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## Texas Dispute Resolution System offers help in a variety of conflicts

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The Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR), provides a range of problem-solving and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services, which generally include mediation, mini-trials, moderated settlement conferences, summary jury trials, and binding and non-binding arbitration. The most common type of ADR process is mediation, where people in a dispute meet with a trained, neutral mediator who assists the parties in reaching their own solution to a problem. "For me I get gratification out of being able to help people resolve their problems through mediation," said Dan Kuss, a 12 year mediator with the Texas Dispute Resolution System™. "The parties end up having more control over the outcome." These services ultimately offer individuals the ability to facilitate, evaluate, or decide a dispute in a cost effective manner, relative to more expensive and time consuming options such as traditional litigation where the individual has less control over the outcome.

Furthermore, their Dispute Resolution Training Institute™ provides basic and

advanced training for individuals who are interested in becoming trained as ADR neutrals. Their successful track record and innovative programs led to the agency's appointment as the administrator for the Texas Rural Mediation Services™ (TRMS), which is the sole provider of the USDA Certified State Agricultural Mediation Program for Texas. TRMS addresses statewide disputes impacting USDA agencies and their participants, yet for other issues facing rural Texans, anyone in the 207 Texas counties without access to an ADR system can request mediation through the program.

Texas Rural Mediation Services is accountable to the Lubbock County Board of Judges and has its own Dispute Resolution Advisory Board. This judicial oversight is rare for an ADR system, but they feel it fosters more collaboration and leads to a better relationship between their office and the rest of the legal community. The agency also holds intergovernmental contracts with the following nine surrounding counties: Cochran, Crosby, Dickens, Garza, Hockley, Howard, Lamb, Terry, and Yoakum. These counties refer cases they deem appropriate for mediation.

In the past year alone, the Texas Dispute Resolution System™ received over 3,000 inquiries and referrals, the highest per capita in the state. It is currently on track to meet, if not exceed, this number again in the upcoming year.

As we look to the future, we hope to set the bar even higher. We will soon be moving up one floor to newly renovated and expanded offices, and we have hired several new employees to accommodate our growth.

