



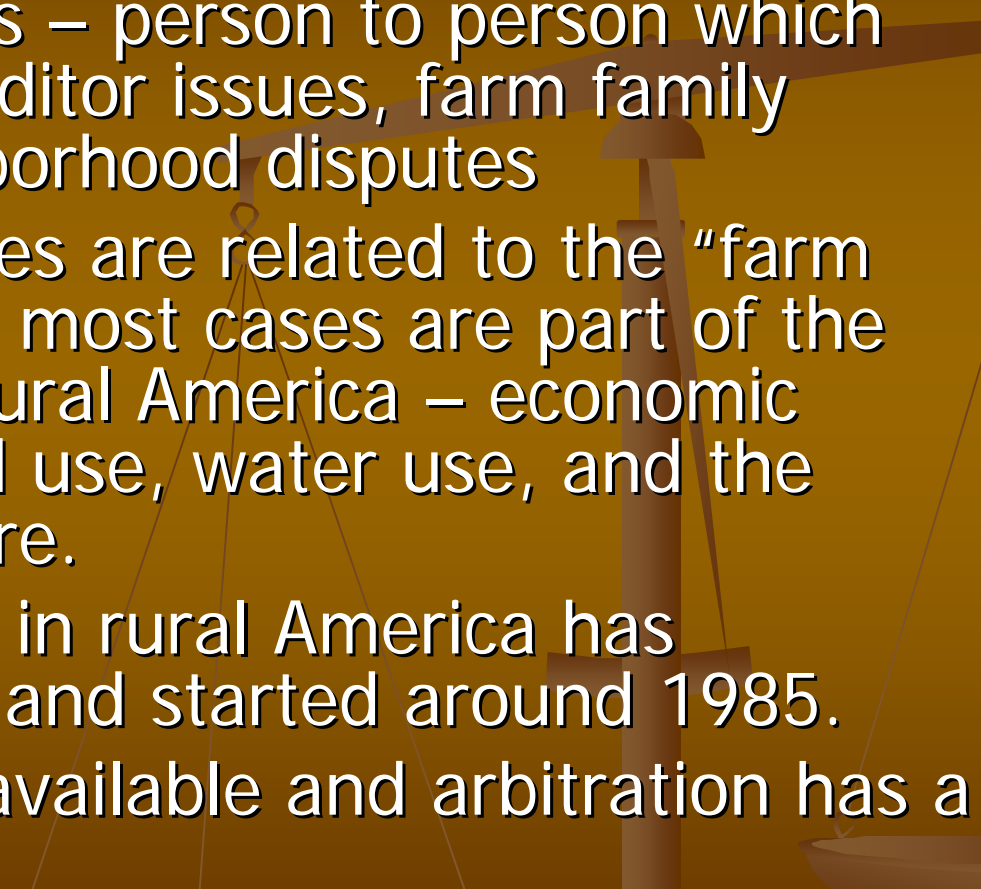
# DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN AGRICULTURAL/RURAL POLICY DISPUTES

National Public Policy Planning Conference:  
Consequences of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Food  
System

September 18, 2006

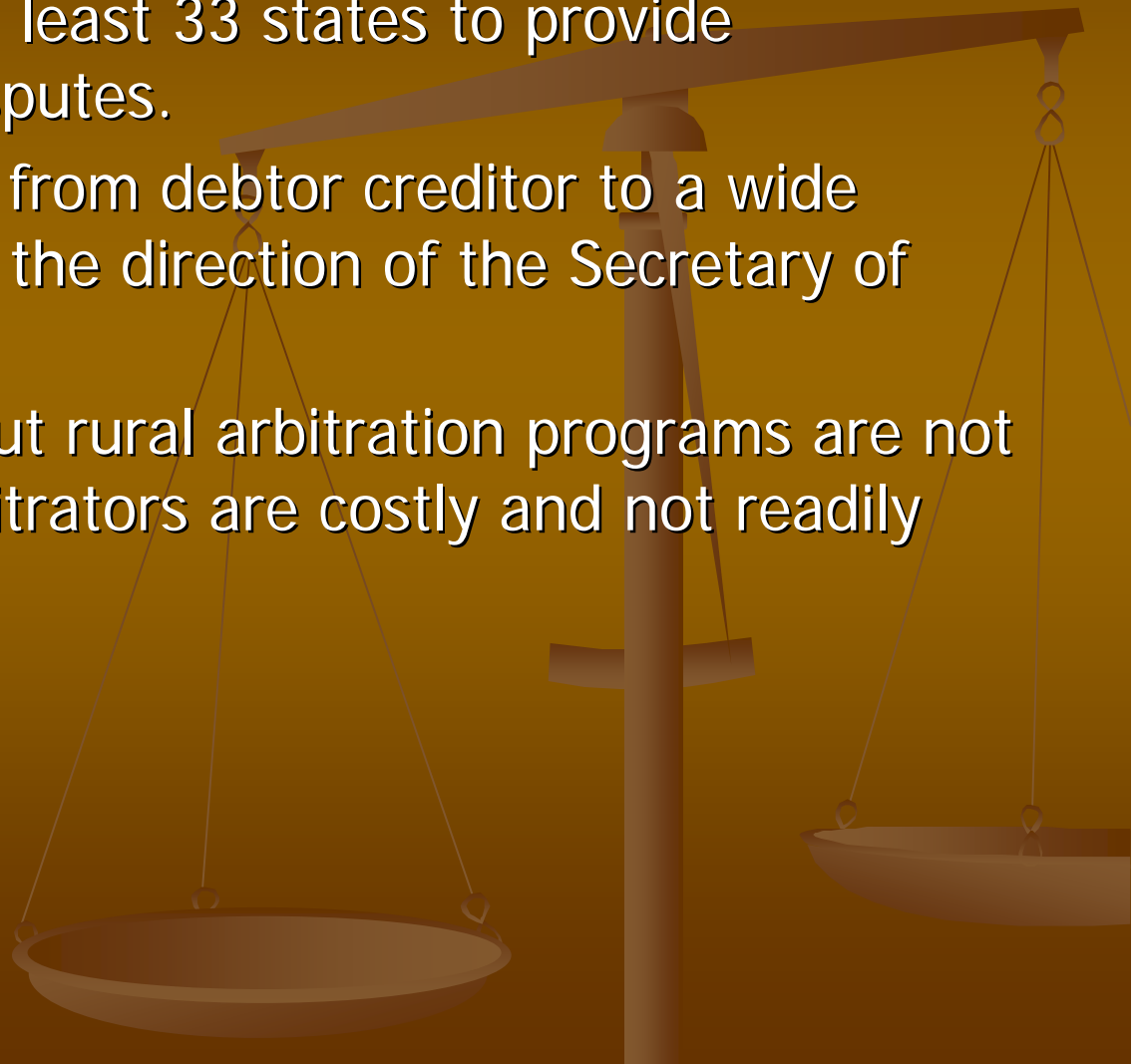
Micheal Thompson, Iowa Mediation Service

## 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.
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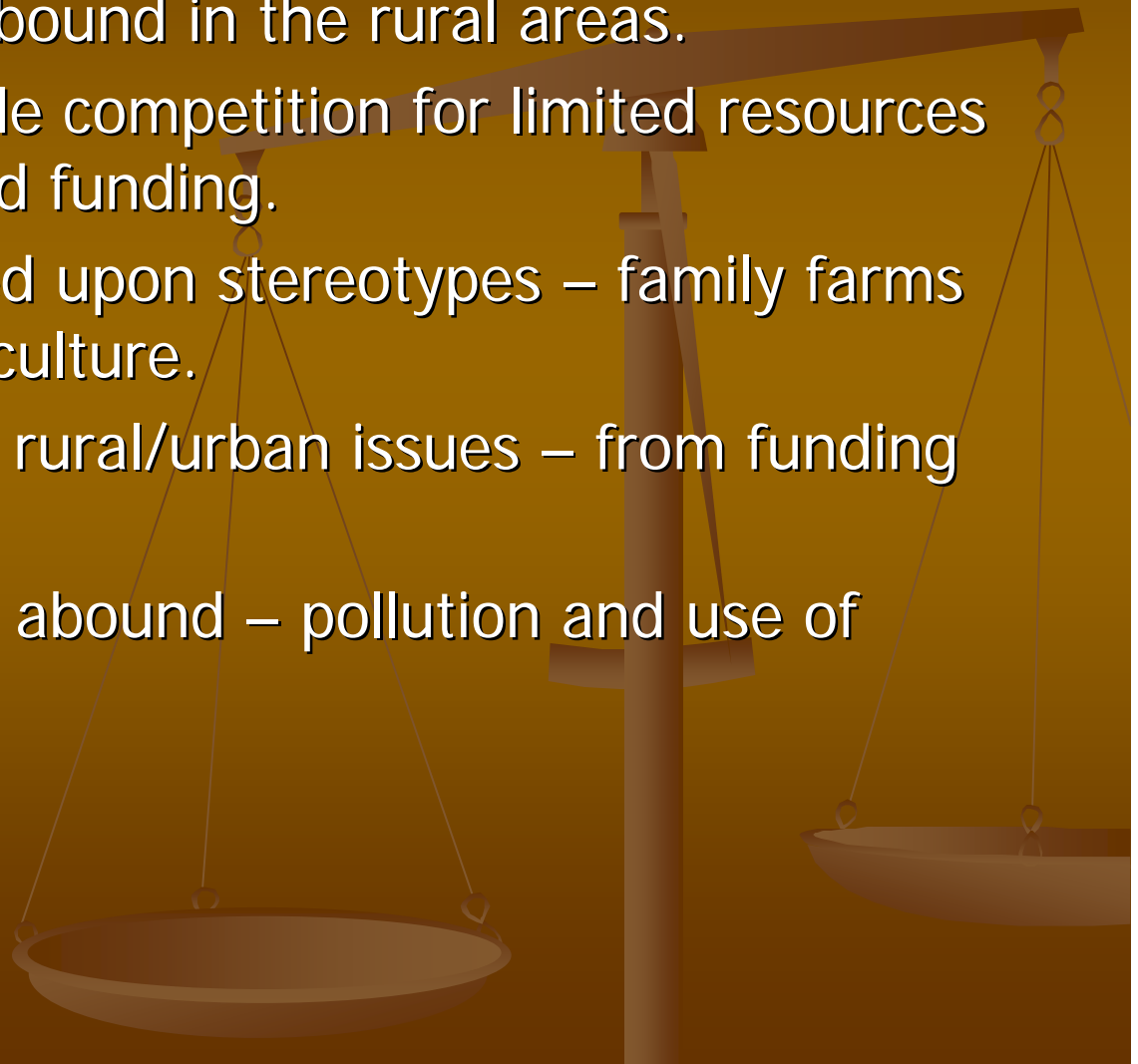
## Conflict in Rural America (continued)

- 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 Works

- 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?

