

Box 3

Civil rights ag
Civil rights coordinating council
Civil rights enforcement
Class size
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Cloning bills and acts
Cloning meetings
Cloning OMB, leg referral memo
Cloning presidents statements
Coleman
College
College cost
College deduction
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Computers inner city
Concentration
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Consumer
Consumer affairs
Consumer draft
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Continuum care
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Cpsc
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Doj finds



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MESSAGE: Update on Civil Rights

Civil Rights Progress at USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, under the leadership of Secretary Dan Glickman, is undergoing an unprecedented effort to ensure that every USDA customer and employee is treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect. This Department-wide effort began in 1996 with a series of listening sessions conducted across the country and culminated with the Civil Rights Action Team's introspective and candid report on the state of civil rights in the Department. The effort continues and is aimed at righting past wrongs to customers and employees, strengthening programs targeted to under-served populations, and implementing policies designed to prevent new problems from occurring.

1. Foreclosures:

USDA halted several thousand pending USDA foreclosures until an independent review team certified that there was no evidence of disparate treatment. This independent review has become a regular step in USDA's handling of delinquent loans to ensure that no farmers face foreclosure by USDA as a result of discrimination.

2. FSA State Committee Representation

USDA has increased the minority representation on its state committees by 10 percent. Women or minorities now comprise 46 percent of the 222 FSA state committee positions. These committees advise the State Executive Director, help to implement USDA programs at the state level, and serve as the appeal board for farmers who disagree with decisions made at the county level.

3. Loans

USDA has increased its lending to minority and women producers. During the past 5 years there has been a 74 percent increase in direct lending to these groups -- from \$46.5 million in FY 93 to \$81 million in FY 97. Increased outreach efforts by USDA will ensure that lending to minorities and women continues to expand.

USDA has sent legislation to Congress, which would amend the 1996 Farm Bill provisions that unfairly excludes thousands of farmers from participation in USDA's credit programs.

In concert with the White House, USDA is discussing legislation with Congress to address the statute of limitations issue that is currently affecting our ability to settle some discrimination cases.

4. Outreach

A new Community Outreach Office has been established to coordinate and provide leadership in delivering programs and services to USDA customers, particularly those groups and individuals who have not been historically well-served.

USDA increased civil rights funding for FY 98 in our Office of Civil Rights. The money is being used for increased staffing and enforcement activities.

5. Program discrimination complaints

Since January 1, 1997, USDA has closed 295 program discrimination complaints in the 1,088 case backlog (approximately 180 of the cases remaining in the backlog are minority farmer's alleging discrimination in Farm Service Agency programs) There have been 15 settlements (11 administrative and 4 judicial settlements). A comprehensive plan has been implemented to resolve the remaining complaints, including hiring 14 full-time investigators at USDA, and contracting with 10 private investigation firms.

6. Accountability

All USDA agency heads now have performance standards for civil rights and will be rated by the Assistant Secretary for Administration on their civil rights accomplishments.

USDA has adopted a policy of zero tolerance for reprisals against employees who file civil rights violations, and a policy of immediately adjusting hostile or volatile work place conditions. In addition, all USDA employees are required to attend annual civil rights training.

7. Senior Staff

In January, the Secretary hired David Harris as the new Associate General Counsel for Civil Rights. Mr. Harris is currently hiring his staff. Additionally, in February, the Secretary appointed John Sparks as Special Assistant to the Secretary for Civil Rights to provide daily oversight of these issues.