

SILVESTRE REYES
16TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
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WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2433 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4831
FAX: (202) 225-2016

DISTRICT OFFICE:
310 NORTH MESA, SUITE 400
EL PASO, TX 79901
(915) 534-4400
FAX: (915) 534-7426
<http://www.house.gov/reyes/>

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2007

The Honorable Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC. 20510-6000

Dear Senator Harkin:


As you finalize your work on the 2007 Farm Bill, I respectfully request that you include several provisions that would help address the long history of discrimination by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) towards Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers.

As you are aware, for many years there have been pending class action lawsuits between these and other minority groups and the USDA, alleging discriminatory practices in lending and the administration of benefit programs. Although other Members of Congress and I have contacted the President and the various Secretaries of the Department of Agriculture numerous times over the past several years asking for a resolution to this issue.

I respectfully request the addition of provisions to the 2007 Farm Bill requiring the Secretary of Agriculture to meet with Hispanic and women farmers in order to establish a mechanism to resolve all outstanding claims for compensation and appropriate relief. If agreement is not reached by these parties, remedial relief should be directed in the 2007 Farm Bill. In addition, to assure meaningful transparency and accountability, I ask that the Department be mandated to report annually to Congress about USDA farm loan and benefit programs. This will help ensure that minority farmers and ranchers have equal access to these important resources.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter. If I may provide additional information or assistance, please feel free to call on me.

Sincerely,


Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress