

**NORTH COUNTRY CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERVICES**  
A Program of the RURAL LAW CENTER OF NEW YORK

**New York State  
Agricultural Mediation  
Program**

**The Organization**

North Country Conflict Resolution Services (NCCRS) is a program of the Rural Law Center of New York, Inc. The program is staffed by dispute resolution professionals and certified community volunteers, and is part of the statewide Community Dispute Resolution Centers Program administered by the Unified Court System of the State of New York.

**Service Area**

The NCCRS dispute resolution centers provide conflict resolution services to residents of northern New York counties. Our services are available in St. Lawrence County, Clinton County, Franklin County, Essex Country and Hamilton County.

**What is the New York State Agricultural Mediation Program (NYSAMP)?**

The New York State Agricultural Mediation Program is one of 34 state programs that provide services to farmers, producers and the agricultural community to assist in resolving disputes. NYSAMP is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the NYS Unified Court System and is administered by the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA), an independent nonprofit organization. For the North Country region, North Country Conflict Resolution Services, administers local cases.

**What is mediation?**

Mediation is a way in which a trained, impartial person – a mediator – helps people discuss issues, clear up misunderstandings, consider options, and, if they wish, to reach mutually acceptable solutions. A mediator helps people communicate clearly and stay on track, but does not make decisions for them. Mediators do not give legal advice.

Mediation is confidential and voluntary; usually it is free. Local mediators are available in every county; they are trained under the supervision of the New York State Unified Court System. Mediation provides an opportunity for people to resolve problems before they escalate in ways that hurt everybody.

### **If you are a Rural Agricultural Producer, why choose mediation to settle disputes?**

Local mediators can help with many problems experienced by farm families including unpaid bills; odor or noise; Right to Farm complaints; labor problems; separation and divorce; delinquent loans; farm succession; and adverse decisions in USDA programs.

#### **In addition, the Mediation Process:**

- Clears up communication problems**
- Confidential, voluntary and private**
- No need to involve outside authorities**
- Mediation services available in every county in NY**
- Reduces stress**
- Helps people reach agreements**
- Costs less than litigation  
(mediation is usually free)**
- Flexible scheduling (evenings  
may be available)**
- People decide for themselves what will work**

### **Examples of Agricultural Mediation in Use**

**Neighbor Dispute** – A dairy farmer and his neighbor were surprised that mediation helped them reach some decisions together and end their battle over manure storage and spreading. The neighbor had complained to the police, several town officials, and the DEC. After a two hour mediation the farmer agreed to give notice and change the timing of his manure spreading and other farm practices; the neighbor gained an understanding of farm work, economic pressures, and his neighbor's contributions to the community.

**Family Problems** – A couple who own a greenhouse and farm stand business decided to separate and, eventually, they will probably divorce. Although feelings run high at times, both are committed to their three children, and want to avoid the high costs and horror stories they hear about litigated divorce. They discover that they can talk more calmly and productively with their mediator, work together to get the advice they need from financial legal and other advisors, and to make workable plans for their family and businesses.

**Financial** – A farmer leased 200 acres to give his parents some cash and security, and later subleased them to a neighbor. In applying for a new FSA loan, he realized the full extent of the family debt crisis. After an initial adverse decision, he met with the loan

officer, local bank manager, Farm Bureau advisors, and family members (who had serious disagreements) and a mediator. After a couple of meetings, the family realized they would have to work together to keep the farm, and were able to work out a plan to restructure the debts.

### **Does mediation really work?**

At least 75% of mediations end in agreements which are written and signed, and usually people follow through on their agreements. It makes sense that people will do what they agreed to do, since they came up with the solution themselves, rather than having it imposed by someone who does not understand the situation.

*"Things happened fast and to great satisfaction of all parties involved. I was amazed that egos were set aside so easily, as well as an agreement being reached to satisfy both sides." -- Farm Bureau employee*

### **How Can I Arrange for Mediation Services?**

Contact the Community Dispute Resolution Center office in your county. Contact information for each of the 5 rural county offices served by the North Country Conflict Resolution Services (St. Lawrence, Clinton, Franklin, Essex and Hamilton) is listed in the general information found at the Conflict Resolution tab on this website.