shall pay assessments to the committee upon demand, which assessments shall be in payment of such handler’s pro rata share of the committee’s expenses.

(b) Assessments shall be levied upon handlers at rates established by the Secretary. Such rates may be established upon the basis of the committee’s recommendations or other available information.

(c) At any time during, or subsequent to, a given fiscal period the committee may recommend the approval of an amended budget and an increase in the rate of assessment. Upon the basis of such recommendations, or other available information, the Secretary may approve an amended budget and increase the assessment rate. Such increase shall be applicable to all Vidalia onions which were handled during such fiscal period.

(d) The payment of assessments for the maintenance and functioning of the committee may be required under this part throughout the period it is in effect irrespective of whether particular provisions of this part are suspended or become inoperative.

(e) To provide funds for the administration of the provisions of this part during the initial fiscal period or the first part of a fiscal period when neither sufficient operating reserve funds nor sufficient revenue from assessments on the current season’s shipments are available, the committee may accept payment of assessments in advance or may borrow money for such purposes.

(f) The committee may impose a late payment charge or an interest charge or both, on any handler who fails to pay any assessment in a timely manner. Such time and the rates shall be recommended by the committee and approved by the Secretary.

§ 955.43 Accounting.

(a) All funds received by the committee pursuant to the provisions of this part shall be used solely for the purposes specified in this part.

(b) The Secretary may at any time require the committee, its members and alternates, employees, agents and all other persons to account for all receipts and disbursements, funds, property, or records for which they are responsible. Whenever any person ceases to be a member or alternate of the committee, such person shall account for all receipts and disbursements and deliver all property and funds in such member’s possession to the committee. The committee’s activities for which such person was responsible, and shall execute such assignments and other instruments as may be necessary or appropriate to vest in the committee full title to all of the property, funds, and claims vested in such person.

(c) The committee may make recommendations to the Secretary for one or more of the members thereof, or any other person, to act as a trustee for holding records, funds, or any other committee property during periods of suspension of this part, or during any period or periods when regulations are not in effect and, upon determining such action is appropriate, the Secretary may direct that such person or persons shall act as trustee or trustees for the committee.

§ 955.44 Excess funds.

If, at the end of a fiscal period, the assessments collected are in excess of expenses incurred, such excess shall be accounted for as follows:

(a) The committee, with the approval of the Secretary, may establish an operating reserve and may carry over to subsequent fiscal periods excess funds in a reserve so established, except funds in the reserve shall not exceed the equivalent of approximately three fiscal periods’ budgeted expenses. Such reserve funds may be used:

1. To defray any expenses authorized under this part;

2. To defray expenses during any fiscal period prior to the time assessment income is sufficient to cover such expenses;

3. To cover deficits incurred during any fiscal period when assessment income is less than expenses;

4. To defray expenses incurred during any period when any or all provisions of this part are suspended or are inoperative; and

5. To cover necessary expenses of liquidation in the event of termination of this part.
Upon termination of this part, any funds not required to defray the necessary expenses of liquidation shall be disposed of in such manner as the Secretary may determine to be appropriate except that to the extent practicable, such funds shall be returned pro rata to the persons from whom such funds were collected.

(b) If such excess is not retained in a reserve as provided in paragraph (a) of this section, each handler entitled to a proportionate refund of the excess assessments collected shall be credited at the end of a fiscal period with such refund against the operations of the following fiscal period unless such handler demands payment thereof, in which event such proportionate refund shall be paid.

§ 955.45 Contributions.

The committee may accept voluntary contributions but these shall only be used to pay expenses incurred pursuant to § 955.50. Such contributions shall be free from any encumbrances by the donor, and the committee shall retain complete control of their use.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

§ 955.50 Research and development.

(a) The committee, with the approval of the Secretary, may establish or provide for the establishment of production research, marketing research and development and marketing promotion projects, including paid advertising, designed to assist, improve, or promote the marketing, distribution, consumption, or efficient production of Vidalia onions. Any such project for the promotion and advertising of Vidalia onions may utilize an identifying mark which shall be made available for use by all handlers in accordance with such terms and conditions as the committee, with the approval of the Secretary, may prescribe. The expense of such projects shall be paid from funds collected pursuant to § 955.42 or § 955.45.

(b) In recommending projects pursuant to this section, the committee shall give consideration to the following:

(1) The expected supply of Vidalia onions in relation to market requirements;

(2) The supply situation among competing areas and commodities;

(3) The anticipated benefits from such projects in relation to their costs;

(4) The need for marketing research with respect to any market development activity; and

(5) Other relevant factors.

(c) If the committee should conclude that a program of research and development should be undertaken, or continued, in any fiscal period, it shall submit the following for the approval of the Secretary:

(1) Its recommendations as to the funds to be obtained pursuant to § 955.42 or § 955.45;

(2) Its recommendation as to any research projects; and

(3) Its recommendations as to promotion activity and paid advertising.

(d) Upon conclusion of each activity, but at least annually, the committee shall summarize and report the results of such activity to the Secretary.

(e) All marketing promotion activity engaged in by the committee, including paid advertising, shall be subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) No marketing promotion, including paid advertising, shall refer to any private brand, private trademark or private trade name;

(2) No promotion or advertising shall disparage the quality, use, value or sale of like or any other agricultural commodity or product, and no false or unwarranted claims shall be made in connection with the product; and

(3) No promotion or advertising shall be undertaken without reason to believe that returns to producers will be improved by such activity.

REPORTS AND RECORDKEEPING

§ 955.60 Reports and recordkeeping.

Upon request of the committee, made with the approval of the Secretary, each handler shall furnish to the committee, in such manner and at such time as it may prescribe, such reports and other information as may be necessary for the committee to perform its duties under this part.

(a) Such reports may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) The quantities of Vidalia onions received by a handler;