

estimated to save \$100,000 per year in operation and maintenance costs, as well as allow the sale of the secondary treatment facility property.

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Senators urge resolution to help state's Hispanic farmers and ranchers

Washington, D.C. — On Monday, U.S. Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet announced that they have written letters to congressional leaders, urging them to work with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to resolve a discrimination lawsuit brought by Hispanic farmers and ranchers in Colorado, New Mexico, and other states against the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In their lawsuit, Garcia v. Vilsack, filed in 2000, more than 100 Hispanic farmers charge USDA with systematic discrimination in the review and awarding of operating and disaster loans between 1981 and 2000, depriving them of critical farm aid. Farmers and ranchers in the San Luis Valley are among those who want a timely resolution of the lawsuit.

Former Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman testified before congress in 1997 that the USDA had a long history of discrimination. Similar lawsuits filed by African American and Native American farmers were granted class certification and went forward as class action lawsuits. But in 2006, an appeals court decision denied Hispanic farmers the ability

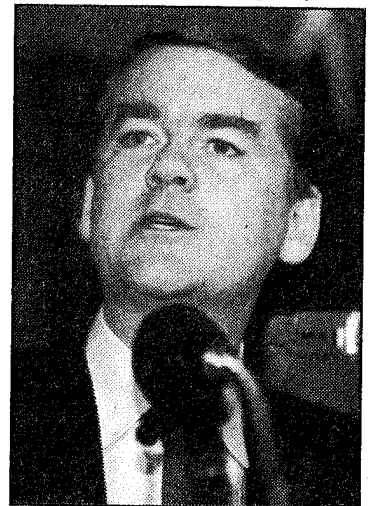
to file a class action lawsuit, and the U.S. Department of Justice has been reluctant to negotiate with them, leaving the farmers waiting for resolution.

Secretary Vilsack has expressed a desire to work with congress to resolve the discrimination claims. In their letters to Rep. Nydia Velázquez, chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the senators applauded the administration and congress for their commitment to bringing the matter to a timely and fair resolution, but reminded them that tens of thousands of farmers have been waiting nearly a decade for justice. They urged the lawmakers to work quickly to find a just resolution.

"This is an issue of fundamental fairness. The sooner we can resolve this, the sooner we can look forward to a USDA that serves all Americans equally," Senator Udall said. "Families in Colorado were hit hard financially after devastating natural disasters - yet they were denied aid or operating assistance because of their heritage. We have acknowledged this shameful past. Now, these family

farmers deserve the ability to begin to rebuild their lives and businesses."

"Colorado's farmers and ranchers deserve justice. Across the country, and here in Colorado, many of our farmers and ranchers were discriminated against because of their Hispanic heritage. This is wrong and unfair," Senator Bennet said. "Together with Senator Udall, I will continue to urge Washington to immediately resolve these cases. It's time we end inconsistent applications of justice and treat our farmers and the ranchers with respect and dignity."

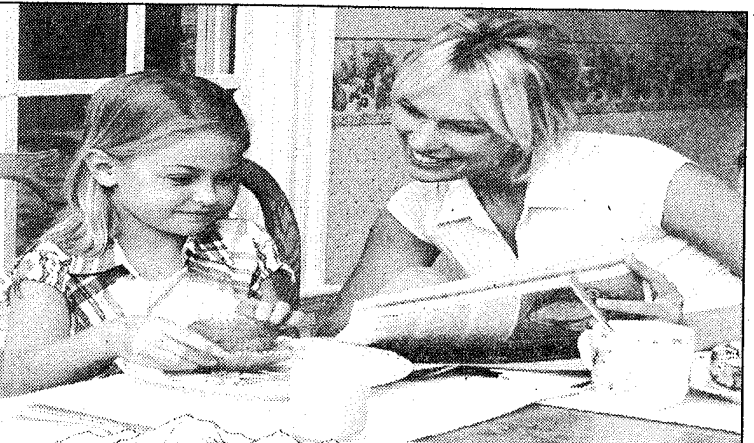


US Sen. Michael Bennet
(D-CO)

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