



COURT REFUSES TO HEAR FARMERS' LAWSUIT

Pearsall Family Among Original Plaintiffs

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SAN ANTONIO -- The discrimination claims of more than 100 Hispanic farmers from Texas to California may have to be heard individually by lower courts now that the U.S. Supreme Court has rejected the view they represent a class action. That decision may come in early February. However, African American farmers have been awarded settlements totaling \$2.4 billion, beginning in 1999.

"Is it because blacks are better than Hispanics?" Modesta Rodriguez Salazar, of Pearsall, said. "It's just not possible. Why are they doing this to us?"

According to the lawsuit's Washington D.C. attorney Stephen Hill, the U.S. Department of Agriculture admitted to decades of discrimination against minority farmers in their handling of farm loans. The U.S. Congress even ordered their proven claims be paid in the 2008 Farm Bill. "Perhaps the bitterest pill is that this administration ... pledged to end discrimination and they selectively agree to compensate only one victim group," Hill said.

Salazar's attorney said the White House also can order the Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture to settle the cases still pending.

Her family's once-productive land has been overtaken by mesquite trees that blanket their 500-acre farm in Frio County. If they ever get a settlement, she said it will go toward bringing the land back to life with the crops it once produced.

Bought in 1952 by the family patriarch, Manuel Rodriguez, a successful farmer in Brownsville, Salazar said her father was warned by Anglo neighbors, "We don't know what's going to happen, but they will take this farm away from you."

She recalls how the first sign of trouble came when the town's only banker back then called in a \$1,000 note.

"My brother and my dad just looked at each other and said, 'We don't have no other loans,'" Salazar said. Hearing that, she said the banker's Anglo secretary wrote a check for the amount herself.

A few years later, her family hired an attorney whose wealthy friend offered to pay what the Rodriguez brothers owed.

Decades later, they encountered similar discrimination in the handling of loan applications by the local offices of the Farmers Home Administration, now the Farmers Service Agency under the USDA.

"Not just my family, but all farmers," said Salazar. The claims of women and Native American farmers also are still pending.

She said she was disappointed in the Supreme Court's denial of their cases
"There's no justice in this country."

Before she began crying, Salazar's 75-year-old sister, Manuela, pounded her fist on the sofa as she said in Spanish, "They squashed us."

Her 68-year-old brother, Modesto Rodriguez, who also took up the fight for their family farm and whose speech is limited by illness, said in Spanish, "If we were Anglos, it would be different." Still, the 65-year-old Salazar hopes to see justice done before she and her siblings leave this earth.

"I'll continue fighting probably until I die," she said.

For more information, visit [Garcia Class Action](#) or [Justice for Hispanic Farmers](#).

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