



Agricultural Mediation Benefits the Nation

“I tried to resolve my dispute on my own for 18 months but was shot down on every avenue I tried. Once we got into mediation, they really started to listen to me for the first time and we were able to resolve the dispute quickly.” **Farmer**

“The dedication of Agricultural Mediation Program mediators and their ability to get all the necessary parties willing to work together constructively made it possible to reach a positive outcome in a case where it didn’t seem likely.” **USDA Employee**

Background

Since 1988, thousands of farmers have and continue to turn to USDA state-certified agricultural mediation programs for help. This nationwide network provides trained and specialized professionals to serve the needs of America’s farmers and producers, along with ag-adjacent businesses involved in lending, finance, machinery, co-ops, and distributors. Individuals and businesses who need assistance navigating a wide array of challenges are finding the support they need to keep producing our food. Each state program is designated by the governor or head of the Department of Agriculture to administer agricultural mediation functions, which now include the growing field of farm succession planning.

The business of agriculture touches every American in some way. Agricultural business reaches every generation, geography, and gender. During FY 2023 and 2024, the agricultural mediation programs received 7,150 mediation requests and completed 5,183 cases. Agreement rates exceeded 70%, generating positive outcomes for those involved.

Over 1.9 million U.S Farms

- 95% family owned
- Increasingly younger & female
 - 10% under the age of 35
 - 36% female

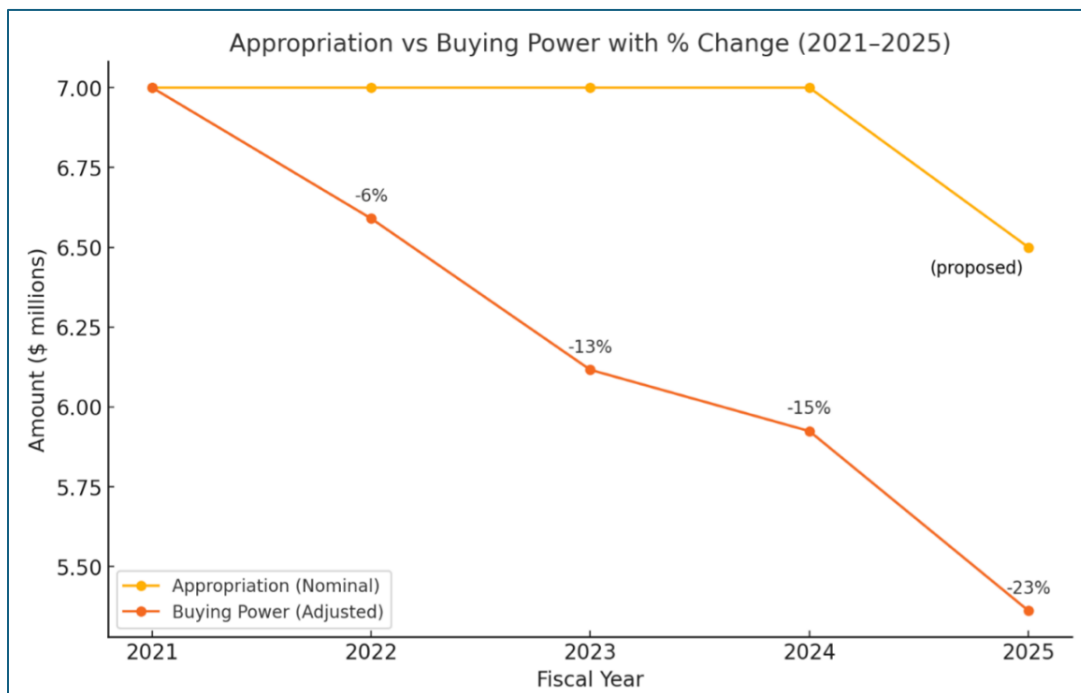
Mediation Saves Time and Money

Mediation can benefit farmers in ways that other forms of conflict resolution, such as litigation, do not. On average, cases handled through mediation take 26 months less time to process; save 61 hours of time; reduce transaction costs; and result in a 14% increase in perceived fairness and a 29% increase in perceived value for the money. A 2007 analysis, adjusted for inflation, estimated that the average cost for a mediation is \$17,253 less than a lawsuit. How do these results translate to the work of the state-certified mediation programs? Conservative projections

suggest that more than \$63 million and almost 96,000 months of productivity time will be saved in 2025—benefits that accrue not just to individual farm operators, but also to financial institutions and many other ag-related vendors, helping contain costs for all American consumers. A separate government survey found that over 90% of parties indicated they would use the mediation process again if the opportunity arose.

Small Budget, Big Impact

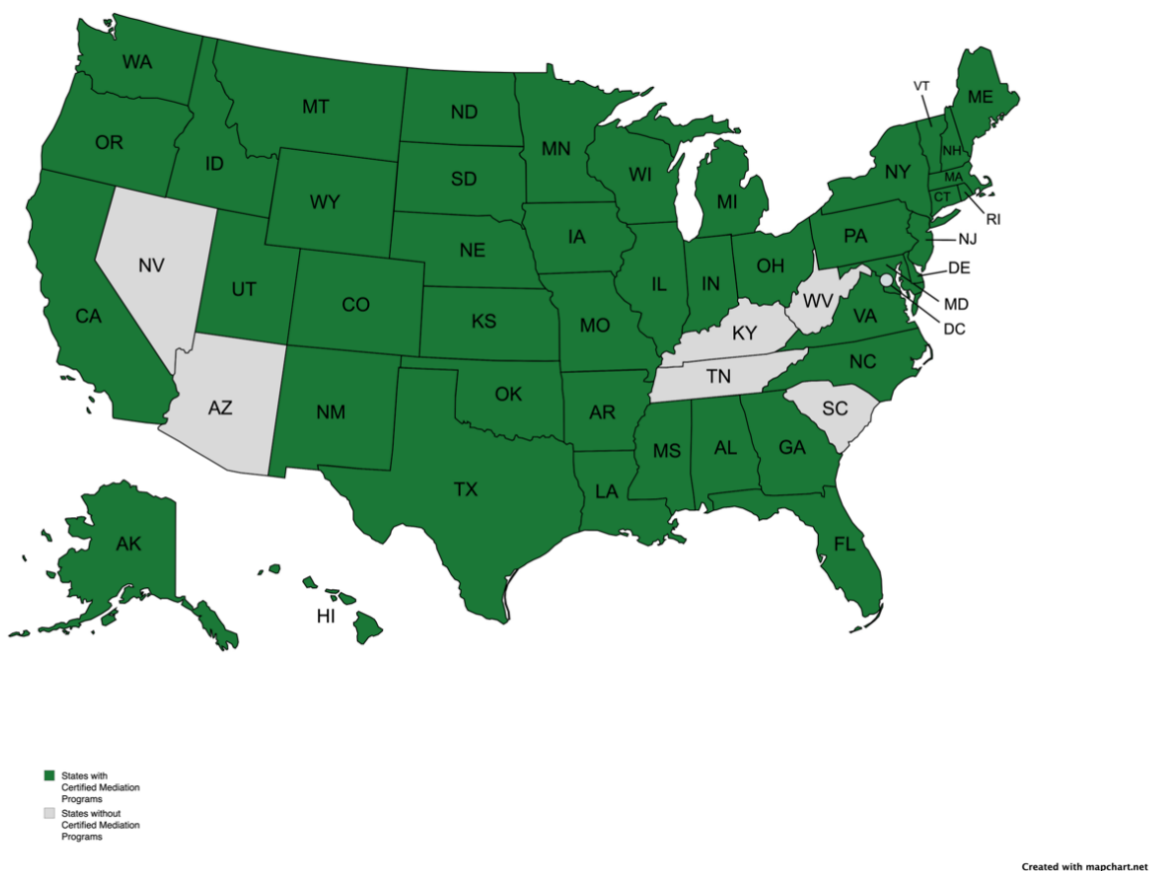
The state-certified programs offer mediation and related covered services at no or very low cost to the agricultural community. The program is a partnership between the federal and state government where the states provide a 30% match (over \$2 million annually) which leverages the federal funding and increases the impact. For FY 25, the proposed federal budget for the Agricultural Mediation Program is reduced from \$7 million to \$6.5 million. When inflation over the last four years is considered, the buying power for each state program has dropped 23%, even though the caseload has increased nearly 39% during the same timeframe. With pandemic related moratoriums expiring, USDA is taking action on outstanding debts. Many state-certified programs are seeing an additional increase in caseloads this fiscal year. In addition, the types of cases have become more complex and span a wider range of topics. The programs are now mediating water conservation projects, pesticide disputes, organic certification, farm succession planning, and high-dollar debtor-creditor situations—all matters that draw on the unique experience of mediators who are specialized experts with agricultural issues.



Agricultural mediation programs help farmers tackle issues beyond transactional matters. For example, many of these skilled mediation professionals have certifications in credit counseling, farm transition planning, and Mental Health First Aid. The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention recognizes that suicide rates within the farming community are five times higher than the general population: farmers have some of the highest suicide rates among all occupations, due to the stress and lack of mental health services in many rural populations. Mediators undergo specialized training to provide a framework for managing conflict that is sensitive to both transactional and emotional components.

Mediation works, because the process creates platforms for safety, enhances the ability to be seen and heard, addresses power disparities, and generates tailored outcomes that are participant driven. Post-mediation evaluations have cited financial savings, improved understanding among participants, and repaired relationships.



*FY2025-2026**

To learn more about how this network directly benefits your constituents and to find the program coordinator for your state, visit the Coalition of Agricultural Mediation Programs' website:

<https://agriculturemediation.org>

References and sources are available upon request.

Agricultural Mediation Program Fact Sheet

❖ History:

- State-Federal partnership going back to 1988, initially authorized as part of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987.
- While initially geared at credit and debt issues, Congress expanded the program in 1994 through the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agricultural Reorganization Act to include USDA conservation issues and other USDA agency adverse decisions.
- The program was expanded again in the 2018 Farm Bill to include organic certification, pesticides, farmer-neighbor conflicts, family farm transitions and succession planning, credit counseling, and leases. Additionally, the statute allows for a State Department of Agriculture to add additional issues in a given state. Examples of issues that have been added in certain states include labor, farm management, contracts and environmental compliance, amongst others.
- *Currently there are 44 states that have certified mediation programs (represented in green on the agricultural mediation program map on page 3).
- These programs assist agricultural producers, their creditors, the USDA and others who interact with producers to resolve disputes without resorting to a lengthy and expensive judicial proceeding. They support the entire agricultural community by providing affordable, neutral forums to resolve complex disputes.

❖ Hallmarks of Mediation:

- Mediation is *voluntary*, *confidential* and mediators are *trained 3rd party neutrals*. Confidentiality is particularly important, because it allows the parties to speak freely without fearing any legal repercussions, making it easier to reach agreement.

❖ Benefits of Mediation:

- **TIME.** Mediation is much faster than the judicial process, and typically disputes take only a few weeks to resolve, saving resources on all sides.
- **RELATIONSHIPS.** Mediation builds strong working relationships between agricultural producers and their creditors, government agencies and others they interact with.
- **AFFORDABILITY.** Mediation is able to resolve complex financial and other issues quickly and affordably, saving precious farm resources for farming.