

(**Washington D.C.**) - Congressman Steve Chabot (R-OH) and Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) today introduced bipartisan legislation designed to help thousands of African-American farmers who were denied entry into the *Pigford v. Glickman* settlement. The legislation, the *Pigford Claims Remedy Act* (H.R. 5575), would allow claims previously rejected on procedural grounds to be reviewed based on merit.

"We have learned during extensive hearings on this issue that an unacceptable number of claims were never considered on their merits," said Chabot. "Our legislation will ensure that any meritorious claims of discrimination are reviewed on the facts of each individual case and that they are not summarily rejected on procedural grounds."

Congressman Scott stated, "three times as many claimants were denied consideration on the merits as the number that received consideration. This bill will allow those who filed a claim, but were denied a consideration on the merits, an opportunity to be heard."

On April 14, 1999, a federal judge approved a settlement agreement to a discrimination lawsuit between African-American farmers and the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The settlement followed the filing of a class action lawsuit by minority farmers against the USDA two years earlier. The lawsuit claimed that the USDA had discriminated against African-American farmers because of their race when applying for farm loans or other forms of assistance in violation of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act.

The settlement and its implementation were criticized after it was reported that more than 70,000 African-American farmers submitted late claims, barring them from the settlement. For example, 420 claims were made after the deadline by African-American farmers in Ohio and 270 claims were made in Virginia. Of those, 410 Ohio claims and 252 Virginia claims were rejected on procedural grounds without consideration of their merit (350 similar claims in Indiana and 77 in Kentucky were turned down because they were filed after the deadline).

The *Pigford Claims Remedy Act* is being cosponsored by Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee (R-WI); Rep. Mel Watt (D-NC), Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus and Ranking Member of the Commercial and Administrative Law Subcommittee; Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AI); Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), Ranking Member of the Immigration, Border Security, and Claims Subcommittee; and Rep. Bennie

Thompson (D-MS).

Over the last 18 months, the Constitution Subcommittee has conducted an extensive review of the *Pigford* settlement which including three hearings and an investigation by the General Accountability Office (GAO) from August 2005 – March 2006.

(####)