

United Tribes News Service

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## **Native American Leaders Call on the Obama Administration to End Decades of USDA Discrimination Against Native American Farmers & Ranchers**

Native American leaders and lawyers representing thousands of Native American farmers and ranchers in a 10-year-old nationwide class action lawsuit (*Keepseagle v. Vilsack*) against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will urge President Obama and Agriculture Secretary Vilsack to make long-overdue changes to the USDA's discriminatory lending practices and call upon the new Administration to settle the *Keepseagle* case.

After a panel discussion and a press availability that are open to the media from 1:30 to 3:30 pm, hundreds of *Keepseagle* class members will meet with their attorneys, Joseph Sellers and Sarah Vogel at the Bismarck Civic Center. These events will take place in conjunction with the 40th Annual United Tribes International Powwow and the United Tribes Tribal Leaders Summit, which thousands of Native Americans will attend.

A new expert report will be released that finds since 1981 Native American farmers and ranchers received only half the loans they were qualified to receive, when compared to other farmers. This disparity confirms the accounts of thousands of Native Americans who have been the subject of a longstanding pattern of discrimination by USDA, which denied them \$3 billion in credit, resulting in nearly \$1 billion in damages.

**WHAT:** Keepseagle Litigation Panel Discussion and Press Availability  
**WHEN:** Thursday, September 10, 2009, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm  
**WHERE:** Bismarck Civic Center, South Fifth Street and Front Ave., Bismarck, ND.  
**WHO:** Native American Leaders and Lawyers representing Native American farmers:

- **Joseph Sellers**, lead counsel for the *Keepseagle* legal team, prominent civil rights attorney, and partner of Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC in Washington, DC.
- **Sarah Vogel**, former two-term ND Agriculture Commissioner, *Keepseagle* legal team member, national leader in Indian & Agricultural law, partner of Sarah Vogel Law Firm P.C. in Bismarck, ND.
- **Ron His Horse Is Thunder**, Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association, and the Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairmen's Health Board.
- **Tex Hall**, Chairman of the Inter Tribal Economic Alliance, former Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes, and former President of the National Congress of American Indians.
- **Janet Thomas**, Executive Director of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and daughter of Basil Alkire, the late lead plaintiff in *Keepseagle*.
- **Marilyn and George Keepseagle** and **Claryca Mandan**, lead plaintiffs in *Keepseagle*.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Although USDA has admitted that it failed to treat minority farmers equally over several decades, it has not taken adequate action to eliminate discrimination in its farm loan programs, and it refuses to compensate Native Americans for their lost property and income caused by USDA's discrimination. With a new Administration, the Native American community hopes that the USDA will finally resolve this unacceptable problem. And while President Obama

announced this Spring that he will take major steps to resolve the remaining discrimination claims of black farmers, he has not stated any such desire to settle the *Keepseagle* action or remedy the gross discrimination suffered by thousands of Native Americans. The leaders, lawyers, and lead plaintiffs on the Sept. 10 panel will call on President Obama and Secretary Vilsack to treat Native Americans equally and resolve the *Keepseagle* litigation.

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