

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 19, 2009

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We applaud your recent commitment to appropriate \$1.25 billion in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget to settle outstanding discrimination lawsuits by black farmers who missed the initial filing deadline in the *Pigford v. Glickman* lawsuit. In your statement on Wednesday, May 6, 2009, you said that “I am pleased that we are now able to close this chapter in the agency’s history” and that you “hope[d] . . . that the farmers and their families who were denied access to USDA loans and programs will be made whole and will have the chance to rebuild their lives and businesses.” Indeed, we share your desire to bring this ugly chapter to a close by restoring justice and fairness to those who were discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, or gender.

Unfortunately, the settlement of the *Pigford* case merely closes a single chapter of a long narrative of discrimination within the USDA. Indeed, we will never be able to close the entire book of discrimination within the USDA until all victims receive fair and just settlements as compensation for the losses they suffered and the USDA is reformed. To date, approximately \$2.25 billion will have been set aside to resolve USDA discrimination against black farmers, yet thousands of Hispanic farmers and ranchers, many of whom are our constituents, continue to suffer from precisely the same discrimination and have seen no recourse thus far. The USDA’s corrective role in this instance has been clearly laid out, and there remains no legitimate reason to delay action for any of the affected groups.

Moreover, despite language in Section 14011 of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 urging the Administration to settle the outstanding discrimination suits brought by Hispanic and other farmers, as well as encouraging words from Secretary Vilsack himself, we are not aware that USDA has begun working to settle these cases. Lawyers representing Hispanic farmers and ranchers have met with members of Secretary Vilsack’s staff and have offered potential solutions to resolve the pending lawsuits and reform USDA policies to ensure the agency will never discriminate again.

Accordingly, we urge you to work to ensure Hispanic farmers and ranchers, like black farmers with whom you have already settled, can begin to rebuild their lives and businesses. Fundamental fairness requires nothing less, and inconsistent applications of justice only serve to threaten the foundations of this great nation. The sooner we can resolve this issue once and for all, the sooner we can look forward to an agency that serves all Americans equally.

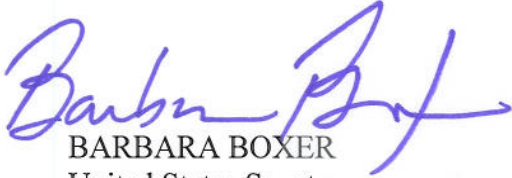
Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator



BARBARA BOXER
United States Senator



MARIA CANTWELL
United States Senator



ARLEN SPECTER
United States Senator



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



MARK UDALL
United States Senator



MICHAEL BENNET
United States Senator