructions, gathering data needed, and responding to questionnaire items. It is also expected that the burden for attempted interviews or contacts with those either ineligible or choosing not to participate will average 18.7 minutes per business.

Full Study: The initial sample size for the full study is 30,000 businesses. 17,040 businesses are expected to be eligible for and complete the study. The total estimated response burden for them is 9,521 hours (17,040 respondents × 33.5 minutes) and for those either ineligible or non-responding business is 4,040 hours (12,960 respondents × 18.7 minutes).

Pilot Study: A pilot test of the survey will be done in advance of the full study survey. The purpose of the pilot is to evaluate the survey protocol, and test instruments and questionnaires. The initial sample size for this phase of the research is 4,000 businesses. 2,272 businesses are expected to be eligible for and complete the study. The total estimated response burden for them is 1,269 hours (2,272 respondents × 33.5 minutes). Non-responding or ineligible businesses will experience 539 hours of burden (1,728 respondents × 18.7 minutes). Total respondent burden is estimated at 15,369 hours (see table below).

Testing will be limited to a maximum of 9 businesses which will be consulted on the questionnaire and asked to complete the questionnaire in a cognitive interview test.

ESTIMATED RESPONDENT BURDEN FOR RURAL ESTABLISHMENT INNOVATION SURVEY

Survey	Sample size	Freq	Responses				Non-response or ineligible				Total burden hours
			Response count	Frequency × count	Minute/ response	Burden hours	Response count	Frequency × count	Minute/ response	Burden hours	
Pilot Study	4,000	1	2,272	2,272	33.5	1,269	1,728	1,728	18.7	539	1,808
Full Study	30,000	1	17,040	17,040	33.5	9,521	12,960	12,960	18.7	4,040	13,561
Total	34000					13,600				1,700	15,369

Dated: January 25, 2013.

Mary Bohman,

Administrator, Economic Research Service.

[FR Doc. 2013–02606 Filed 2–5–13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–18–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Economic Research Service

Notice of Intent To Request Revision of the Previously Requested Experimental Economic Research—A New Generic Clearance for Information Collection

AGENCY: Economic Research Service.

ACTION: Notice of changes and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) implementing regulations, this notice announces changes that the Economic Research Service intends to make to a previously request for a new generic clearance vehicle for information collection, namely Experimental Economic Research. On December 2, 2011 and April 24, 2012, ERS published two Notices of solicitation of comments on the aforementioned new information collection in the **Federal Register** (76 FR 75521–75522, December 2, 2011; 77 FR 24455, April 24, 2012). Although ERS did not receive any comments from the general public during the respective commenting periods, it has, since then, engaged in extensive discussions with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regarding the nature and scope of the study and the appropriateness and practicability of the proposed protection for respondent information. As a result, ERS intends to make four changes to the aforementioned information collection. Details of the changes are discussed in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section below.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by March 8, 2013 to be assured consideration.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments concerning this notice to Nathaniel Higgins, Resource and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Mail Stop 1800, Washington, DC 20250–1800. Comments may also be submitted via fax at 202–245–4847 or via email to *nhiggins@ers.usda.gov*.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nathaniel Higgins, using the contact information listed in the **ADDRESSES** section above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On 2 December 2011 the Economic Research Service (ERS) published a notice and request for comments pursuant to its intent to seek Office of Management and Budget Approval for a new information collection (76 FR 75521–75522) [''60-day notice'']. In that notice ERS stated that a number of research techniques, including laboratory and field techniques, exploratory interviews, pilot experiments and respondent debriefing, would be used to collect to inform or evaluate policies. ERS stated that the number of respondents would be 1,800 and the maximum total burden hours would be 2,300. Additionally, ERS stated that it complies with OMB Implementation Guidance, ''Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E–Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA)'' (72 FR 33362, June 15, 2007). In a subsequent notice announcing that the collection had been submitted to OMB for consideration (77 FR 24455–34456, April 24, 2012) [''30-day notice''] ERS stated that the number of respondents would be 5,400 and the total burden hours would be 6,900.

The intent of this notice is to announce four changes to the clearance sought by ERS: (1) The request is being sought as a pilot of the concept of using a generic approval mechanism for the type of experiments listed above and, as such, experiments will be limited to only two topic areas at this time (conservation and nutrition); (2) ERS does not intend to use the information collected under this approval for purposes of developing or evaluating policy; (3) ERS does not intend to invoke CIPSEA for the collection, but instead intends to protect respondent information under the Privacy Act of 1974 and the E-Government Act of 2002, (4) ERS would like to amend the number of respondents to 6,900 and the number of burden hours to 7,025.

The complexity and cost necessary to invoke CIPSEA is not justified given the nature of the collection; the collections would include a very limited amount of personally-identifiable information (PII), and would generally be designed to be hosted in university computer labs, where CIPSEA compliance could not be assured. Consistent with the Privacy Act and the E-Government Act, a Systems of Records Notice (SORN) and a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) will be submitted for approval, as appropriate. The SORN and PIA will document the ways in which participant personally identifiable information will be collected, stored, and accessed. Data will be managed for research purposes only.

Specific details regarding information handling will be specified in individual submissions under this generic clearance, but will conform to these broad guidelines.

This notice gives the public the opportunity to comment on: (1) The appropriate and reasonable invocation of the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended and the E-Government Act of 2002 to assure that personal information collected by Federal agencies is protected, and (2) the increase in the number of respondents and the burden hours proposed by ERS. Comments should be sent to the address in the preamble. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated:January 29, 2013.

Mary Bohman,

Administrator, Economic Research Service.

[FR Doc. 2013–02607 Filed 2–5–13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–18–P