



NEWS RELEASE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE - FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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DEADLINE EXTENDED: Hispanic and Women Farmers and Ranchers Claims Must be Filed by MAY 1, 2013

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2013- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the extension of the voluntary claims process for Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination by the USDA in past decades. All claims must now be filed by MAY 1, 2013.

"Hispanic and women farmers who believe they have faced discriminatory practices in the past from the USDA have additional time to file a claim in order to have a chance to receive a cash payment or loan forgiveness," said Secretary Vilsack. "USDA urges potential claimants to contact the Claims Administrator for information and to file their claim packages on or before May 1, 2013."

The process offers a voluntary alternative to litigation for each Hispanic or female farmer and rancher who can prove that USDA denied his or her application for loan or loan servicing assistance for discriminatory reasons for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000.

As announced in February 2011, the voluntary claims process will make available at least \$1.33 billion for cash awards and tax relief payments, plus up to \$160 million in farm debt relief, to eligible Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers. There are no filing fees to participate in the program.

Call center representatives can be reached at 1-888-508-4429. Claimants may register for a claims package (by calling the number or visiting the website) or may download the forms from the website. All those interested in learning more or receiving information about the claims process and claims packages are encouraged to visit the website at any time or to contact the call center telephone number Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Claim packages and other documentation may be mailed to Hispanic and Women Farmers and Ranchers Claims Administrator, PO Box 4540, Portland, OR 97208-4540. Claim packages and other documentation may also be emailed to claims@hwfr.org. Claimants may also fax claims packages and other documentation to (855) 626-8343. Completed forms and documentation must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. PDT on May 1, 2013.

Once a claim is submitted to the Claims Administrator, the Claims Administrator will determine if it is timely and complete. If it is, the claim will move to the Claims Adjudicator for a determination on the merits of the claim. USDA may submit evidence to the Claims Adjudicator regarding the claim. If a claim is deemed incomplete, a claimant will be notified by the Claims Administrator and given the opportunity to provide additional information within a certain timeframe. Claimants may check the status of their claims on the claims website.

Website: www.farmerclaims.gov

Phone: 1-888-508-4429

Fax: (855) 626-8343

Email: claims@hwfr.org

Claims Period: September 24, 2012 – May 1, 2013.

Independent companies will administer the claims process and adjudicate the claims. Although there are no filing fees to participate and a lawyer is not required to participate in the claims process, persons seeking legal advice may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider.

Under Secretary Vilsack's leadership, USDA has instituted a comprehensive plan to strengthen the Department as a model service provider and to ensure that every farmer and rancher is treated equally and fairly as part of "a new era of civil rights" at USDA. In February 2010, the Secretary announced the Pigford II settlement with African American farmers, and in October 2010, he announced the Keepseagle settlement with Native American farmers. Both of those settlements have since received court approval. Unlike the cases brought by African American and Native American farmers, the cases filed by Hispanic and women farmers over a decade ago were not certified as class actions. The claims process provides a voluntary alternative to continuing litigation for Hispanic and female farmers and ranchers who want to use it.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).