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Hispanic farmers confront Ag Secretary

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LAS CRUCES (AP) - Farmers from around the Southwest showed support for Hispanic farmers in a discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture during Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's visit to New Mexico.

Vilsack took questions from the crowd Wednesday during a stop in Las Cruces.

Some farmers wore white T-shirts that said "USDA" in the front with a line through the letters and "Stop Discrimination" on the back. Vilsack also met privately with Hispanic farmers.

The courts have scheduled an Oct. 13 conference to determine whether progress has been made in settling the lawsuit.

The lawsuit, filed in 2000, alleged years of discrimination against Hispanic farmers in the USDA's loan program.

Farmer David Cantu of San Juan, Texas, asked Vilsack to call on the Department of Justice and President Barack Obama to resolve the lawsuit.