

Backgrounder for USDA Officials - Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers

- Since the first days of the Obama Administration, we have worked to write a new chapter for civil rights at USDA. We have taken comprehensive, definitive actions to move the Department into a new era as a model employer and premier service provider.
- We believe that every farmer and rancher should be treated equally and fairly and we are committed to resolving all cases involving allegations of past discrimination by individuals, including Hispanic and women farmers.
- As part of our work towards this new era we announced a settlement with black farmers to address pending claims, and finalized a historic settlement agreement with Native American farmers who claim to have faced discrimination by USDA in past decades.
- And the claims process we announced on February 25, 2011, will turn the page on allegations of discrimination made against the Department by Hispanic and women farmers and provide compensation to a final group of individuals who faced discrimination.
- Together with the Department of Justice, we are providing Hispanic, Latino and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination an option for a streamlined process to resolve their claims simply.
- As we move through this claims process, we will continue our work so that fairness and inclusion serve as the foundation of everything we do at USDA, and that each employee and customer is treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect.
- Never again should hard-working Americans be forced off a farm their family has tilled for generations because they can't get the help they deserve to make it through a bad harvest, or are denied a loan to repair a broken tractor. The American people deserve no less.

Background on Unified Claims Process

- In recent years, Federal courts decided not to certify the lawsuits brought by Hispanic and women farmers as class actions. This means that the individual farmers were left with one option: to take their claims individually through the federal court system.
- Having to rely on the courts might discourage many farmers from seeking redress because of the significant financial and time resources required for an individual lawsuit. The process we announced will help folks resolve their claims more simply. .
- If you believe that USDA improperly denied you farm loan benefits between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic, Latino, or female you can find information about the claims process at www.farmerclaims.gov or by calling 1-888-508-4429.
- Claimants will have 180 days from the opening date of the Claims Period, to be announced by the USDA, within which to file a complete Claims Package.
- As part of this claims process, USDA will conduct extensive outreach and notice efforts to Hispanic and/or women farmer communities so that all eligible farmers and ranchers learn about this option and are provided an opportunity to participate.

Employee Guidance on Handling Inquiries on USDA Civil Rights Cases

Background on USDA Civil Rights Cases

- The Obama Administration has made it a priority to resolve all of the large civil rights cases at USDA. In 2010, USDA entered into a settlement with black farmers to address pending claims, and finalized a historic settlement agreement with Native American farmers who claim to have faced discrimination in past decades. In February 2011, USDA announced a claims resolution process being offered that would turn the page on claims of discrimination made by Hispanic and women farmers who show they faced discrimination in the past.

Talking Points – if asked by customers of USDA offices or if asked by anyone who might represent someone with potential claims against USDA:

- Thanks for your interest in the claim resolution processes USDA has set up to resolve cases involving allegations by individuals of past discrimination by USDA.
- USDA is currently taking definitive actions to enter a new era so the department is seen as a model employer and premier service provider.
- As a USDA employee, I **cannot provide legal advice or offer guidance** for completing a claim or deciding whether to file a claim. If you are looking for **guidance about your potential claim, you may consider contacting a lawyer or other legal service provider** in your community.
- If you are a member of the **media, please contact USDA's Office of Communications** at 202-720-4623.
- If you are member of a legislative staff, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-7095 or the Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs at 202-720-6643.
- But – if you feel you may have been discriminated against by USDA:
 - If you are looking for information about the **Hispanic and Women Farmer Claims Process, please visit:**
 - www.farmerclaims.gov or call 1-888-508-4429
 - If you are looking for information about the **Pigford – The Black Farmers Discrimination Litigation, please visit:**
 - www.blackfarmercase.com or call 1-866-950-5547
 - If you are looking for information about the **Keepseagle - The Native American Farmers Class Action Settlement, please visit:**
 - www.IndianFarmClass.com or call 1-888-233-5506
- Thanks so much for taking part in our continuing efforts to make USDA a better service provider. We are writing a new chapter for civil rights at USDA, where every farmer and rancher is treated equally and fairly.

NOTICE TO HISPANIC AND/OR WOMEN FARMERS AND RANCHERS

COMPENSATION FOR CLAIMS OF DISCRIMINATION

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation. This means you may be eligible if:

- 1.** You sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period;
- 2.** The loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
- 3.** You believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic or your being female.

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims package, access the Hispanic and Women Farmer and Rancher Call Center or website:

Call Center: 1-888-508-4429

Website: www.farmerclaims.gov

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community. **USDA cannot provide legal advice to you.**

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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