

Hispanic Farmers Lawsuit Making Small Strides Against USDA

By Na'Tassia Finley - News Center 23 Reporter

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Advocates are trying to locate Hispanic farmers who think they may have been discriminated against by the USDA when it comes to operating or farm purchasing loans.

Many who have filed lawsuits say they've been discriminated against based on their Hispanic roots.

"It's about a group of individuals, who have solely been discriminated against because of their skin color, their last name, or their accent." Hispanic Farmer, David Cantu said.

Cantu, a farmer from the Valley says he's one of them. Back in the early 80's as he was coming into the farming business, a special loan was available to new farmers. He says this was his first experience regarding discrimination through the Farm Service Agency in Hidalgo County.

"The gentleman said, "I wouldn't even apply, it'll be two years at least, before you get your money, so don't even apply, it's not worth it." Cantu recalled.

Cantu is one of several thousand Hispanic farmers from across the nation who has filed a lawsuit against the USDA claiming discrimination.

"We think there's about 80-thousand Hispanic farmers that have been discriminated against." Cantu said.

The Hispanic farmers claims have been acknowledged by the government as they've been offered to settle for \$1.33 billion. However that money is also split among women famers who have filed suit as well. Cantu says it's not good enough. When African American farmers filed a similar discrimination suit, they got over two billion dollars even though that minority group has far less farmers.

"The farmers have always worked the family farm, they take pride in providing for themselves, providing for their neighbors and the country. Today we live in a global society, farmers are providing food for the world and if we don't take care of them, we're gonna be in a bad way." Cantu expressed.

Focusing locally.... "The Valley has the largest concentration of minority farmers in the state." Cantu said.

While some of these Hispanic farmers are being hit hard, losing their farms, or cutting back on crop production. Cantu adds the impact could be felt for the community in which they live.

"Small farmers, not only Hispanic farmers, have a very positive impact on their communities because they buy seed, buy fertilizer, pay local workers, it's not uncommon for us to spend \$150-thousand in one community, locally."

The group is hoping to bring the issue to light so that Hispanic farmers who think they too have been discriminated against will come forward.