



Hispanic Farmers Reject \$1.3 Billion Settlement Offer

By Carolyn Salazar

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A lawyer for Hispanic farmers that were offered a \$1.3 billion settlement by the federal government Friday is calling the proposal unacceptable and “blatantly discriminatory.”

The Hispanic farmers plan to reject the offer, continuing a saga that rocked the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The farmers are suing the Agriculture Department for discrimination.

The government first announced its intent to settle the case last May, but modified the offer on Friday.

“For whatever reason, they want to discriminate against Hispanic farmers – and they feel they can get away with it,” said Stephen Hill of Howrey LLP, the lead counsel in the case. “This was a repackaging of a bad deal our clients uniformly rejected and considered insulting last year. And nothing has been done in the interim to make it less discriminatory and insulting.”

The offer comes after the government settled a \$2.25 million bias case with black farmers, and a \$3.4 billion case against Native Americans. The minority groups filed lawsuits several years ago claiming they were denied loans and assistance for years while all the money and help went to white farmers.

“The Obama Administration has made it a priority to resolve all claims of past discrimination at USDA, and we are committed to closing this sad chapter in USDA’s history,” Agriculture Secretary [Tom Vilsack](#) said in a statement. “Women and Hispanic farmers and ranchers who allege past discrimination can now come forward to participate in a claims process in which they have the opportunity to receive compensation.”

The government offered \$1.33 billion in compensation plus \$160 million in farm debt relief to eligible women and Hispanic farmers and ranchers. The settlement amounts to about \$50,000 a farmer.

Hill said the offer is 59 percent less than was offered to African American farmers, even though the amount would be distributed among many more people.

The Hispanic farmers also must meet the same burden of proof to collect the money – even though they would be receiving a lot less. The Hispanic or women farmers much

show that they were denied a loan or loan services by the USDA between 1981 and 2000.

He said African American and American Indian farmers have been able to recover more than \$250,000 in their settlement with the government – though some have collected much more.

“The amount offered is clearly and blatantly discriminatory,” he said.