

Opinion

## **Sen. Dale Zorn: Support state's agriculture producers**

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Michigan's farmers have been deeply impacted by historically wet weather this year.

According to the governor, Michigan is currently experiencing the third wettest year in state history, with 37.9 inches of rain between May 1, 2018, and April 30, 2019.

Weather-related delays have resulted in the slowest corn planting on record with only one-third of the Michigan corn crop in the ground by the end of May — when the five-year average is over 70% by that time.

The governor has requested a disaster designation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for every county in the state.

To help our farmers, I recently supported approval of legislation that would provide \$15 million for the Qualified Agricultural Loan Origination Program to provide low-interest loans to qualified growers and other agriculture-related businesses impacted by the unusually harsh spring.

It is a privately administered and public- and private-funded loan program, providing 1% interest rate loans for qualified farmers, processors and agribusinesses affected by a declared agricultural disaster.

Eligibility is based on an agricultural disaster declaration and borrowers would have to certify that they have suffered a loss of 25% or more in major enterprises or production loss of 50% or more in any one crop.

If a farmer has an issue with agricultural loans, credit, crop insurance, USDA regulations or other agriculture-related topics, they can use the free Michigan Agricultural Mediation Program (MAMP) to help resolve the dispute.

The mediation program is voluntary, confidential, easy to use and is available at no cost.

The MAMP is funded by the USDA's Farm Service Agency to help growers keep their farms in production and in compliance with the law. Its purpose is to resolve agricultural disputes without expensive hearings or court proceedings, and the 2018 Farm Bill extended the no-cost mediation to more disputes.

The program's mediators are committed to neutrality and have extensive mediation experience and training in agricultural issues. As a result, the program has posted an 80% to 100% success rate over the past three years. That means farmers have a good chance of reaching an agreement and getting back to feeding the nation.

Michigan farmers considering mediation or wishing to learn more can call 800-616-7863 or visit [www.AgMediation.org](http://www.AgMediation.org).

*Sen. Dale Zorn, R-Ida, represents the 17th District, which includes Monroe and Lenawee counties.*