

News Briefs

USDA Claims Must be Mailed by March 25th

WASHINGTON — U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has recently reminded Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination by the USDA in past decades that there are 45 days remaining in the filing period closing March 25.

"Hispanic and women farmers who believe they have faced discriminatory practices in the past from the USDA have 45 days left 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 mail their claim packages on or before March 25, 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.

The Department will continue reaching out to potential Hispanic and female claimants around the country to get the word out to individuals who may be eligible for this program so they have the opportunity to participate.

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 attend meetings in your communities about the claims process and contact the website at any time or call center telephone number Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Website: www.farmerclaims.gov  
Phone: 1-888-508-4429

Claims Period: September 24, 2012 - March 25, 2013.

Independent legal services 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 Keepeagle 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.

Windbreak Tree Order Deadline Slated Today

The Gaines County Soil and Water Conservation District is sponsoring a windbreak tree project in cooperation with the Texas Forest Service for 2012/2013.

You may place your order for trees in person at the Gaines County USDA/FSA Service Center located at 1301 South Main. Payment must be made when your order is placed.

This year's evergreen trees are: Afghanistan Pine, Austrian Pine, Pinyon Pine, Oriental Arborvitae, Lacebark Elm, Four Wing Saltbush, and Italian Stone Pine, Desert Willow. Evergreens are sold in multiples of 30 seedlings.

Hardwood Species available include American Plum, Black Cherry, Green Ash, Hackberry, Honey locust, Bur oak, Chinkapin Oak, Post Oak, Shumard Oak, Osage Orange, Pecan, Red Mulberry, Redbud, Sand Plum, Aromatic Sumac, Smooth Sumac. Hardwoods are sold in multiples of 25 seedlings.

Delivery of the seedlings is scheduled for Thursday, February 28, 2013. All orders will need to be placed by noon on Wednesday, February 20, 2013.

Windbreak trees provide a variety of benefits ranging from controlling wind erosion in fields to decorating around homes.

For more information please contact the Gaines County Soil and Water Conservation District located at 1301 S. Main in the USDA/FSA Service Center or call 758-3722, extension 3.

No 2012 Complaints

Sheriff Recently Releases Racial Profiling Report to Gaines County Commissioners Court

During the 2012 calendar year, the Gaines County Sheriff's Dept. reported no filed complaints of racial profiling for traffic stops conducted by local deputies, according to a report given to Gaines County Commissioners on Monday morning.

As part of the annual reporting process required by law, Gaines County Sheriff Ronny Pipkin released the department's findings, which showed that two of 294 traffic stops conducted by the department in the 2012 calendar year were conducted by deputies who knew the race or ethnicity of the driver being stopped at the time

of conducting a traffic stop.

"We had no formal complaints concerning racial profiling for the 2012 calendar year for the Gaines County Sheriff's Dept.," said Pipkin in his brief report to Commissioners.

Pipkin added the report was submitted to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) as part of its March 1 annual deadline.

In the report, of the 294 traffic stops conducted by the GCSO, 20 arrests were made as a result of traffic related offenses, while 274 citations were issued.

Caucasians and Hispanic drivers



made up a vast majority of those stopped by GCSO deputies, totaling 155 and 128 persons per ethnicity, respectively.

Of the traffic stops conducted, 44 vehicle searches were conducted by GCSO deputies, with 11 of those searches classified as being consented by the driver of the vehicle. The remainder were conducted for probable cause/investigative purposes stemming from the traffic stop investigation.

Beginning in 2002, the GCSO, in accordance with the Texas Racial Profiling Law (S.B. No. 1074), has been collecting police contact data for the purpose of identifying and responding to concerns regarding racial profiling practices.

NM Landowners Oppose Chicken Listing

ROSWELL, N.M. -- Southeast New Mexico residents and elected officials on last week strongly derided the federal government's proposal to designate the lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species — and that was all before the start of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service public hearing on the matter.

"We're going to band together and fight this thing," said state Rep. Bob Wooley, R-Roswell, during a nearly two-hour rally organized by the Roswell and Artesia chambers of commerce and held before the agency hearing at Eastern New Mexico University. "The federal government is not going to come in here and tell us what to do."

Critics said listing the lesser prairie chicken could severely damage ongoing oil and gas production, which accounts for \$1 billion in state revenue each year and most of state education funding, according to Wooley.

"That's what we're dealing with here, and that's what we're about to cut out of our economy," said state Sen. Carol Leavell, R-Jal.

The rally, which drew about 150 people, mirrored another in the same airplane hangar in 2011 when speaker after speaker railed against the proposed listing of the dunes sagebrush lizard, another species struggling in the state's oil patch as a result of fragmented and shrinking habitat.

A similar rally was held Monday evening at the Lubbock Memorial Civic Center, which also drew a large crowd of Texas Panhandle, South Plains and Permian Basin supporters, as well as those residents

of the eastern portions of New Mexico.

Outgoing U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar decided last June that endangered species protections were not warranted for the lizard, largely because voluntary conservation agreements signed by oil and natural gas companies, ranchers and others resulted in sufficient protections for remaining lizard habitat.

Several speakers Tuesday expressed the hope that a similar decision will be made in the case of the lesser prairie chicken. Similar conservation agreements have been signed in New Mexico, and other steps have been taken to conserve the bird's shrinking available habitat.

Jim Lane, director of the state Game and Fish Department, said the state has been working with other states that would be affected by the Endangered Species Act listing — Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado and Kansas — on a sweeping species management plan that he said would make it unnecessary to list the bird.

The chicken was first proposed for listing as a threatened or endangered species in 1996 in a petition filed by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation in Boulder, Colo. Since 1998, the Wildlife Service has designated the bird's inclusion on the endangered species list as "warranted, but precluded" by other higher priority listing decisions.

The historic range of the lesser prairie chicken in grassland that provides protection from predators has shrunk by 84 percent, and it now nests in fragmented habitat in

five states. In announcing the plan to list the bird, which is distinguished by brilliant plumage and a colorful mating dance performed by males, the agency said the species is "likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future" without additional protections.

The rally's headliner, U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., criticized the federal government's management

of national forests and called environmental organizations that have pushed listing of the lesser prairie chicken "lawsuit factories."

Pearce skipped the State of the Union address to attend the rally.

Later, at the public hearing, more than three dozen people spoke but none supported the proposed listing.

Correction

In the Sunday, Feb. 17 edition of the *Seminole Sentinel*, the *Sentinel* provided misinterpreted information regarding the expansion/renovation of the F.J. Young Elementary School campus.

It was reported in the *Sentinel's* story the school campus' children would be moving from the campus, located in the 2100 block of S.W. Ave. B, to the old Seminole Junior High School campus around Seminole ISD's spring break holiday.

The *Sentinel* was informed the move of students would not occur this school year, according to information provided by SISD officials. The transfer of students from the FJY campus to the old SJHS campus will not take place until the start of the fall semester of the 2013-2014 school year.

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Lynn Brisendine.....Publisher  
Dustin Wright.....Managing Editor  
Christy Hawkins.....Office Manager  
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