

ACReS



Maryland Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service

mediator

For more information about agricultural mediation, call 410-841-5770, visit our website at <http://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/acrs> or write:
ACReS • Maryland Department of Agriculture • 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway • Room 208 • Annapolis MD 21401

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first edition of the Maryland Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service Mediator. This newsletter is one of many outreach efforts being taken to ensure that farmers, agricultural producers and businesses, crop insurance providers, and farm credit organizations are aware of the availability of mediation. The Maryland Department of Agriculture is certified by the U. S. Department of Agriculture to offer agricultural mediation.



WHAT IS MARYLAND ACReS?

Maryland Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service (ACReS) is the official U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified (USDA-certified) agricultural mediation program for Maryland, offering confidential assistance to help resolve agriculture-related disputes before they end up in an appeals process or court.

WHAT IS MEDIATION?

Mediation is a voluntary, confidential process in which a neutral third party (the mediator) assists farmers, agricultural lenders, agencies, families, and citizens to resolve disputes in an open communication setting outside the regulatory or traditional legal processes.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MEDIATION?

MEDIATION IS:

Neutral. The mediator is impartial and has no vested interest in the outcome of the mediation.

Voluntary. All parties come to mediation under their own free will and can leave the process at anytime.

Confidential. Parties agree that communication between the parties will be confidential, and will not be used by either against the other in any subsequent appeal or legal action.

Time- and Cost-Efficient. The mediation process tends to be quicker than the alternative, such as going to court. Mediation is generally less costly than litigation.

“Self-Determination”. The mediator does not have decision-making authority. The Participants design the solution themselves and are generally more committed than when a judge or hearing officer imposes a solution.

AGRICULTURAL MEDIATION AND MARYLAND BUSINESSES

“Using Mediation Saves Time, Saves Money, and Develops Relationships

Throughout Maryland, agricultural producers do business with bankers, brokers, equipment dealers, and others on a daily basis. They also interact with numerous regulatory agencies. From time to time, any of these relationships may involve situations that are difficult for farmers and for the business community. For example, nonperforming loans are problematic for the farmer, the lender, and for other community businesses and citizens, as the decline of profitable farms adversely affects their businesses and their lifestyle. Regulatory compliance issues can adversely affect U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Maryland Department of Agriculture objectives, producer profitability, and business success, as well as Maryland’s economic growth.

Maryland’s USDA-certified agricultural mediation program, Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service (ACReS), has been available since 1999. ACReS gives the agricultural community a recognized, effective, low-cost means to address concerns relating to agricultural production. Mediation can:

- Encourage individuals to make better decisions and create a better future.
- Reduce the need for unnecessary cost associated with litigation or appeals processes.
- Increase understanding among agricultural producers, agencies, organizations, and Maryland citizens.
- Empower individual accountability for one’s own problems and joint responsibility for solutions.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture has developed the program to offer a low-to-no cost means of resolving disputes. Usually, mediation can be completed more quickly than other legal processes, such as appeals or litigation, with a higher level of satisfaction for all those involved. However, if mediation is unsuccessful, the person can still exercise the other options that would have been available if mediation had not occurred.

Maryland ACReS is one of thirty-six USDA-certified state agricultural mediation programs in the United States.



For more information about agricultural mediation:

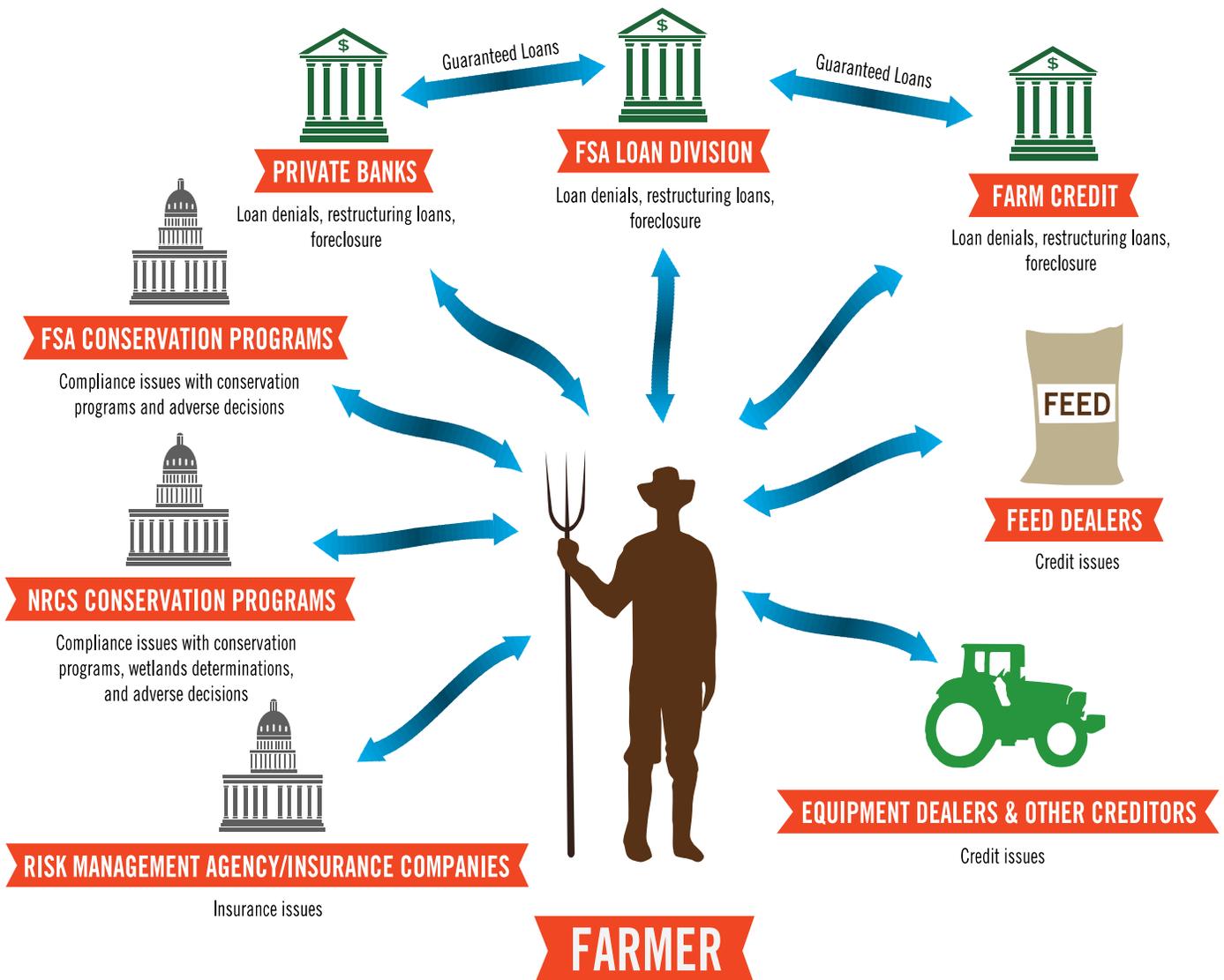
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THE AGRICULTURAL MEDIATION PROGRAM HELPS FARMERS, LENDERS, CREDITORS, USDA AGENCIES, AND OTHER ENTITIES FIND SOLUTIONS

(Article courtesy of New Hampshire State Agricultural Mediation Programs)

There is a well-known African proverb that says “it takes a village to raise a child.” While that may or may not be true, it does take the whole agricultural community for a farming operation to thrive. Farmers rely on lenders, feed dealers, equipment dealers, technical service providers, state and federal government agencies, and many others to survive. In order for an agricultural operation to thrive, all these entities need to be able to work together. When there is an issue that needs to be resolved, the agricultural mediation program can hopefully help the parties resolve the issue and preserve the crucial working relationship. Below is an illustration of the various entities within the agricultural community and the types of situations where we can help.



CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Contact: Julie Oberg, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Communications

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released its first look at the Census of Agriculture showing that in Maryland, since the last Census was conducted in 2007, there are 578 or 4.5 percent fewer farms, average farm size increased to 166 acres up from 160, and 18.7 percent or 80 more female principal farm operators. From an economic standpoint, the value of agricultural products sold increased 24 percent to \$2.27 billion, with an average per farm increase of 30 percent to \$185,329. The latest figures indicate that the rate of farmland loss is slowing in Maryland. There was a 1.0 percent (21,011 acre) loss in 2012 compared to a 1.3 percent (25,874 acre) loss in 2007 and 5.5 percent (115,433 acre) loss in 2002. USDA will release the full Census results with much more information, including data to the county level, in May.

“The Census of Agriculture is important because it is the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agricultural data for every county in the nation,” said Dale Hawks, director of the NASS Maryland Field Office. “Through the Census, producers can show the nation the value and importance of agriculture, and help influence the decisions that will shape the future of American agriculture for years to come. Census data are used by all those who serve farmers and rural communities – federal, state and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations and many others.”

The 2012 Census of Agriculture also found that, in Maryland:

- Value of crops, including nursery/greenhouse crops, increased 67 percent to \$1.05 billion.
- Value of livestock, poultry, and their products increased 1 percent to \$1.2 billion.
- Government payments (including federal, state, and local) received increased by 8 percent totaling \$36 million.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of farms are less than 50 acres.

Principal operators with Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin are up 27 percent, and Asian operators are up 18 percent from 2007.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Maryland Department of Agriculture prohibit discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and, where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited basis will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)