Conflict in Rural America

- Individual Disputes – person to person which include farmer creditor issues, farm family issues, and neighborhood disputes
- Many of these cases are related to the “farm crisis” but actually most cases are part of the chronic issues in rural America – economic development, land use, water use, and the future of agriculture.
- Dispute resolution in rural America has developed slowly, and started around 1985.
- Mediation is now available and arbitration has a foothold.
USDA has certified at least 33 states to provide mediation of their disputes.

Mediation has grown from debtor creditor to a wide array of cases as per the direction of the Secretary of Agriculture.

Arbitration is used, but rural arbitration programs are not available. Urban arbitrators are costly and not readily trusted.
Public Policy Conflicts

- Public Policy issues abound in the rural areas.
- These disputes include competition for limited resources – land, water, air, and funding.
- Disputes have focused upon stereotypes – family farms versus industrial agriculture.
- Disputes also include rural/urban issues – from funding of roads to schools.
- Environmental issues abound – pollution and use of water/land.
Public Policy Conflicts (continued)

- Other policy issues – GMOs – co-existence, contamination, drift, and preservation of patents.
- Local food systems
- New Farm Bill
Mediation has proved to be useful in the agricultural and rural areas.

Mediation is a process where a third party neutral assists two or more parties in negotiating.

Mediation helps people overcome impasse and determine underlying interests such that resolution can be reached.

It is time to use mediation – can rural interests continue to use assets fighting when a nonadversarial model is available?