

Hispanic farmers lash out against USDA

Farmers claim current settlement doesn't justify losses

By **Marvin Tessneer**
 Las Cruces Bulletin

Hispanic farmers unhappy with the U.S. Department of Agriculture took to the New Mexico State University Horseshoe Thursday, July 8, wearing "Discriminación" ("Discrimination") T-shirts joined by their Washington, D.C., attorney and representative Stephen Hill.

Hill, a partner in the Washington, D.C.-based firm Howrey LLP, which is representing the Hispanic farmers, is the litigation specialist for Guadalupe L. Garcia Jr. vs. the Secretary of Agriculture (Tom Vilsack).

The Hispanic farmers are charging the USDA with discrimination in the granting of its loans and benefits.

"The government has offered a settlement to Hispanic farmers that is totally inadequate both in terms of the amount of money offered and the process for resolving the claims," Hill said. "The government has offered \$1.33 billion to be shared by Hispanic farmers and women farmers. In contrast, the government has

offered black farmers, in two settlements, a total of \$2.25 billion.

"And it's undisputed that black and Hispanic farmers have suffered the same discrimination and that the Hispanic farmers outnumber Black farmers 2-to-1."

Information released by the Howrey firm contends that:

- The current Hispanic settlement offers a cap of \$50,000 per claimant, which does not meet the financial losses from years of discrimination.
- The process for submitting claims under the proposed settlement for Hispanics is punitive and discriminates against Hispanic farmers who will not be afforded the traditional methods of filing claims.
- The proposed settlement ignores the traditional Rule 23, which is streamlined to provide equitable and swift expediting of claims.
- The proposed system requires a process that is cumbersome and expensive and could clog the courts around the country for years resulting in an even longer wait for justice.

“ I feel that I wasn't able to get any more loans because I'm Hispanic. ”

RUDOLFO PEREZ,
 El Paso farmer

Hispanic farmers from Texas, California, Colorado and New Mexico gave rallying calls at the Horseshoe gathering Friday.

Rudolfo Perez of El Paso was one of the farmers who participated in the rally. Perez raises Charlois beef



Las Cruces Bulletin photo by Todd Dickson

Area Hispanic farmers and their supporters rally Thursday, July 8, on the New Mexico State University main campus to speak in favor of a class-action lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture that claims the federal agency unfairly denied grants and other support to Hispanic farmers.

cattle, but previously he had raised alfalfa, oats, Sudan grass and cotton in the Dell City, Texas, area.

"At one time I was able to get loans from the Farm Service Agency, and then the agency

declined to give me any more loans," he said. "I feel that I wasn't able to get any more loans because I'm Hispanic. This has been going on for years, and we need some relief from discrimination from the USDA."