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Massachusetts Agricultural Mediation Program

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Massachusetts Agricultural Mediation Program

Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration

U.S. Department of Agriculture; MA Department of Agricultural Resources

Summary

The Massachusetts Agricultural Mediation Program is administered by the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) at UMass Boston and certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide mediation services to the farm community in Massachusetts.

Through the Program, MOPC provides mediation services to farmers, their creditors, and the USDA, as well as conducts training and outreach to build the capacity of producer organizations and state and local officials to address conflicts.

Goals and Objectives

In 1988 Congress authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop Certified State Mediation Programs as part of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987. In 2002 MOPC was certified by the USDA to administer the Massachusetts Agricultural Mediation Program.

Past and present partners include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, municipal agricultural commissions of Massachusetts, and producer support organizations such as the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership and the Northeast Organic Farming Association.

Results/Impacts

Over the past ten years, the Agricultural Mediation Program has provided mediation services to customers of three USDA agencies and numerous Massachusetts communities, for issues including foreclosure, loan denial, land use, wetlands conservation, and farm-neighbor disputes. In many cases, parties have been successful in reaching workable agreement terms. The Program saw an 80 percent resolution rate in the 2011 Program Year.

Additionally, the Program has provided workshops to hundreds of farmers, farmers market managers, agricultural commissioners, and staff of producer organizations. Extensive training has been provided to state environment, agriculture and natural resources agency staff, as well as USDA staff and local agricultural commissioners.

Approaches and Methods

The program utilizes a panel of qualified mediators who have a background in agriculture and/or have received training in agricultural issues to provide mediation services. Program staff, who also mediate, conduct observations of current mediators and partner with new mediators to familiarize them with the content and process specific to these types of disputes. Furthermore, education and outreach activities are provided by program staff with input and feedback from agriculture partners.

Conclusion/Next Steps

MOPC will continue to administer the MA Agricultural Mediation Program in partnership with the USDA and state and local entities. Current plans involve development of a new training in conflict and collaboration for agriculture and natural resource agency staff (federal, state, local).

Efforts to increase program activity are underway, including additional outreach and development of partnerships with other USDA agencies and producer support organizations.

References and Resources

Additional information is available from the following sources:

1. Certified Mediation Program, 7 CFR, pt. 785 (2002).
2. *Agricultural Mediation Program*. MA Office of Public Collaboration.
www.mopc.umb.edu/programs/ag_med_program.html.

Additional Partnerships, Interests, Information and/or Contacts

Additional partners include the Coalition of Agricultural Mediation Programs (CAMP) and the others certified state programs in the Northeast. Funding for this program is provided by grant funds from the USDA.

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