

SUGGESTIONS HELP KEEP **relations with**



Mending fences, controlling weeds, and keeping animals from running wild are only a few strategies that can prevent relationships with neighbors from turning sour.

Developing a good relationship with a neighbor is an important part of rural life. While the closest neighbors might

be right across the street or 10 miles away, they drive the same roads and share property lines, and their kids attend the same schools.

But the expectations new neighbors have of each other can differ widely, and sometimes relationships become strained. The Wyoming Agriculture and Natural Resource Mediation Program (WANRMP) receives calls from people seeking help with situations involving neighbors. In most cases, communication has broken down, and the neighbors are not talking to each other.

Such a situation is unfortunate. A neighbor can be a resource in a time of trouble, and having a good relationship can decrease stress in your life. A friend may be gained, and a better understanding of another's situation is developed.

Here are five strategies to help maintain a good association with the folks next door. These ideas emerged from conversations with co-workers and friends who live on small acreages and mediation cases the WANRMP office has been involved in.

1. Fix your fences. The old adage that "good fences make good neighbors" is probably truer in rural areas than anywhere. Many problems are avoided by making sure fences are sturdy and animals on either side can't get out or in. If moving into a new development, a first chance to meet neighbors might be when it's time to put up that fence and

decide if costs are shared. This is a great opportunity to establish good lines of communication and an effective working relationship.

- 2. Control weeds.** Invasive weeds can cause a lot of problems for native plants, livestock, wildlife, and other rural residents. Spending time and money keeping Russian thistle, knapweed, and other weeds off property only to turn around the next summer and find it has spread from the field next door is very frustrating. If the weed problem is widespread, invite neighbors to work together to eradicate the invasive species. A local weed and pest control district office or University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office can provide information to help identify problem weeds and offer suggestions for eliminating them. A list of districts is available online at www.wyoweed.org/wp_dist.html. A list of UW CES offices is available at www.uwyo.edu/UWCES/Counties.asp.
- 3. Don't let Fido run wild.** Keep dogs and other pets under control and out of a neighbor's rabbit house or chicken coop. If living near a ranch, ensure dogs don't bother livestock. Keep livestock healthy; vaccinations will help prevent the spread of disease and help keep all of the neighborhood's animals healthy.
- 4. Obey the rules.** Keep property neat; don't give neighbors a reason to complain. Work with a homeowner's association or county government and learn about the covenants and zoning for the neighborhood. If the homeowner's association meets regularly, attend the meetings. If living in a subdivision that allows livestock, pay close attention to your livestock numbers and overgrazing restrictions.



neighbors

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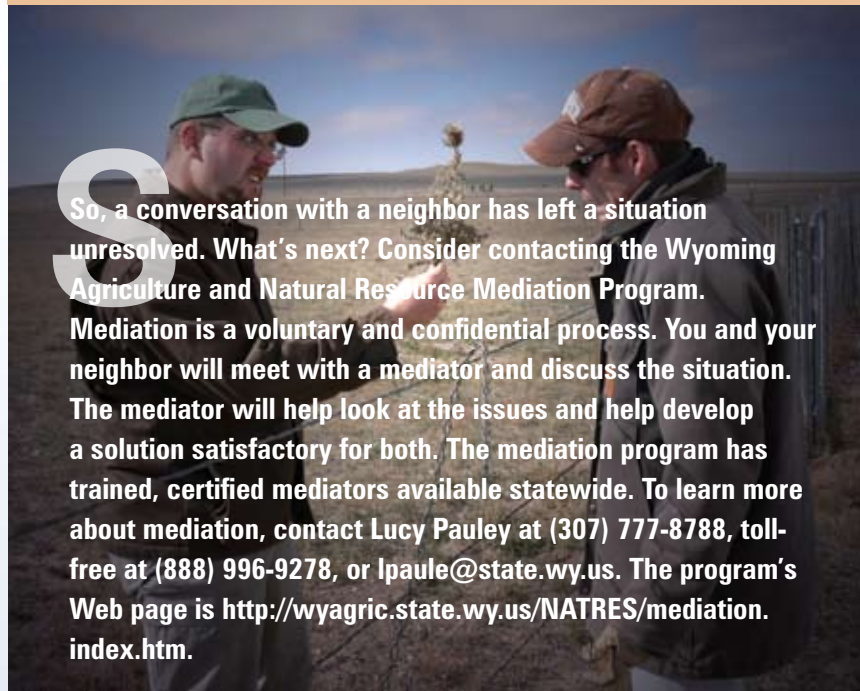
- 5. Help each other out.** If a neighbor is working on a tough project and there are a few hours to spare, lend a hand. You might need help later in the year. Small efforts now may pay off in better relationships with neighbors in the future.

When a Situation Goes South

A situation might arise in which you've tried to be a good neighbor, but personality conflicts or other factors have resulted in a clash. The situation is resolvable, but where to start? There are several steps to resolve the situation.

First, don't let the situation fester. Call the neighbor and set up a meeting. Suggest a convenient time and neutral location. Before the meeting, take a few minutes to think about what to say. Try to look at the problem objectively, and jot down possible solutions. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, written by Roger Fisher and William Ury, helps develop a strategy based on the four principles of integrated negotiation: separate the people from the problem, focus on interests not positions, invent options for mutual gain, and insist on using objective criteria. *Getting to Yes* can be found in most bookstores and online retailers. If unable to find the book, call the WANRMP at (888) 996-9278.

During the meeting, try to keep an open mind. Listen to what the neighbor is saying, and determine if there is common ground you both can agree upon. If the discussion is becoming too heated, take a break for a few minutes. Give each other time to talk, and ask



So, a conversation with a neighbor has left a situation unresolved. What's next? Consider contacting the Wyoming Agriculture and Natural Resource Mediation Program. Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process. You and your neighbor will meet with a mediator and discuss the situation. The mediator will help look at the issues and help develop a solution satisfactory for both. The mediation program has trained, certified mediators available statewide. To learn more about mediation, contact Lucy Pauley at (307) 777-8788, toll-free at (888) 996-9278, or lpau@state.wy.us. The program's Web page is <http://wyagric.state.wy.us/NATRES/mediation.index.htm>.

questions if more information is needed. Brainstorm several solutions, and then decide together how to evaluate potential solutions. Once a solution is decided upon, be specific about the terms of the agreement, who will be responsible for what, and any timelines that need to be included. The WANRMP can also provide information on negotiation skills. Relationships take time to grow; they don't happen overnight, and they often require a little cultivation. You don't have to be friends with someone just because a fence line is shared, but a good working relationship makes rural life a little easier.

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