



Hispanic, Female Farmers Fight USDA

Farmers Claim Discrimination, Want Compensation From USDA

[Isis Romero](#), KSAT 12 News Reporter

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SAN ANTONIO -- Hispanic farmers across the country are fighting the U.S. Department of Agriculture, claiming that for decades, they've been discriminated against.

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A lawsuit filed in 2000, *Garcia v. Vilsack*, outlined the claims.

"This discrimination is well documented, and it's been admitted," said Collette Harrell, an attorney with Howrey LLP, the attorneys representing Hispanic farmers.

"What we're asking, is that they not only close the chapter, but that they close the book of discrimination."

According to Harrell, the U.S. Government recently offered Hispanic and female farmers a \$1.3 billion settlement, which would give each farmer a maximum of \$50,000 each.

"You have to understand that some of these farmers were foreclosed on in the 1990s," Harrell said.

"At the time of their foreclosure, their farm was valued at several million dollars, so \$50,000 is absolutely nothing."

African-American farmers, who also suffered discrimination at the hands of USDA, received a total of \$2.25 billion over the past several years.

The 2007 Ag Census places the number of farms operated by African-Americans at 30,599.

There are 55,570 operated by Hispanics, and 306,209 operated by females.

According to these figures, Hispanic and female farmers outnumber African-American farmers by nearly 12 to 1.

Pearsall farmer Noe Obregon is one of the thousands seeking compensation for damages and wants to see more done.

"Back in the early 80s, I went to the Farmers Home Administration, requesting for loan services, and because I was a Hispanic, we were turned down," Obregon said.

"If they would have given me the same privileges and loans, I would have probably been operating now and been very successful."

Attorneys with Howrey LLP will be meeting with farmers and ranchers throughout the country to bring the issue to light.

Meetings in Atascosa, Jim Wells, Hidalgo, and Fort Bend County are also scheduled for this week.