

New Mexico Agricultural Mediation Program

by Eduardo Medina and Pilja Vitale*

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INTRODUCTION

The USDA-Certified State Agricultural Mediation Program was established by Congress in 1987 under the Agricultural Credit Act (Public Law 100-233) to help farmers and ranchers resolve disputes without going to court. Originally created to address farm credit problems from the 1980s agricultural debt crisis,⁹ the program has evolved into a federal–state partnership, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) covering up to 70% of costs and the remainder funded by a state agriculture department, land-grant university, or other authorized entity.¹ Over time, Congress expanded its scope to include USDA program decisions, wetland compliance, conservation issues, lease and land use disputes, family farm transitions, organic certification, farmer–neighbor conflicts, and credit counseling.³ Today, 44 certified state programs handle more than 3,000 cases annually, with resolution rates typically between 75% and 95%.⁸

THE NEW MEXICO AGRICULTURAL MEDIATION PROGRAM (NMAMP)

The New Mexico Agricultural Mediation Program (NMAMP) mediates agricultural disputes between farmers and ranchers and USDA throughout the state of New Mexico. The program is administered by the Cooperative Extension Service at New Mexico State University and is certified by USDA.

NMAMP offers a voluntary alternative to litigation, arbitration, or formal appeals by providing an impartial third-party mediator. The mediator facilitates communication, helps clarify issues, and assists the parties in working toward a mutually acceptable resolution. Mediation allows all parties to discuss options in a controlled setting, share their perspectives, and provide input toward the solution. The mediator does not impose a decision; the process extends traditional negotiation procedures by adding a neutral third party to guide the discussions. Mediators are impartial and conflicts of interest are screened; a different mediator

*Respectively, Program Manager, Cooperative Extension Service Department of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business (AEAB); and Extension Economist, Department of Extension Economics (EE). Both from New Mexico State University.

can be assigned if needed. The NMAMP home page, which includes program details and contact information, is available at <https://aces-nmamp.nmsu.edu/>.

WHY IT MATTERS IN NEW MEXICO

New Mexico's agricultural landscape offers unique challenges: drought, water rights disputes, grazing allotments, and multi-generation land ownership. Farmers and ranchers often work with multiple agencies—federal, state, and tribal—and navigating rules on loans, conservation, and land use can be complex.

The NMAMP offers a confidential alternative to court proceedings. Mediators are trained in agriculture and work in both English and Spanish, a vital service in a state where many producers prefer to discuss important matters in Spanish. When disputes involve tribal lands or jurisdictions, the mediators coordinate respectfully with tribal governments.

By bringing all parties together with a neutral mediator, the NMAMP helps save time, reduce costs, preserve relationships, and keep operations running. For many producers, it can be the difference between a long, expensive conflict and a practical solution that keeps the farm or ranch productive.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

The NMAMP is open to both individuals and groups—including farmers, ranchers, agricultural organizations, co-operatives, lenders, USDA or state agencies, tribal governments, and other parties involved in agricultural disputes in New Mexico. Participation is voluntary, and all services are confidential under program rules.

WHAT CAN BE MEDIATED

The New Mexico Agricultural Mediation Program can help resolve many types of agricultural disputes. If your issue is not listed here, a mediator may still be able to mediate it with authorization by the Secretary of Agriculture.

This list identifies what can be mediated:

- Agricultural loans – whether made or guaranteed by USDA or by a third-party lender
- Wetland determinations.
- Compliance issues with farm programs, conservation programs, or the National Organic Program under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990.
- Rural water loan programs.
- Grazing issues on National Forest System lands.
- Pesticide-related disputes.
- Lease issues – including land and equipment leases.
- Family farm transitions.
- Farmer–neighbor conflicts.
- Other issues to better serve the agricultural community approved by the Secretary of Agriculture

Certified mediation programs may also provide credit counseling before starting mediation involving USDA, or for issues not related to any ongoing USDA dispute.

HOW TO REQUEST MEDIATION

To request mediation, contact the NMAMP by phone or email (emw@nmsu.edu). Program staff will explain how mediation works and collect basic details about your dispute. If everyone agrees to participate, the mediator will schedule a session—either in person at a convenient location or by phone or video.

Please bring any documents or information related to the dispute. A nominal fee may apply that will be discussed before mediation begins.

If an agreement is reached, a written document will be prepared. When relevant, the parties may share this agreement with agencies to implement its terms.

BENEFITS OF MEDIATION

The New Mexico Agricultural Mediation Program offers several advantages:

- Cost-effective – Less expensive than going to court.
- Custom solutions – Agreements are made by the people involved to fit their needs.
- Relationship-focused – To keep good working relationships in place and/or repair them when needed.

HOW TO GET STARTED (STEP BY STEP)

1. Contact NMAMP – Call 575-646-2529 or email emw@nmsu.edu to request mediation. Office hours: Mon–Fri, 8–5 MT; after-hours messages returned next business day.
2. Share the basics – by providing your contact information, the other party's information, along with a brief description of the issue (you can request Spanish).
3. The mediator invites all the identified parties — NMAMP contacts the other party; participation is voluntary for everyone.
4. Schedule the session – Choose a convenient time and place or select a phone or video conference. The mediator offers in-person, phone, or video sessions; shuttle mediation (separate rooms/caucus) is available when helpful.
5. Prepare and mediate – Bring relevant letters/decision notices, contracts/leases, loan documents, maps, invoices, and your notes/timeline. A neutral mediator facilitates discussion so you can explore options and decide on a solution.
6. If you need to cancel or reschedule, please give 24–48 hours notice

CONCLUSION

The New Mexico Agricultural Mediation Program (NMAMP) provides a voluntary, confidential opportunity to resolve agricultural disputes between farmers, ranchers, lenders, the USDA, state agencies, and other parties across New Mexico. Services are available in English and Spanish. By bringing everyone involved with a neutral mediator, NMAMP helps save time, reduce costs, preserve relationships, and ensure that agricultural operations run smoothly.

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Eduardo (Lalo) Medina is a Program Manager with the Cooperative Extension Service in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business at New Mexico State University and a team member of the Cooperative Extension Research and Outreach Assistance Network. He holds a Master's degree of Agriculture in Agricultural Business. His areas of expertise are in agriculture economics, animal and range science, range livestock production and management, national and international community/economic/business development, community needs assessments, and product marketing and technology adoption.

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