

Managing the Challenges of Mediating Irish Agritourism Disputes

Mary Flanagan

Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone, Ireland

Dr. Catríona Murphy

Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone, Ireland

Abstract

While agritourism represents a vital source of income for many farm families in Ireland and is a significant contributor to the Ireland's economy and society, disputes arise due to the interconnection between agricultural operations, tourism activities and regulatory requirements. Given the diverse needs of such stakeholders, agritourism disputes impact not only the immediate parties involved, but also farmers, tourists, businesses and the broader community. Consequently, conflict resolution is essential for the sustainability of agritourism ventures and mediation can offer a structured and collaborative alternative mechanism where those in such conflict can resolve their disputes effectively. Disputes resolved through mediation tend to be resolved faster on more favourable terms and at a lower cost than those managed through litigation. Additionally, early mediation intervention can prevent disputes from escalating by promoting open communication between the parties and focusing on finding practical solutions rather than pursuing legal action.

However, given the unique history of land ownership in Ireland and the intrinsic link between agritourism and agriculture coupled with communication barriers in rural communities, mediators operating in agritourism encounter unique challenges in resolving disputes. Many agritourism ventures are operated in tandem with family farms, combining business and agriculture. This increases the complexity of disputes especially when agreements are not formally documented. Moreover, finding a mediator with the necessary expertise to identify the root causes and effectively address such disputes can be challenging. This presentation explores these challenges, and outlines strategies for achieving positive outcomes by drawing on selected case studies to demonstrate the efficacy of mediation within the Irish agritourism context.

Keywords

Agritourism, Mediation, Conflict, Early intervention.

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