

## Turning the page on discrimination at USDA

Written by Secretary Tom Vilsack  
Thursday, 02 December 2010 16:21

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Since my first day as Secretary of Agriculture in January 2009, President Obama and I have made resolving USDA's troubled civil rights record one of our top priorities. Today we have taken an important step forward in this work as the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing the Claims Settlement Act of 2010 to finally allow USDA to turn the page on past discrimination against black farmers. The inequities many faced are well-documented and affirmed in the courts; however, the question of compensation has lingered.

The Claims Settlement Act will allow those that have been waiting to get the relief they deserve and have long been promised. USDA has worked with Congress to include strong protections against waste, fraud, and abuse and ensure that only deserving applicants are reimbursed under this settlement.

On Monday, I joined a [conference call \(audio \)](#) with representatives from the Department of the Interior and Justice to applaud the Senate's choice to approve the fully paid-for \$1.15 billion settlement and to urge the House to finalize this long-awaited resolution. I applaud the House for acting so quickly, as we can focus our attention on resolving other cases and claims.

I'm proud of the many critical steps we've taken in the past months to right the wrongs of the past, but more work remains to be done. I have put into action an all-encompassing program to correct our past errors, learn from those mistakes, and outline definitive action to ensure there will be no missteps in the future. The process has been long and often difficult, but we can't wait any longer to close this sad chapter in USDA's history.

*Tom Vilsack is Secretary of Agriculture*