



Hispanic farmers fight back Claim USDA is source of discrimination

BY MARVIN TESSNEER
October 20, 2009

United States Department of Agriculture Secretary of Agriculture Tom [Vilsack](#) assured farmers and rural dwellers during his listening tour on Sept. 30 at the Southern New Mexico State Fair that he would take their messages back to President Barack Obama. “President Obama has instructed me to listen to you, to explain what we are doing for farmers and rural people in Washington,” [Vilsack](#) said. “He wants you to understand that we are listening to you.”

While [Vilsack](#) spoke, about 50 people in the section directly before him were wearing T-shirts bearing a green USDA emblem that was circled with a red ring and a red slash with the word “discriminación.” Recently, Doña Ana County farmer Guadalupe Garcia filed a class-action suit against [Vilsack](#) in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, charging the USDA with discrimination against Hispanic farmers by denying them loans and other benefits in violation of the Equal Opportunity Act. Among the complaints in the suit was that county committees that review Farm Service Administration loan and credit applications for approval are open to abuse and that they are selective and discriminate in their approval of applications. Hispanic attorneys have demanded more committee accountability. When applications are filed, FSA personnel should review them promptly to see if they are complete. If they are not complete, the FSA should provide in writing what is required to complete the applications.

An aide to Secretary of Agriculture Tom [Vilsack](#) told protesters [Vilsack](#) was not offended by their anti-USDA T-shirts. But their display emphasized their skepticism over progress with a class-action suit and [Vilsack](#)’s promise to carry their messages to President Barack Obama.