



[6705-01-P]

FARM CREDIT ADMINISTRATION

12 CFR Part 622

RIN 3052-AD41

Rules of Practice and Procedure; Adjusting Civil Money Penalties for Inflation

AGENCY: Farm Credit Administration.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This regulation implements inflation adjustments to civil money penalties (CMPs) that the Farm Credit Administration (FCA) may impose or enforce pursuant to the Farm Credit Act of 1971, as amended (Farm Credit Act), and pursuant to the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, as amended by the National Flood Insurance Reform Act of 1994, and further amended by the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 (Biggert-Waters Act) (collectively FDPA, as amended).

DATES: Effective date: This regulation is effective on [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. Applicability date: The inflation-adjusted CMP were applicable beginning January 15, 2020.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Paul K. Gibbs, Associate Director, Office of Regulatory Policy, Farm Credit Administration, (703) 883-4203, TTY (703) 883-4056,

or

Autumn R. Agans, Senior Attorney, Office of General Counsel, Farm Credit Administration, (703) 883-4082, TTY (703) 883-4056.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Objective

The objective of this regulation is to adjust the maximum CMPs for inflation through a final rulemaking to retain the deterrent effect of such penalties.

II. Background

A. Introduction

The Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended by the Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 (1996 Act) and the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015 (2015 Act) (collectively, 1990 Act, as amended), requires all Federal agencies with the authority to enforce CMPs to evaluate and adjust, if necessary, those CMPs each year to ensure that they continue to maintain their deterrent value and promote compliance with the law. Section 3(2) of the 1990 Act, as amended, defines a civil monetary penalty¹ as any penalty,

¹Note: While the 1990 Act, as amended by 1996 and 2015 Acts, uses the term "civil monetary penalties" for these penalties or other sanctions, the Farm Credit Act and the FCA Regulations use the term "civil money

fine, or other sanction that: (1) Either is for a specific monetary amount as provided by Federal law or has a maximum amount provided for by Federal law; (2) is assessed or enforced by an agency pursuant to Federal law; and (3) is assessed or enforced pursuant to an administrative proceeding or a civil action in the Federal courts.²

The FCA imposes and enforces CMPs through the Farm Credit Act³ and the FDPA, as amended.⁴ FCA's regulations governing CMPs are found in 12 CFR Parts 622 and 623. Part 622 establishes rules of practice and procedure applicable to formal and informal hearings held before the FCA, and to formal investigations conducted under the Farm Credit Act. Part 623 prescribes rules regarding persons who may practice before the FCA and the circumstances under which such persons may be suspended or debarred from practice before the FCA.

B. CMPs Issued Under the Farm Credit Act

The Farm Credit Act provides that any Farm Credit System (System) institution or any officer, director, employee, agent, or other person participating in the

penalties." Both terms have the same meaning. Accordingly, this rule uses the term civil money penalty, and both terms may be used interchangeably.

² See 28 U.S.C. 2461 note.

³ Pub. L. 92-181, as amended.

⁴ 42 U.S.C. 4012a and Pub. L. 103-325, title V, 108 Stat. 2160, 2255-87 (September 23, 1994).

conduct of the affairs of a System institution who violates the terms of a cease-and-desist order that has become final pursuant to section 5.25 or 5.26 of the Farm Credit Act must pay up to a maximum daily amount of \$1,000⁵ during which such violation continues. This CMP maximum was set by the Farm Credit Amendments Act of 1985, which amended the Farm Credit Act. Orders issued by the FCA under section 5.25 or 5.26 of the Farm Credit Act include temporary and permanent cease-and-desist orders. In addition, section 5.32(h) of the Farm Credit Act provides that any directive issued under sections 4.3(b)(2), 4.3A(e), or 4.14A(i) of the Farm Credit Act "shall be treated" as a final order issued under section 5.25 of the Farm Credit Act for purposes of assessing a CMP.

Section 5.32(a) of the Farm Credit Act also states that "[a]ny such institution or person who violates any provision of the [Farm Credit] Act or any regulation issued under this Act shall forfeit and pay a civil penalty of not more than \$500⁶ per day for each day during which such violation continues." This CMP maximum was set by the

⁵ The inflation-adjusted CMP in effect on January 15, 2019, for a violation of a final order is \$2,326 per day, as set forth in § 622.61(a)(1) of FCA regulations.

⁶ The inflation-adjusted CMP in effect on January 15, 2019, for a violation of the Farm Credit Act or a regulation issued under the Farm Credit Act is \$1,052 per day, as set forth in § 622.61(a)(2) of FCA regulations.

Agricultural Credit Act of 1987, which was enacted in 1988, and amends the Farm Credit Act. Current, inflation-adjusted CMP maximums are set forth in existing § 622.61 of FCA regulations.⁷

The FCA also enforces the FDPA, as amended, which requires FCA to assess CMPs for a pattern or practice of committing certain specific actions in violation of the National Flood Insurance Program. The existing maximum CMP for a violation under the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 is \$2,000.^{8, 9}

C. Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015

1. In General

The 2015 Act required all Federal agencies to adjust the CMPs yearly, starting January 15, 2017.

Under Section 4(b) of the 1990 Act, as amended, annual adjustments are to be made yearly no later than January 15 of each year.¹⁰ Section 6 of the 1990 Act, as amended, states that any increase to a civil monetary penalty under this 1990 Act applies only to civil monetary penalties, including those whose associated violation predated such

⁷ Prior adjustments were made under the 1990 Act.

⁸ Pub. L. 112-141, 126 Stat. 405 (July 6, 2012).

⁹ The inflation-adjusted CMP in effect on January 15, 2019, for a flood insurance violation is \$2,187, as set forth in § 622.61(b) of FCA regulations.

¹⁰ Pub. L. 114-74, sec. 701(b)(1).

increase, which are assessed after the date the increase takes effect.

Section 5(b) of the 1990 Act, as amended, defines the term "cost-of-living adjustment" as the percentage (if any) for each civil monetary penalty by which (1) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the month of October of the calendar year preceding the adjustment, exceeds (2) the CPI for the month of October 1 year before the month of October referred to in (1) of the calendar year in which the amount of such civil monetary penalty was last set or adjusted pursuant to law.¹¹

The increase for each CMP adjusted for inflation must be rounded using a method prescribed by section 5(a) of the 1990 Act, as amended, by the 2015 Act.¹²

2. Other Adjustments

If a civil monetary penalty is subject to a cost-of-living adjustment under the 1990 Act, as amended, but is adjusted to an amount greater than the amount of the adjustment required under the Act within the 12 months preceding a required cost-of-living adjustment, the agency

¹¹ The CPI is published by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics, and is available at its Web site:
<ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpi.ai.txt>.

¹² Pursuant to section 5(a)(3) of the 2015 Act, any increase determined under the subsection shall be rounded to the nearest \$1.

is not required to make the cost-of-living adjustment to that CMP in that calendar year.¹³

III. Yearly Adjustments

A. Mathematical Calculations of 2020 Adjustments

The adjustment requirement affects two provisions of section 5.32(a) of the Farm Credit Act. For the 2020 yearly adjustments to the CMPs set forth by the Farm Credit Act, the calculation required by the 2019 White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance¹⁴ is based on the percentage by which the CPI for October 2019 exceeds the CPIs for October 2018. The OMB set forth guidance, as required by the 2015 Act,¹⁵ with a multiplier for calculating the new CMP values.¹⁶ The 2019 OMB multiplier for the 2020 CMPs is 1.01764.

The adjustment also affects the CMPs set by the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, as amended. The adjustment multiplier is the same for all FCA enforced CMPs, set at 1.01764. The maximum CMPs for violations were created in 2012 by the Biggert-Waters Act, which amended the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973.

¹³ Pursuant to section 4(d) of the 1990 Act, as amended.

¹⁴ OMB Circular M-20-05, Implementation of Penalty Inflation Adjustments for 2020, Pursuant to the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015.

¹⁵ 28 U.S.C. 2461 note, section 7(a).

¹⁶ OMB Circular M-20-05, Implementation of Penalty Inflation Adjustments for 2020, Pursuant to the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015.

1. New Penalty Amount in § 622.61(a) (1)

The inflation-adjusted CMP currently in effect for violations of a final order occurring on or after January 15, 2019, is a maximum daily amount of \$2,326.¹⁷ Multiplying the \$2,326 CMP by the 2019 OMB multiplier, 1.01764, yields a total of \$2,403.67. When that number is rounded as required by section 5(a) of the 1990 Act, as amended, the inflation-adjusted maximum increases to \$2,404. Thus, the new CMP maximum is \$2,404, for violations that occur on or after January 15, 2020.

2. New Penalty Amount in § 622.61(a) (2)

The inflation-adjusted CMP currently in effect for violations of the Farm Credit Act or regulations issued under the Farm Credit Act occurring on or after January 15, 2019, is a maximum daily amount of \$1,052.¹⁸ Multiplying the \$1,052 CMP maximum by the 2019 OMB multiplier, 1.01764, yields a total of \$1,070.56. When that number is rounded as required by section 5(a) of the 1990 Act, as amended the inflation-adjusted maximum increases to \$1,071. Thus, the new CMP maximum is \$1,071, for violations that occur on or after January 15, 2020.

3. New Penalty Amounts for Flood Insurance Violations
under § 622.61(b)

¹⁷ 12 CFR 622.61(a) (1).

¹⁸ 12 CFR 622.61(a) (2).

The existing maximum CMP for a pattern or practice of flood insurance violations pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 4012a(f)(5) occurring on or after January 15, 2019, is \$2,187. Multiplying \$2,187 by the 2019 OMB multiplier, 1.01764, yields a total of \$2,225.58. When that number is rounded as required by section 5(a) of the 1990 Act, as amended, the new maximum assessment of the CMP for violating 42 U.S.C. 4012a(f)(5) is \$2,226. Thus, the new CMP maximum is \$2,226, for violations that occur on or after January 15, 2020.

IV. Notice and Comment Not Required by Administrative Procedure Act

The 1990 Act, as amended, gives Federal agencies no discretion in the adjustment of CMPs for the rate of inflation. Further, these revisions are ministerial, technical, and noncontroversial. For these reasons, the FCA finds good cause to determine that public notice and an opportunity to comment are impracticable, unnecessary, and contrary to the public interest pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), and adopts this rule in final form.

V. Regulatory Flexibility Act

Pursuant to section 605(b) of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), the FCA hereby

certifies that this final rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Each of the banks in the System, considered together with its affiliated associations, has assets and annual income in excess of the amounts that would qualify them as small entities. Therefore, System institutions are not "small entities" as defined in the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

List of Subjects in 12 CFR Part 622

Administrative practice and procedure, Crime, Investigations, Penalties.

For the reasons stated in the preamble, part 622 of chapter VI, title 12 of the Code of Federal Regulations is amended as follows:

PART 622--RULES OF PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

1. The authority citation for part 622 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Secs. 5.9, 5.10, 5.17, 5.25-5.37 of the Farm Credit Act (12 U.S.C. 2243, 2244, 2252, 2261-2273); 28 U.S.C. 2461 note; and 42 U.S.C. 4012a(f).

2. Revise § 622.61 to read as follows:

§ 622.61 Adjustment of civil money penalties by the rate of inflation under the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended.

(a) The maximum amount of each civil money penalty within FCA's jurisdiction is adjusted in accordance with the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended (28 U.S.C. 2461 note), as follows:

(1) Amount of civil money penalty imposed under section 5.32 of the Act for violation of a final order issued under section 5.25 or 5.26 of the Act: The maximum daily amount is \$2,404 for violations that occur on or after January 15, 2020.

(2) Amount of civil money penalty for violation of the Act or regulations: the maximum daily amount is \$1,071 for each violation that occurs on or after January 15, 2020.

(b) The maximum civil money penalty amount assessed under 42 U.S.C. 4012a(f) is \$2,226 for each violation that occurs on or after January 15, 2020, with no cap on the total amount of penalties that can be assessed against any single institution during any calendar year.

Dated: January 23, 2020.

Dale Aultman,
Secretary,
Farm Credit Administration Board
[FR Doc. 2020-01410 Filed: 2/3/2020 8:45 am; Publication Date: 2/4/2020]