



X. Civil Rights



USDA conducts listening sessions throughout the country to meet with small, limited-resource, and minority farmers to ensure that all Department policies and practices have no adverse impact on them.

Commission Recommendations: The Commission gave a strong endorsement for the recommendation for the USDA Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT) report, emphasizing swift action to settle outstanding discrimination cases brought forward by farmers and USDA employees and to put in place effective civil rights enforcement and monitoring procedures.

AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

USDA Office of Civil Rights (CR)

Secretary Ann M. Veneman’s civil rights policy statement states her firm commitment to ensuring USDA’s compliance with civil rights and equal employment opportunity for everyone regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, or protected genetic information.

USDA is establishing the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights as part of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Under the new farm bill, the new office will ensure compliance with all civil rights and related laws by all agencies and under all programs of the Department, coordinate administration of civil rights laws and regulations for employees and participants of USDA programs, and ensure that necessary and appropriate civil rights components are properly incorporated into all strategic planning initiatives within the Department.

The Office of Civil Rights (CR) will be part of the new Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. In accordance with the Secretary’s civil rights statement, CR ensures that all USDA policies and practices have no disparate impact on small, limited-resource, and minority farmers. A civil rights impact analysis must be conducted on all new USDA policies and regulations and approved by CR prior to implementation. New procedures for processing program complaints of discrimination have been developed. The complainant will be informed of the jurisdictional determination and any additional information that the complainant must submit will be requested before obtaining the agency response



- CR developed a plan for effecting long-term improvement of its Programs and Employment functions. The objective of the plan was to determine actions, changes and resources necessary to fundamentally improve operations in CR so that employment and program complaints of discrimination will be processed in a consistent, effective, and timely way. This plan resulted in a comprehensive analysis of CR systems, processes, procedures, staffing needs, level of knowledge, skills and abilities, automation needs, and administrative support. The full implementation of the long-term improvement plan will enable CR to process complaints within the statutory required timeframe. CR has processed all of the 1,088 backlogged program complaints that were identified by CR and verified in the Office of Inspector General's 1998 Evaluation Report.
- **Update on Status of CRAT Recommendations:** CR's role is to monitor USDA Agencies' implementation of the CRAT recommendations. As of September 2001, there were three remaining recommendations to be implemented that do not require legislative action. Of the 17 recommendations requiring some form of legislative action, 5 had been implemented. Eighty-eight recommendations had been fully implemented or steps taken to implement them.

As of November 2002, there were 22,829 claims reviewed under the *Pigford v. Glickman* Consent Decree. Of those, 21,583 Track A claims and 181 Track B claims were accepted for processing. The remaining 1,065 claims were rejected based on a determination that the claimant was not a member of the class. A court appointed monitor manages the Consent Decree. The monitor makes periodic progress reports to the Court.

To ensure that program managers and supervisors appreciate the needs of minority small farmers, USDA managers and supervisors were required to attend a mandatory one-day diversity-training seminar. The objective of this training was to enhance the ability of managers and supervisors to understand diversity, to better manage diversity, and to identify how diversity relates to making USDA a high-performance agency.

- Compliance reviews are conducted to ensure that USDA agencies provide services in accordance with all civil rights laws, rules, and regulations. CR will be coordinating with USDA Agencies to ensure that compliance reviews are conducted pursuant to USDA policy and guidelines. USDA Agencies are required to review 20 percent of all USDA programs annually.

