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Michigan Community Mediation Association Launches Michigan Agricultural Mediation Program

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Community Mediation Association (MCMA) has been awarded the Michigan Agricultural Mediation Program (MAMP) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This program offers free mediation services to Michigan farmers to resolve their disputes outside of court. Farmers' disputes covered by this grant can range from contract issues, estate and probate complications, adverse determinations by the USDA, bankruptcy, and any other conflict they may face concerning their farm.

"Our association is honored to have been awarded this grant to provide a vital alternative to resolving disputes for our farmers," said Gabriella Reihanian Havlicek, Executive Director of MCMA. "We will be working with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, industry stakeholders, and local leaders to ensure every farmer knows this program is available to them for free to resolve their conflicts."

MCMA is an advocacy, not-for-profit association for the 17 Community Dispute Resolution Program (CDRP) mediation centers across the state of Michigan that are partially funded by the Michigan Supreme Court State Court Administrative Office (SCAO). MCMA's mission is to help advocate for the 17 CDRP and educate Michigan residents on the importance of mediation and restorative practices.

"Michigan's farmers work to feed our communities and families 24/7, 365 days a year and mediation provides an avenue for them to be an integral part of the conflict resolution process. MDARD is proud to support MCMA," said Gary McDowell, MDARD Director. "I encourage farmers to look into mediation as a viable option for resolving conflict."

Mediation is a confidential process where disputing parties will discuss their issues with a neutral third party, the mediator, who will help them come to a resolution.

"Farmers already have heavy issues to navigate on a daily basis," said Kelly Turner, CEO of Potato Growers of Michigan. "Whether it's a supply chain shortage, finding workers, or navigating continually changing weather conditions. What they don't need is to have extra legal issues hanging over their head for years to come. Now they can contact MCMA and request a free mediation to resolve any dispute they may be facing."

Buddy Sebastian, President of Michigan Ground Water Association, echoed these sentiments by sharing, "We at Michigan Ground Water Association are excited to be partnering with MCMA and the 17 Community Dispute Resolution Program mediation centers. The services they provide to our residents and now our farmers allow Michiganders the opportunity to resolve disputes in a free and faster way."

The 17 CDRP mediation centers are local nonprofits that offer mediation and restorative practice services. Their volunteer mediators are trained in the use of the facilitative model. This will ensure that all participants' voices are heard and that the disputing parties are the ones making the agreement. Not the mediators.

CDRP mediators are required to complete 40 hours of SCAO-approved General Civil training or 48 hours of SCAO-approved Domestic training, practical experience supervised by seasoned mediators, and continuing education. To mediate agricultural cases the mediators will also be required to participate in 20 additional hours of advanced training every two years.

"Our mediators are highly skilled and trained on how to best serve their community members facing conflict in a respectful, professional manner," said Shannon Taylor, Executive Director of Upper Peninsula Commission for Area Progress (UPCAP) Conflict Resolution Program and MCMA's Training Committee Chairwoman. "I am certain they will bring this same level of expertise to the Michigan Agricultural Mediation Program and to our farmers."

Farmers that wish to request a mediation may contact MCMA at www.micommunitymediation.org, via email micommunitymediationassoc@gmail.com, or by calling 800-616-7863.

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