

Land-Use Issues and Conflict Resolution

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Preamble

Two farmer's - Farmer A and Farmer B reflect on the circumstances that have lead them to an ongoing and expensive conflict:

Farmer A's Perspective

My great-great-great grandparents originally cleared a 100-acre farm out of the bush on the 7th Concession. It was good land, a creek went through the middle of the farm, there was water for the livestock and with the soils and climate they were blessed with they could grow some of the best crops in Canada. Gradually, over the years, they established a good sized barn that supported their cattle, pigs and horses. As the farm became more prosperous, the old log house was eventually replaced by a red brick house that would stand the test of time.

They had good neighbours that lived across the road - their children played together, went to school together, and they supported each other in times of need. The farm was passed down from generation to generation and the cycle of neighbourly relations went on for more than 100 years.

Gradually, however, things changed. After the war the house across the road lost some of its luster, farm sizes were getting larger and larger and eventually the neighbour's farm was purchased by a farmer who lived several miles away. The house continued to deteriorate - no one was living in it now, but the barn continued to be valuable. Dairy heifers were kept in the barn - it was good to see it being occupied. The barn was kept in good repair and now and then there was a chance to speak to my new neighbour about the dairy business - something we shared in common. This went on for several years - trees had now grown up around the old house and while the I longed for the days when we had good neighbours close at hand there was something to be said for the solitude. This farm would provide a good home for my son and grandchildren.

And then one morning there were happenings across the road. The old dairy barn was being demolished and there was evidence that a new barn was about to be built. I soon discovered that there were plans for one or more hog barns. I've read and heard that these new larger barns can be a real problem - in fact, I once had pigs myself - and know how much they can stink. I contacted the Township but was told that everything was fine - appropriate permits had been issued. Still, this change caused me concern. This new barn seemed awfully close. I spoke to the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and they informed me that while certain guidelines weren't met, the Township did issue a legal permit. I've decided to contact my lawyer and now we'll see what happens....

Farmer B's perspective

I'm proud to call Canada my home. When my parents left Europe for Canada, I came along as a young man determined to work hard, to contribute positively to my new country and to farm in what seemed like wide open spaces. I worked hard to build up sufficient equity to purchase my first farm. It was a time of opportunity.

Many people did not see the relative cheapness of Ontario's farmland, but with prudent acquisitions I was able to add several farms close to my home operation. The dairy business

was good to me - that monthly cheque allowed me to keep the bills paid when crop prices were bad or when the high interest rates of the early 80s forced other farmers out of business. For me getting large was a survival strategy. My children wanted to farm and with Free Trade and ever reduced margins, I sensed that if I wanted to keep in the business and compete with the Americans and Brazilians I needed to both diversify and achieve certain economies of scale.

Some years ago I picked up the farm on the 7th Concession - a good piece of land - a decent barn but not much of a house - certainly not worth the hassle of trying to rent it out. I kept dairy heifers in the barn for a number of years - it was close to home - not so far for the hired hand to go for chores. The neighbour across the road was a good man and gave me a call if he saw anything unusual around the property.

I'd been in the hog business for a while - the market was always up and down - but that new approach to production - a "loop" as they called it with sows in one barn, feeder hogs in another and weaners in another barn held promise - of reducing disease, maximizing production and of achieving those economies of scale that I needed. As I thought about it, the farm I picked up a number of years ago on the 7th concession was a good spot to build. There was a sow barn in the next township, and I had plans to build finishing barns with a partner elsewhere. I needed a spot to build two to four weaner barns and I decided that the farm on the 7th Concession would work well.

I approached the Township for a building permit and they told me that I should get a Certificate of Compliance that determines the minimum separation distance to the neighbour's house - this would push the barns back further from his house than was practical (the property slopes away from the road and if the barns are too far back I wouldn't be able to use the gravity system for the liquid manure that I had planned to use. When I discussed this with the Township I discovered that the Certificate is simply a guideline - a recommendation and that the Township would issue me a building permit even if I didn't have a certificate. After all these barns aren't that large (two barns at 1800 weaner pigs each) and these new barns will be downwind from my neighbour. It seemed like a good spot to build.

A few days after construction began, I was in the coffee shop and heard that my neighbour was quite concerned about my new barns. I wasn't overly concerned - after all I did everything that the township required of me. Just the other day, however, I was contacted by the Ministry and understood that my neighbour has hired a lawyer. Some years ago I discovered, that while I know pigs and cows - I don't know law. I think I'll give my own lawyer a call. What else can I do?

From the above scenario there are five observations that serve as a useful backdrop to this paper:

1. Conflict often emerges out of what appears to be routine circumstances
2. Conflict is usually brought about by what is perceived to be a significant change
3. Conflict, if not positively managed, can become a significant impediment to peoples quality of life - both an emotional and financial strain.
4. There is often the opportunity to manage conflict at an early stage or to avoid it all together
5. There is often no right or wrong when it comes to issues of conflict.

This paper provides an overview of some of the key factors associated with conflict and provides an overview of some of the key strategies that farmers, municipalities and others can employ to manage conflict.

Rural land-use conflict: Introduction*

(* This paper builds upon materials prepared by Caldwell, Toombs, Knight and Turvey (2000) and included in the manual: "Rural Planning and Nutrient Management: Issues and Approaches.")

In reality Farmer A and Farmer B, as introduced above, have spent tens of thousands of dollars advocating their respective positions. The conflict they have experienced is, in many ways, a symptom of broader changes that are occurring within rural communities across the country. In many areas the intensification and specialization of agriculture, in combination with a number of trends including increasing numbers of non-farm neighbours has contributed to farm/non-farm conflict as well as conflict between farmers (Caldwell, 1998). In particular the trend towards larger farms with liquid manure systems has made conflict resolution related to environmental issues more important than ever. It includes concerns from farmers and non-farmers alike towards other farmers and towards the municipality itself (Why don't you do something about the odours from Farmer John's farm!).

This paper explores the nature of conflict, but more specifically focuses on some of the parameters of conflict resolution or Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as it is often called. This paper provides an overview of various alternative dispute resolution concepts and approaches. The paper concludes by offering some strategies for the minimization of conflict both from a farmer and a municipal perspective.

Farmers and conflict resolution

As noted by Carter and Owen (2000) the number and intensity of conflicts facing Canadian farmers has risen sharply in recent years. Farmers must now answer to a wide range of critics and stakeholders, including urbanites, lobby groups, federal, provincial, regional and municipal government agencies, non-farm rural residents and sometimes neighbouring farmers.

The risks to the farm community associated with conflict are high. Recently (April, 2001) in Bruce County, Ontario for example, 300 people (many cottagers) attended a meeting on Easter Sunday in opposition to a proposed new hog barn. This issue is now before the courts and demonstrates that the intensity of this type of conflict can seriously threaten the future of livestock production. Sometimes conflict can be based on perceptual issues which may not have any factual basis (Caldwell, 1998). Carter and Owen (2000) identify a number of Common Causes of conflict that they refer to as the Dirty Dozen. These are listed below:

The Dirty Dozen (Carter and Owen, 2000)

Most of the conflicts affecting Canadian farmers are about:

1. Air pollution - odour, dust or noise
2. Water pollution - both surface and ground
3. Waste management - both handling and disposal
4. Chemicals - of all kinds at all stages in the food production and processing system
5. Land degradation - erosion, compaction, salinization, depletion, contamination, etc.
6. Wildlife and fish protection - including habitat protection
7. Biodiversity - including fears about dwindling wildlands and mono-culture farming
8. Resource management - including preservation of wild parklands and green spaces
9. Public access - to public and private land used by farmers and trespassing
10. Zoning and planning - farms and residential subdivisions sited too close together
11. Unkempt farmsteads - offend neighbours and passers-by
12. Aesthetic despoilment - due to berms, nets, buildings, fences and hours of operation

Municipalities and conflict resolution

Municipalities are also often drawn into conflict. Sometimes municipalities are the source of the conflict and other times they are perceived as an objective body that can or should intervene to resolve problems between neighbours. When people have a concern, for example, the first place they often turn to is their local municipality. Sources of conflict within the rural community are varied. Sometimes, conflict may be a running feud between two neighbours and the municipality will likely decline involvement. In other instances, however, and from the perspective of rural planning and environmental management it may be in the municipalities interest to become involved. For example the "Dirty Dozen" sources of conflict identified by Carter and Owen (2000) have a strong municipal or public component to them (for example water and air quality).

As mentioned, conflict can also exist between the municipality and ratepayers. Conflict may arise from concern over municipal action or inaction, staff dealings with public, concern over council-related issues, concern over taxes or concerns over any number of a wide range of municipal services. In many rural municipalities across the country, the issue of agricultural intensification has put many conflicts squarely on the Council table. In Ontario, municipalities have been lobbied to stop the construction of new livestock facilities. In Manitoba and Alberta tense public meetings have accompanied proposals for the construction of new barns.

While conflict can not always be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, it is desirable to try to resolve or manage it. Individuals and organizations are recognizing that by increasing their understanding of the negotiating process and by using specific skills, they can achieve enhanced outcomes for themselves and others.

For a variety of reasons unresolved conflict is a problem. It destroys relationships between people, complicates livelihoods and eventually contributes to a dysfunctional community. Conflict can however be the impetus for positive change. In the words of Sherman and Uvey (1992) "The most valuable aspect of conflict is the energy that it generates and conflict management is not an attempt to suppress the energy but to use it constructively." While sometimes conflict just goes away, remains unresolved, or is dealt with informally there is much to be gained by channeling energies to resolve it outside of a formal legal structure (i.e. the courts). From this perspective the challenge is to find the mechanisms that are most successful in the resolution of conflict.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) - a range of options

In the recent past, a court of law was the venue where personal, business, and environmental conflicts were settled. Now, with ever-increasing frequency, one of the first steps in resolving a dispute is a more efficient and cost-effective process known as alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The "alternative" in alternative dispute resolution implies an alternative to litigation. The generally accepted alternatives include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and administrative tribunals. *Figure 1* illustrates the range and overlap of various alternative dispute approaches.

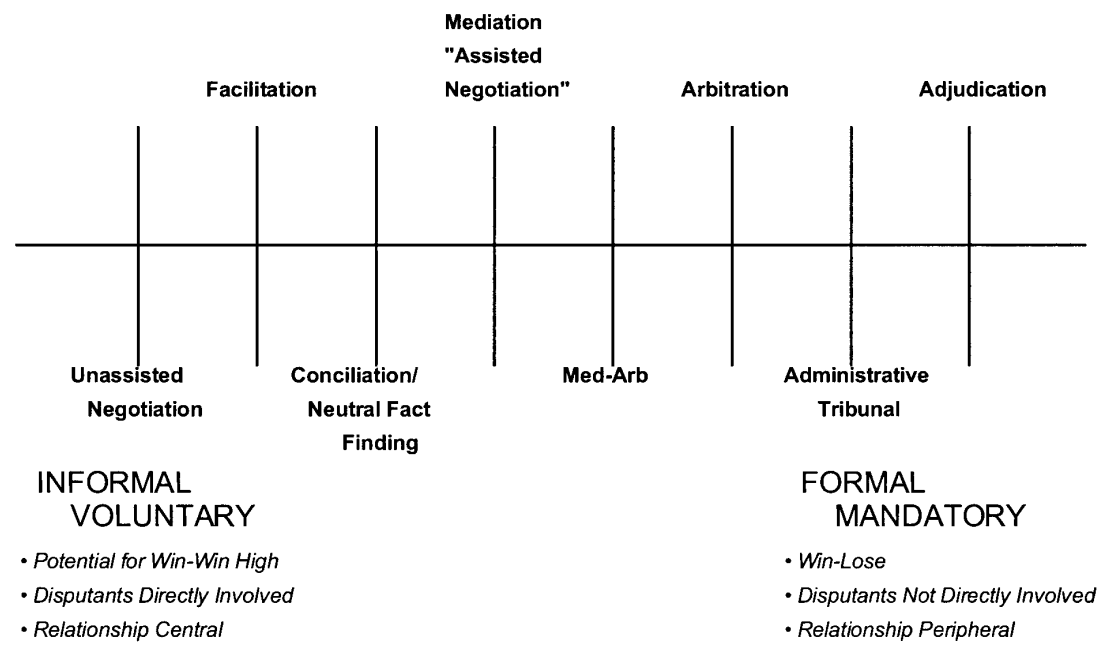


Figure 1. ADR Continuum.

The following provides a brief summary of the key options for Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Negotiation of a dispute is when the parties meet to exchange information about needs and interest between individuals, teams or groups with a goal of reaching mutually acceptable agreements. The negotiating parties have a direct stake in and are affected by the outcome of the negotiation. They meet directly or through representatives; the parties control the process and the dispute need not be resolved on legal positions

Assisted Negotiation refers to various types of dispute resolution methods that bring in a "neutral" person with special qualifications from outside to help play a major role in the resolution process. The following are examples of assisted negotiation.

- In **facilitation**, a facilitator is voluntarily chosen by the negotiating parties to make the course of the negotiation run smoothly. The facilitator aims at assisting the parties to have productive meetings by managing the logistics and the format of discussion so that the parties can focus on substantive issues. The facilitator helps set the agenda, suggests ground rules, keeps the discussion on track and makes suggestions on effective process actions. Facilitation is used when the parties need some assistance managing discussion. The facilitator does not have a stake in the outcome of the process. While there are strong similarities to a mediator, the facilitator is likely to have a "softer" role in the process.
- In **mediation**, two or more people come together to work out a solution to their problem. A mutually agreed upon objective third party, called a mediator, facilitates the process of resolution. A mediator is trained to help parties identify common ground, but does not have a stake in the outcome of the mediation. Unlike a judge or arbitrator, the mediator does not take sides or make decisions. The mediator's job is to help the disputants evaluate their goals and options and find their own mutually satisfactory solution.

The mediator ensures that all participants in a mediation get to speak and be heard, helps define the issues, emphasizes common goals, keeps discussion focused, facilitates discussion of all options and reduces fault finding. During the mediation session, the mediator is responsible for keeping things orderly, fair, and moving forward. The mediator may advise, counsel, and assist the parties on ways to come to agreement, but does not tell the parties how they should conduct their business or personal affairs. The mediator does not advise on legal matters or advise/assist parties in determining their legal rights.

In a more formal mediation, the mediator not only manages the discussions but also assists in analyzing the dispute, collecting data, designing the negotiation process, building constituent terms, and developing support for agreements.

The challenge for the mediator is to transform the parties from a win/lose mindset to an all-gain mindset. The mediator has no power to impose a decision, but only the authority voluntarily bestowed by the parties.

- **Arbitration** is a binding process in which an outside third party (the arbitrator) decides issues between or among parties. With arbitration the process is still within the control of the parties and it can be tailored to meet their need. There should be rules governing the process for procedural safeguards, but the decision is binding on the parties.

John Forester, in his 1987 survey of negotiation and mediation identifies six strategies that are frequently used by planners in local land use conflict. These strategies are:

- *Identifying the relevant facts, regulations and impacts*
- *Pre-mediation, representing anticipated concerns of all parties and searching for compromise*
- *Planner as resource - bringing the parties together; encourage back and forth meetings*
- *Shuttle diplomacy - probe and advise both sides separately*
- *Planner as active and interested mediator*
- *Planner as negotiator, as a planner - instigated neutral mediation.*

The arbitrator reviews the facts of the case and makes a settlement decision. It differs from mediation in that the neutral third party is not just charged with helping to reach agreement but in fact decides the form of the agreement. Binding arbitration requires that the parties accept the arbitrator's decision. This is mostly used in labour/management disputes - but rarely in planning disputes.

- **Mediation/Arbitration:** In this process negotiations proceed under the guidance of an empowered mediator who may identify common issues, suggest an outcome and then rule on its implementation. During the process, the mediator's role changes to that of an arbitrator.
- **Administrative tribunals** such as the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board or the Ontario Municipal Board are established under provincial statute to resolve disputes in a specific subject area. They are generally more formal, the statutes set the procedural rules and the parties have limited control of the process.

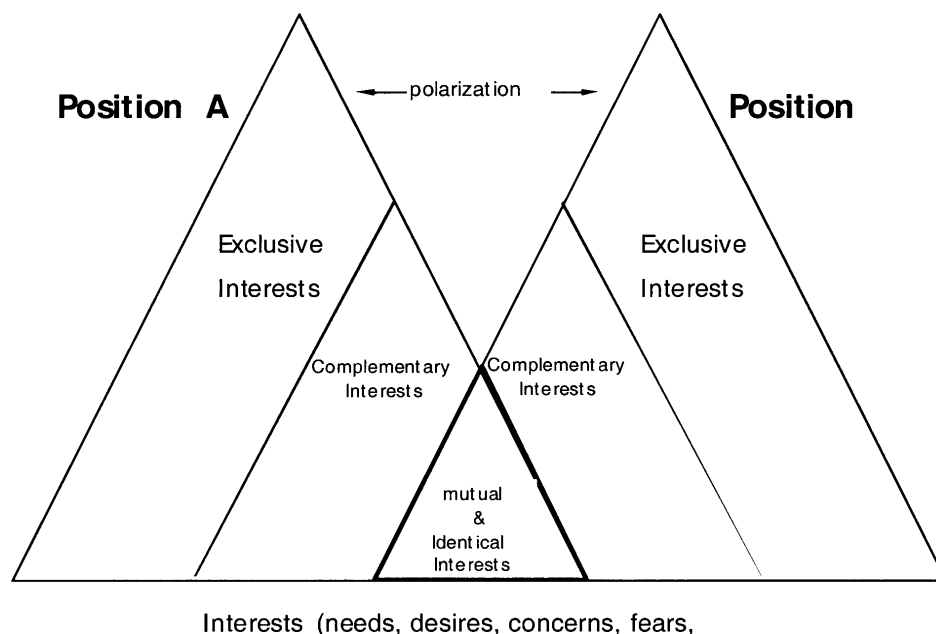


Figure 2. Moving from POSITIONS to INTERESTS expands solution.

The goal of Alternative Dispute Resolution is to arrive at some mutually agreeable solution that satisfies the needs of the constituent groups and ideally can be labelled as a win/win situation. Part of this is appreciating that when conflict is identified people usually start out with conflicting positions (Figure 2) (Person A raises hogs for a living and Person B doesn't like the odours), however there are often complementary interests that can be agreed to (both agree that food production is essential) and there may be mutual and identical interest that are held in common (for example, people might agree that manure should not be spread near watercourses or on Sundays). The challenge through ADR is to find this common ground, which is a good starting point on the road to dialogue and a win/win resolution.

A focus on mediation

Frequently municipal officials find themselves in the role of mediator - sometimes trying to resolve an issue between ratepayers (for example, a planning dispute is often resolved at the Council table) and sometimes trying to resolve conflict between the public and a municipal interest (for example, concern over the actions of the animal control officer or debating the amount and location of parkland to be received by the municipality). Whatever the context, (and sometimes it may be more negotiation than mediation) there are certain principles that can enhance the outcome and provide a greater chance of a win/win result.

At the outset the Mediator will want to identify two key objectives for the benefit of the participants: First, the mediator will want to confirm that the parties **understand** what mediation is and that it is a preferred alternative to arbitration or tribunals (in terms of procedures, time and cost). The mediator may also want to encourage the participants to think about what happens if the mediation fails and conversely what happens if they are successful. Secondly, the mediator will want the participants to understand that they are **striving for a settlement between the parties** that serves their interests, is fair, and is likely to be ratified (i.e. if someone else has "approval" authority prior to ratification). Figure 3 provides an abbreviated five-step approach to mediation.

Five Steps to a Win-Win Situation in Mediation

Step 1 - Clarify issues and interests

As mediator confirm that each party understands the underlying interests that they have and the interests of the other parties.

As mediator your responsibility is to determine what the issues are and what the interests are of the parties that have raised the concerns (i.e. Is the complainant a neighbour? Is the issue a concern of safety?)

Step 2 - Review the available information

Is new or additional information required? Is there new information since the complaint was made?

Step 3 - Explore options

What is the common ground between the complaint and the complainant? Is there potential for agreement or compromise?

What types of solutions might potentially be used in dealing with the complaint? What is feasible and what is financially and technically possible? Will it have the desired outcome? Is it likely to be perceived in a positive way by neighbours?

Conversely, is the complaint not founded? And do you have adequate information to properly explain that to the person who has raised the complaint?

Step 4 - Use objective criteria to seek settlement

Remember your responsibility as mediator is to not necessarily side with either party but rather establish criteria that allows you to come to an appropriate win-win situation (i.e. Is there an odour problem? Is there a potential water quality problem? Are there other irritants that exist that can be responded to?)

Make sure that the solution can be implemented.

Make sure that the parties understand how it will be implemented.

Step 5 - Report the results of mediation

It is advisable to accurately record the results of a mediation decision while both parties remain together. Recording the mediated agreement in written form, including terminology and definitions, helps to ensure that both parties know what has been agreed to and establishes a "paper trail" should the mediated solution require review at a future point.

Figure 3. Five steps to a win-win situation in mediation.

Mediation and agriculture

The application of mediation in agriculture originated in the area of farm debt, where mediators were used to assist farmers and agricultural lenders to address issues of agricultural indebtedness. A neutral party was introduced into the borrower and creditor discussions to facilitate discussion, and to generate alternative plans. Farmers and creditors came to mediation with the understanding that they would seek a mutually agreeable solution that, in the best way possible, met the needs of all parties.

Due to the success of mediation with farm credit issues, mediation has been recognised as a beneficial process that could be applied to other areas in agriculture. For example, in 1995, North Carolina established the Farm Assistance Mediation Program to provide voluntary mediation of farm-related disputes, and mandatory mediation prior to initiating court action. The purpose of the program is to resolve disputes arising out of expansion of non-agricultural land uses in agricultural areas and intensification of agricultural operations. A dispute is defined as a controversy between a farmer and another person over a claim, which is eligible for resolution in court. The dispute relates to action of the farmer alleged to be creating a nuisance, which interferes with the enjoyment of property rights of the neighbour. The cost of mediation is borne by the parties in the dispute.

Environmental conflicts in farming can range from odour, noise, or dust complaints, to lagoon spills. In many cases, even if environmental laws are violated, there are opportunities for conflict resolution to help in achieving workable compromises and solutions that all parties can live with and trust. In Ontario, with many municipalities requiring the completion of a Nutrient Management Plan as a tool to ensure that Best Management Practices are applied to livestock production, there has also been a move to establish local committees to review and attempt to resolve complaints. Some municipalities have also entrusted this type of Committee to approve Nutrient Management Plans. The Nutrient Management Act proposed for Ontario (2001) retains this type of Committee as a useful tool to resolve conflict locally. Perth County located in southwestern Ontario, was one of the first counties in the province to establish a local peer review committee to deal with local conflict. Perth County contains 3,156 farms and had the third largest total sales, 366 million dollars, of Ontario counties in 1991. The county recognises the importance of agriculture to its economy and the importance of agriculture to the community and social structure throughout the county. In mid-1995, County Council founded the Perth County Agricultural Committee consisting of members from each of the major livestock/poultry organizations, Perth County Federation of Agriculture, Perth County Christian Farmers and government agencies.

As part of the Committee's work, establishment of a Review Committee was recommended to deal with complaints and inquiries related to good farm management practices as they relate to livestock and poultry operations throughout the county. The Perth County Agricultural Review Committee operates as a group of peers from the farm community with representation from the major commodity groups and farm organizations in the county. It is intended that the Committee review complaints and consider inquiries concerning farm management practices and that the committee will provide advice. It may provide an alternative dispute service and has the potential to resolve agricultural issues locally.

Similar Committees have been established elsewhere in Ontario. While these committees have no statutory authority they have had a reasonable degree of success. In Huron County, for example, several complaints have come to this Committee annually (there have been particular concerns along the Lake Huron shoreline). In general, the Committee has been successful in either encouraging farmers to alter their management practices or in explaining to the complainant the legitimacy of certain farming practices.

Conflict resolution: good and bad etiquette

Whether one is a municipal politician or staff person thrust into the role of mediator, a member of an "Agricultural Review Committee" or a landowner embroiled in conflict, there are certain practices which have the potential to either help or complicate the resolution of conflict. Figure 4 and Figure 5 provide suggestions as to what to do or not to do in trying to resolve conflict. These hints are relevant for both people directly engaged in conflict and for those who are attempting to mediate or resolve the conflict themselves. From this list one can identify how important it is to strategically think through the negotiation and second how important it is to employ positive interpersonal skills.

Healthy and Unhealthy Ways to Reduce Conflict	
<i>Healthy Ways to Reduce Conflict</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on problems not personalities • Separate people from problems • Speak to be understood • Prepare • Invent options for mutual gain • Use objectives and criteria • Seek win/win • Put yourself in their shoes • Celebrate differences in opinions and ideas • Try to achieve self-solving of problem 	
<i>Unhealthy Ways to Reduce Conflict</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight to win • Blame the other party • Promote only your solution • Don't divide the pie! • React with heavy emotion • Focus on the past • Use rigid linear thinking - the "one" right solution • Lock into an idea - entrench • Put personalities before issues • Be passive/aggressive/defensive 	

Figure 4. Healthy and unhealthy ways to reduce conflict.

Do's and Don'ts in Dealing with Complaints	
Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen before you speak • Avoid being judgmental • Be open to all points of views • Use open questions • Be clear and straightforward in the questions that you ask • Acknowledge the limits of your mandate • Acknowledge the over-riding interests of other parties • Clearly explain your role when meeting other people • Clearly understand and explain to people their options in the event that you are unable to come to a resolution • Involve the appropriate government level at the appropriate times • Seek more information when required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't become argumentative • Don't rely on questions that only require "yes" or "no" answers • Don't be judgmental • Don't allow yourself or your committee to become involved where you have no authority or jurisdiction • Don't come to conclusions until you have heard all the information • Don't make decisions or recommendations in the absence of required information

Figure 5. Do's and don'ts in dealing with complaints.

Related to these strategies to assist with conflict resolution, there are a number of key items that people in conflict should remember:

- In almost all instances, the complaint will be legitimate in the eyes of the complainant.
- All parties have an interest in the issue (and these may be different).
- Lack of effective communication is the principal evil of all conflict.
- Ideally, all parties need to win in a win-win situation, but you should recognize that there might be situations where this will not occur.
- Confidentiality is an important component of the mediation process. The details and contents of discussions with people should remain in confidence.
- Each situation is unique and will need to rely on the willing participation of each party.
- Allow parties to determine solutions - you'll get better commitment.

Resolving land-use conflict

So what does the future hold for rural communities? Will there be less conflict or more? How will farmers manage relations with their neighbours? How will agriculture evolve and what will be the implications for harmony in the local community? These are all relevant questions that in many ways cannot be answered. What we do know, however, is that despite sound approaches to land-use planning in many agricultural areas of the country there will be more rural residents living in proximity to agriculture. For the foreseeable future, we can also anticipate that the current trend in agriculture towards larger operations will continue. The implications are that there will be more potential for conflict in the rural community.

There are, however, two separate actions that may avert these probable trends. One, farmers are increasingly aware of the sources of conflict and many are taking action to avert it. Carter and Owen (2000), for example, identify a number of strategies for farmers to use to prevent conflict. Being a good neighbour and being a good farmer are perhaps self-evident, but held within these simple concepts is the ability to develop good will and support amongst neighbours. Secondly, both farmers and municipalities are increasingly appreciative of the opportunities that Alternative Dispute Resolution strategies provide. These techniques provide a mechanism that can hopefully remain local, inexpensive, fair and responsive to concerns, while at the same time respecting the nature of agricultural production. Many municipalities and farm groups have also gained an increasing appreciation for the role of land-use planning in minimizing the potential for conflict. Proper siting criteria (eg. separation distances); appropriate land base for livestock production, and minimizing non-farm development in the countryside are examples of approaches that have the potential to minimize conflict.

In summary, Farmer A and Farmer B, have not gained much in their ongoing conflict. The debate still continues, dollars are still being spent and the concerns which initially caused the conflict remain. At the end of the process, perhaps there will be a winner, or perhaps there will be two individuals who have lost something. Across the country these kinds of scenarios continue. In some instances these conflicts can be averted through sound practices at the farm level and through the application of appropriate planning strategies at the municipal level. In other instances they can be managed through sound conflict-resolution techniques.

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