



## Latino Life

### Obama offers \$1.3 billion settlement to Mexican American farmers

By

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The Obama administration today offered to settle longstanding discrimination lawsuits filed by Mexican American and women farmers, who routinely faced discrimination at the hands of local agents of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The White House's offer: \$1.3 billion.

The Associated Press reported the Mexican American farmers were seeking a larger settlement in *Garcia v. Vilsack*. Some of them lost their farms after local agents deliberately delayed or refused them loans to which they would have been entitled. Meanwhile, white farmers in the same areas received loans and, most importantly, got them in time to plant their crops. Latino farmers also were denied access to non-loan benefit programs.

Even Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has called the department's history in these cases "sordid."

Similar lawsuits have been filed by African American and Native American farmers. At the moment, a \$1.25 billion settlement with African American farmers rests in Congress, awaiting approval. This, in addition, to an even larger settlement in 1999.

All the while, though, Justice Department lawyers have downplayed the discrimination claims, fighting class-action status, and circumvented settlements.

The AP story says, the deal has not been finalized. "Under the proposal, the government would reach out to farming communities to make women and Latinos aware of the settlement," the story says. "Successful claimants could get a maximum of \$50,000, but the awards could be lower, depending on how many people win claims."

Stephen Hill, who is representing Mexican American farmers, calls the administration's offer "disappointing."

"This fight is far from over," he said in a press release. "While we applaud the government's beginning settlement discussions there is much more to be considered before this can be presented to those who have suffered this discrimination. The Justice Department's proposal serves to highlight the inequities being faced by Hispanic farmers as the government insists on treating groups that suffered the same discrimination differently. Hispanic and women farmers represent a significantly larger group than black farmers, yet the offer from the (Department of Justice) allots only a fraction of the compensation that black farmers have received. Our farmers have to wonder why their government feels that the value of their pain is so much less than that of other minorities."

"The administration still has a ways to go in order to treat Hispanic farmers and ranchers fairly, and on par with other victims of discrimination," Hill said in the AP story.

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