



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
Linda T. Sánchez | Chairwoman
114TH CONGRESS

October 28, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to bring to your attention several reports that the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) has received regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) treatment toward Hispanic and Latino farmers and ranchers.

Many of our members have received reports from constituents indicating significant civil rights violations and discrimination by USDA. In fact, in 2013, the USDA's Office of Compliance, Policy, Training and Cultural Transformation conducted a Civil Rights Compliance Review of the Forest Service Region Two in Colorado and Region Three in New Mexico, and found that both regions were non-compliant with civil rights requirements and that regulations were being inconsistently implemented. Although the report only examined two states, we believe these issues with USDA are wide-spread and affect Hispanic communities across the country.

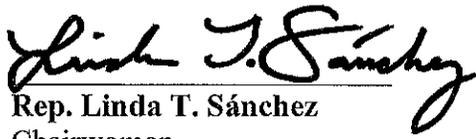
The CHC receives weekly calls from farmers throughout the country, including California and Texas. Farming and ranching are rich traditions in Hispanic communities across the United States, but unfortunately, too many are still battling against discrimination. Many of these farmers tend to be older, with limited English, and no email addresses, and have been patiently waiting for USDA to right a wrong from years ago.

In addition, we've also heard concerns with USDA's \$1.3 billion settlement to resolve allegations of discrimination toward Hispanic and female farmers. The CHC has received reports that claims filed by Hispanic and women farmers have been denied at higher rates than those of other minority groups. We are concerned that the settlement process may be discriminating against the very people it's supposed to benefit.

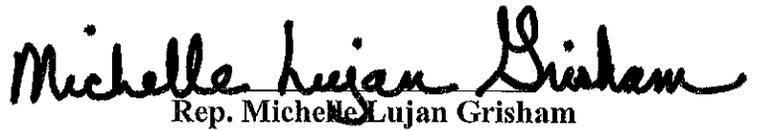
Finally, although the CHC has sent several meeting and update requests since April 2015 to discuss USDA's Hispanic Serving Institutions National Internship Program, we have yet to receive any updates on the status of USDA's Memorandum of Understanding with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. We would appreciate an update on this matter.

As we work to ensure that Latino communities are fairly represented and that Hispanic farmers and ranchers are made whole from past discrimination by USDA, we request a meeting with you to discuss what steps USDA has taken to address discrimination reports and what changes the agency has made to ensure compliance with Federal civil rights laws, rules and regulations.

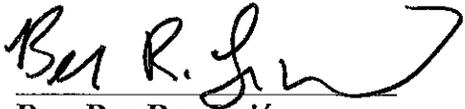
Sincerely,



Rep. Linda T. Sánchez
Chairwoman
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham
First Vice-Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Rep. Ben Ray Luján
Member
Congressional Hispanic Caucus