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## **USDA offers settlement to women, Hispanic farmers**

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The Obama administration is offering at least \$1.3 billion to settle complaints from female and Hispanic farmers who say they faced discrimination from the Agriculture Department.

The Agriculture and Justice departments announced Friday that farmers who could prove discrimination could receive up to \$50,000. The proposal comes after the government settled with American Indians over similar discrimination issues last fall and Congress provided money for the second round of a black farmers settlement.

Like the black and American Indian farmers, the thousands of minorities and women say local USDA offices for years denied them loans and other assistance that routinely went to whites.

The government first announced its intent to settle the complaints in May. The more detailed offer announced Friday does not cap the number of farmers who may receive awards and waives some application fees.

Lawyers for both the women and Hispanic farmers said their clients deserve more money. Indian farmers were offered up to \$250,000 each to settle claims.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said any Hispanic and women farmers not pleased with the settlement can still pursue their cases against the government.

"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," Vilsack said. "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."