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## USDA Secretary Visits LC To Hear Concerns From Farmers

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**LAS CRUCES, N.M.** -- In early June, the United States Department of Agriculture assistant secretary for civil rights met with Hispanic farmers at a restaurant in Anthony. KFOX was not allowed to attend the meeting and even had the door shut on us. After talking to some of the farmers who attended the meeting, it was clear the topic dealt with the USDA's alleged history of discrimination toward Hispanic farmers. Wednesday, on the last stop of a 21-stop rural listening tour, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack was able to answer any concerns Hispanic farmers had and admitted there had been discrimination. "We have, folks, a very sad history at USDA of discriminating against farmers of many different cultures," said Vilsack. The discrimination came mostly in the form of money. "Past discriminations have shown that Hispanic farmers were not getting the same servicing on their FSA loans," said David Cantu who has farms near San Juan, Texas. Representing the Obama administration, Vilsack said the discrimination has gone on for years and impacted more than Hispanic farmers. "Anglo farmers were getting them (loans) and in some areas they were getting priority," said Cantu. Vilsack said the USDA is now working hard to bring an end to the discrimination. "We are doing an external review of all of our practices and procedures, we've hired an outside consulting firm," said Vilsack. "We're reorganizing our administrative structure within USDA to provide greater accountability." There is still a law suit that dates back years ago with thousands of claims from Hispanic farmers saying they were discriminated against. A similar case was settled for African American farmers, resulting in \$2.5 billion. Hispanic farmers want to know where's their money and what's wrong with their case. However, because of logistics and the fact that the case was not certified as a class-action lawsuit there are too many separate claims and Vilsack said it's not so easy.

"If it were up to me, I could," said Vilsack. "But I need direction from congress, either to set the process up or give me money and say go figure the process out. I don't have either one of these right now."

Jennifer Samolyk who's one of the lawyers representing Hispanic farmers on the case, says she's not buying it.

"It's a cop-out he could, I meant the class certification issue and things they can settle the case at anytime," she said.

Samolyk said it's been done before and it can be done now.

"All we're asking of Vilsack is to call the White House, to call president Obama," said Samolyk. "We know he can't settle the lawsuit, but president Obama can and president Clinton did that for the black farmers."

And with many of the discrimination claims being made years ago, if the case were to ever be settled, not everyone would benefit.

"It isn't a matter of time running out it's a matter of these people not living long enough and that's a tragedy," said Vilsack.