

# Black farmers discussing \$125 settlement proposal

By Janelle Carter

WASHINGTON (AP) — Black farmers said they are considering a deal of at least \$125 million to settle their discrimination lawsuit against the Agriculture Department.

Attorneys for the farmers held three meetings around the country last week to gauge support for the deal.

About 300 farmers attended a meeting Friday in Durham, N.C., participants told The Associated Press.

Attorneys also met with plaintiffs last Wednesday in Selma, Ala., and last Thursday in Pine Bluff, Ark.

"I think the farmers are going to take the prospective deal," said John Boyd, president

of the National Black Farmers Association, who said he talked to about 15 farmers who went to Friday's meeting.

The settlement would give each of the 1,000 plaintiffs about \$50,000 and resolve any outstanding debt with the government.

The average plaintiff's debt is estimated at \$75,000 to \$100,000.

The offer, which farmers said government attorneys made recently, is significantly higher than the \$15,000-per-farmer offer the agency made this summer, plaintiffs said. But the total would be far less than the \$3 billion the farmers initially sought.

Laura Trivers, a spokeswoman for Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, said,

"Settlement discussions are going very well and the secretary is both eager and optimistic that this lawsuit will be settled in the near future."

The proposed deal still faces obstacles.

"People left with mixed emotions," said Philip Haynie II, a Heathsville, Va., farmer who attended Friday's meeting.

Some farmers feel a settlement should include an offer of land, Haynie said, since the government foreclosed on many of the farmers' property as their debts mounted.

"For individuals who have lost their land to foreclosure, nothing can be done about that," Haynie said. "A person in that situation has really come up short."

Attorneys also are working to include language that would shield the settlement from taxes, farmers said.

The lawsuit — claiming discrimination through denial of farm loans, crop subsidies and other benefits — was filed last year, shortly after the Agriculture Department admitted its own process of resolving discrimination complaints had been in disarray and caused a huge backlog.

Plaintiffs won a significant victory last month when a judge agreed to certify them as a class. A trial has been scheduled for Feb. 1.

U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman urged the two sides at a hearing last month to work harder to reach a settlement.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Councilman John Rhodes has been a vocal supporter of the Windsor Park project.

## Council proceeds with housing plans

The North Las Vegas City Council voted earlier this month to continue pushing for \$5 million — a \$4 million bond issue and \$1 million in cash — to be used to relocate residents of a sinking subdivision.

Windsor Parks residents discovered their homes were sinking in 1988. Residents of the 241-unit subdivision would get \$50,000 they could use to pay off old mortgages, put down payments on new houses or cover closing costs on the condition they live in their new homes at least 10 years or pay back the grant. Repayment cost dwindles

the longer residents live in the new homes.

"This is finally coming to fruition after four years," North Las Vegas City Councilman John Rhodes said.

Rhodes said the council have secured an agreement with the Fannie Mae Foundation for an additional \$5 million should it be needed after five years.

The foundations and walls of the homes began buckling and cracking in the '70s because the subdivision was built on several geologic fault lines and on water-depleted soil.

## North Las Vegas casino proposal nixed

The City Council recently voted down the NevStar Gaming and Entertainment Corp.'s proposal for a casino and entertainment complex in North Las Vegas.

Before the vote, representatives of NevStar asserted that the emphasis of the new facility will be shopping, not gambling.

The company planned to construct a 200-room hotel a 37,000-square-foot casino, a 60-lane bowling center, a movie theater with at least a dozen screens, a fitness center, a retail complex, a video arcade, meeting rooms and restaurants on the northwest corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Coralie Avenue, south of Craig Road. The company maintained that only 10 percent of the center would be devoted to gaming.

The land is zoned for commercial development, including casinos. Areas to



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

C. C. School District area superintendent Eva Simmons expresses her opinion about casinos to close to schools.

the north and west also are residential. The NevStar site would not be surrounded by houses, but residences are located within about a quarter-mile.

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John R. Triplett, Financial Advisor  
3763 Howard Hughes Pkwy, Ste #330  
(702) 796-0135 or (800) 457-4551  
john\_r\_triplett@prusec.com  
www.prusec.com



John R. Triplett

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