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Conversation about Arizona's Cattle Feeding Industry: Barbara Jackson

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Communication & Organization Director

Arizona's Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) member representative from 2010 through 2015 from Tucson, Barbara Jackson grew up on a feed yard that her parents founded in 1964, Red Rock Feeding Company. In fact, the cattle industry has been central to her life.

Jackson attended the University of Arizona for two years before transferring to Washington State University where she earned a degree in Animal Science with a minor in Agricultural Economics.

Her first job out of college was working for the family feedyard business but after a year she joined Syntex, a pharmaceutical company. Her career with Syntex took her from sales representative to national accounts coordinator to director of public relations and advertising. She left Syntex to return to Arizona and to start her own marketing consulting business "TurnKey Promotions." Clients included Walco International, Elanco, SunWest and SAILA.

In the midst of her busy career she met and married Tim Jackson who exported cattle from Mexico and managed a ranch in Nevada. Tim and Barbara together founded Animal Health Express in 1990. The Tucson-based online business sells animal health supplies, tack, livestock equipment and pet supplies. In addition to Animal Health Express the Jacksons started ReproTec in 1995 to market a diagnostic bull fertility test developed and patented at the University of Arizona. In February 2002, the Jacksons opened Vaquero Feed & Livestock, a full service farm and ranch store in Tucson. This facility also houses Animal Health Express and ReproTec. In 2014 the Jacksons acquired a small beef cow/calf ranch in Sonoita, Arizona.

Jackson is part owner of Red Rock Feeding Company, her family's 30,000-head southern Arizona feed yard. She's also served as president of the Arizona CowBelles

and as Region VI director for the American National Cattlewomen (ANCW) where she chaired the organization's Animal Welfare Committee and eventually served as president in 2013, following in the footsteps of her mother, Pat Stevenson, who was president in 1970.

Like most CBB members and other agriculture organizations, Jackson's active in volunteer work for the industry. With ANCW, she's served on various state and national committees including: Nominating, Budget & Finance; Bylaws; and is part of the National Beef Speakers' Bureau. Jackson served as co-chair of the 2001 National Beef Cook-off® and as a member of the Advisory Committee in the restructuring of ANCW.

Having known Barbara Jackson for some time now, I wanted to learn more about the cattle feeding industry and her experiences in Arizona's largest agriculture commodity, beef. Her insights are a wealth of information and reflect a special agriculture heritage.

Arizona Agriculture: What makes Arizona's cattle industry so special compared to the rest of the country?

Jackson: Arizona has a tremendous heritage with cattle – beef and dairy. The Arizona Cattle Feeders Association was the first and is the oldest cattle feeders' association in the USA. There are so many great families in Arizona that built these businesses, ranches, farms, dairies and feed yards – we have a lot in which to take pride!

Arizona Agriculture: Talk to us about herd health and necessary vaccination before going to auction for slaughter. How does Arizona rank?

Jackson: Arizona feeder cattle historically have not had a good reputation in the

See JACKSON Page 4



Long-time beef industry leader Barbara Jackson says more and more cattle owners are seeking to diligently and consistently implement better herd health programs.

The Policy Development Process Needs You!

Staff Reports

Policy Development – what is it, really? It's the process that Farm Bureau offers its members to surface solutions to the issues that threaten or challenge the agriculture industry. You, as a farmer or rancher member are the expert, the one that know what's going on "in the field" and know what will work or not work to fix it. That's why Farm Bureau goes out of its way to have you tell us what needs to be worked on before we go to work at the county courthouse, the state capitol or in Washington, DC.

PERIODICALS



In March, Arizona Farm Bureau kicked off the annual Policy Development process by gathering the members of our Commodity Advisory Committees together. The effort consists of small groups of producers who meet once a year to surface issues of concern that are specific to their segment of agriculture that include Air & Water Quality, Beef, Citrus, Cotton, Dairy, Equine, Hay & Forage, Horticulture, Labor, Nursery, Sheep & Goat, Water, and Wheat & Grain. This year, 56 farmers and ranchers attended. This is the first effort in the year to drive policy action on behalf of our industry.

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Why are we so effective in the political arena? Because it's you, our farmer and rancher members, who live the issues day in and day out, who come up with the solutions that we work to implement. Policy Development and Implementation – that's the heart of Farm Bureau, and it only works if you get involved and let us know what concerns you have and the solutions you'd like to see implemented.

In March we

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Mark Your Calendar - Page 2
Women's Leadership Conference in July

Congressman O'Halleran - Page 2
Meets with Farmers

Water - Page 7
When the Shortage Comes

Eleven Reasons to Attend the Women in Agriculture Conference

By Peggy Jo Goodfellow, Arizona Farm Bureau Marketing Manager

It's time to register for the 21st annual Women in Agriculture Conference that will be held at the Scottsdale Plaza Resort July 13 through 14. The theme this year is *We've come a Long Way*.

Why should you attend the conference this year? Here are 11 good reasons.

- 1. Location, location, location!** The Scottsdale Plaza Resort is more than a resort it's a blending of casual elegance with the charm of the Southwest, the Scottsdale Plaza is a relaxing getaway destination. Plus, it's close to the western charm of old-town Scottsdale!
- 2. Time of year.** In July, the traffic in the West Valley of the Phoenix area is less and more relaxed.
- 3. Free from Conflict.** The July dates for this conference don't conflict with FFA or the Summer Ag Institute activities.
- 4. Western Spirit Museum Tour.** Join friends for a tour of the Western Spirit Museum. A museum of the West that celebrates the art, history and unique stories of the 19 states of the American West. Enjoy a fun scavenger hunt while at the museum.
- 5. Networking.** There is plenty of time to relax and network with your fellow aggies. Plus, you can make new friends.
- 6. Meet the Keynote.** Meet and talk with Jordan Craig, Director, Grassroots Program Development, American Farm Bureau Federation.
- 7. Come and get the basics.** Learn the basics about biotechnology and how it is being used in agriculture today.
- 8. Your Just Desserts.** There will be a shortcake bar with cake, strawberry, blueberry, chocolate sauces and whipped cream.
- 9. Educational Drive.** The Then & Now panel of speakers and topics means you'll come away with more knowledge and understanding.
- 10. Anyone's Welcome.** The educational conference encourages young and old, male and female and all segments of agriculture.
- 11. It's Inspirational and Encouraging:** One 2016 conference attendee said, "Being encouraged to speak the truth about agriculture practices." Another said, "Every aspect of the conference was excellent; I took a lot from it back home with me."

To register for the conference go to www.azfb.org, then click on the *We've Come A Long Way* theme photo. For hotel reservations call 800-832-2025 to book your hotel reservation by June 20, 2017 to receive the special group rate. If you need more information, contact Peggy Jo Goodfellow at 480.635.3609 or email peggyjogoodfellow@azfb.org.



Our mix of topics and speakers means all educational needs will be met.

Congressman O'Halleran is Farmer for a Day

By Amber Morin, Arizona Farm Bureau Field Manager



Congressman O'Halleran met with Arizona Farm Bureau's First Vice President Stefanie Smallhouse, Marana Farmer Dan Pacheco, President of the Pima County Farm Bureau Jack Mann, and Arizona Farm Bureau's Women's Leadership State Director Catherine Mann.

Last month, members from the Pima County Farm Bureau along with Arizona Farm Bureau staff met with Congressman Tom O'Halleran representing Arizona's District 1. At 9 A.M. the Congressman along with his wife, Pat, and staffers Zach and Max arrived in Marana, Arizona at the farm of Dan Pacheco to learn more about Arizona's agriculture issues and opportunities. The Congressional group couldn't have had more fitting agriculturalists to learn from, as the Pacheco family has been in Arizona since the 1750s and has been involved in agriculture for multiple generations. Members also in attendance were, the President of the Pima County Farm Bureau, Jack Mann, the Women's Leadership, Catherine Mann, and Arizona Farm Bureau's 1st Vice President, Stefanie Smallhouse, all of whom also have longstanding family histories in the beef industry.

The exchange of ideas between the two groups was casual, but fruitful. Underneath the shade of the Pacheco's barn, Dan discussed the history of his family's operation, what he is currently farming (cotton and durum wheat), and where the future of his operation is going. Issues discussed amongst the whole group included generational succession of family farms/ranches, tax concerns

for agriculture, regulatory reform, water and energy, immigration and labor, biotechnology and the 2018 Farm Bill.

The conversation ended with an open-door invitation to the Congressman and staff. "If you need anything from Farm Bureau, do not hesitate to contact us," said Arizona Farm Bureau's Director of Government Relations, Chelsea McGuire, "We are meant to be a resource for you, if you have any questions about agriculture."

Editor's note: Additional congressional delegations have been invited to visit our Arizona farmer and rancher leadership in the various counties.

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feedyards. Most of our commercial crossbred beef cattle are fed out of state. Arizona has a history of minimal vaccination protocol (of course there are exceptions), so our cattle go into feedlots very “naive.” Part of that is due to our large-sized (geographically) ranches and partly because we have a milder climate and our cattle “get away” with lesser vaccine programs. That is, they stay healthy on the ranch – but when they get stressed by weaning and trucking – they tend to be susceptible to illness. Just imagine you keeping your children at home from birth until the first grade, then you take them outside of your house for the first time when you walk them to school. They are exposed to a new environment, crowded into a classroom with kids from all over – away from you the parent – how do you think they would do? Stressed, scared, get sick?

We are doing much better here in Arizona, more and more cattle owners are seeking to implement a better herd health program. We have to be diligent and consistent. We are doing better!

Arizona Agriculture: What do you recommend for ranches that have huge geographic challenges? It’s easy to vaccinate a steer in feedlot.

Jackson: Larger ranches are an issue. But you just have to adapt your management. They have to get vaccinated and branded while young and nursing the cow. Then when weaning the calf – they should get two sets of vaccinations, parasite control and be held for 45 days. This “pre-conditioning” period is critical as to how healthy they will be and how well they will perform in the feedyard. If the ranch does just not have the facilities to do this they should consider sending the calves when weaned to a “backgrounding” feedyard for this pre-conditioning process – there are feedyards in our state that can do this for the rancher, and do it well. The agriculture community is very small – your cattle already have a reputation of how well they do, how sick they get, etc. Be proactive and establish the reputation you want it to be.

Arizona Agriculture: In *Drovers*, you’re quoted as saying, cow/calf people need more feedback on what they’re doing. How would you make this happen?

Jackson: With all the communications we have today – it is easier. If you retain ownership and feed your own cattle – of course you will know how they did in the feedyard. The cattle feeder can request information from the packer and usually you will get the carcass data. What makes it difficult is when you sell less than a truckload of cattle and they get mixed with other cattle. But at the least, you follow up with whoever bought your cattle and see how they did for that Buyer.

Arizona Agriculture: You also say that the feedlot industry is a much faster pace than the ranching environment. What are the implications for the health of cattle in feedlots? Explain as if you’re talking to general consumers.

Jackson: In a feed yard cattle are bought and sold practically every day, that’s the faster pace. Cattle are received into the feedyard and given that yard’s herd health program. Every day the cowboys ride through the pens and look at every animal to check for health issues, if one is sick they go to the “hospital” for treatment. The treatment programs are under the direction of a licensed veterinary. The feed that the feedyard makes every day in their mill and fed to the cattle is under the direction of a professional nutritionist. That feed is being monitored daily to ensure the cattle get an optimal diet. Just because the cattle are “concentrated” there can be more health issues – but the extensive efforts to provide the best health care and diet possible make it a good environment for the cattle.

The ranches usually gather and vaccinate at branding, then again when they wean – so a “slower” pace comparatively. However the ranchers certainly have plenty of other issues to deal with, drought, fires, noxious weeds, and more.

Arizona Agriculture: Speak to the feeders’ diet for cattle today, especially as it relates to steam processing and flaking of cereal grains. Why was this so transformative?

Jackson: A significant portion of the work and research that was done to develop steam flaked rolled grain was done right here at the experimental feedyard of the U of A at Miracle Mile and I-10. My father Carl Stevenson was feeding cattle here in Arizona since the early 1950s, and he worked closely with Dr. Bart Cardon and Dr. Bill Hale. Steam cooking the grain, then rolling it – takes the hardness out the hull of corn, milo and barley such that the cattle can digest and utilize much more of the grain. This impacted the cattle’s feed efficiency significantly, thus the cost of gain. They started feeding the steamed and rolled grains in the late 1950s and early 1960s and it is still the feeding standard today for feedyards.

Arizona Agriculture: On the international front, Brazil is facing sanitary and corruption problems in that nation’s meatpacking industry. What should U.S. beef producers prepare for? Does this raise expectations for U.S. beef?

Jackson: Our expectations for U.S. beef to be the safest, the best tasting are already there and we fulfill these expectations every day. What happened in Brazil is very disappointing. Our industry needs beef exports to keep our domestic market strong – so we can’t be an isolationist and not allow some in. Most imported beef goes into canned soups or other processed items. What worries us more about beef coming from Brazil is they still have areas of Foot and Mouth disease. But in spite of objections from the U.S.

beef industry, the USDA under the last administration allowed it to come. We need to keep our agriculture trade associations focused to “fight the most important fights.”

Arizona Agriculture: Reading up on your background I noticed you started out in sales and eventually became public relations and advertising for an animal pharmaceutical company. Considering your expertise in this, on the advocacy side of things, how do we get better on behalf of agriculture overall?

Jackson: The beef industry, all of Agriculture, needs to do a significantly better job advocating for our industry. I know how hard a lot of our associations’ staffs and volunteers work at this – but honestly I do not believe we are moving the needle enough. The biggest challenge is – well under 2% of the U.S. population is involved in agriculture and that is all agriculture – animal agriculture, farming, aqua-culture – all of Ag. There are so few of us. Then, we have so many different associations, way too many – and the majority do not always agree on key issues.

In Washington DC they call it the “barnyard coalition.” The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, the Milk Producers, The Farm Bureau, the Pork Producers, the Egg and Turkey producers. And just those groups don’t always agree – plus there are at least six or eight other groups that splintered off from the above groups. Plus, the “umbrella” groups like the Animal Ag Alliance, the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance, the National Institute for Animal Ag, and more.

Do you realize how confusing this is to consumers as well as the legislators we try to influence in D.C. and in our home states? We ALL need to work together, have fewer groups and stay with a simple focused message. Unfortunately this is not happening enough. My mother was active in the Cattle Women’s group (Cowbelle) and she had the same consumer issues we face today: “What about the added hormones and antibiotics in our meat?” “Red meat is not healthy for us.” Why have we not successfully diffused these issues 50 years later?

Ag tends to be “reactive” and not “proactive.” Smaller commodity groups have successfully created a healthy image for example Almonds, Avocados – but not beef. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We need to change and we need to do it fast, or go the way of the sheep industry.

Arizona Agriculture: What are common misconceptions about the feedlot industry you’d like to dispel here?

Jackson: We are not “factory farmers.” Because of the efficiency of feedlots we get more beef on the dinner table with a much smaller carbon footprint, less water used than ever, ever before. The animals are extremely well cared for – more so than a lot of people. I take great pride in the fact we provide the best, safest and tastiest beef in the world – bar none!

Arizona Agriculture: Who will lead our industry into the future?

Jackson: The average age of our ranchers, farmers and feeders is getting older and older. So much industry knowledge disappears with the loss of each one. How do we capture and keep that knowledge? How do we keep from making old mistakes over and over? We need to work smarter. The need for strong, decisive, forward-thinking and innovative leadership for agriculture is huge and I worry those boots will not be filled. 🚗



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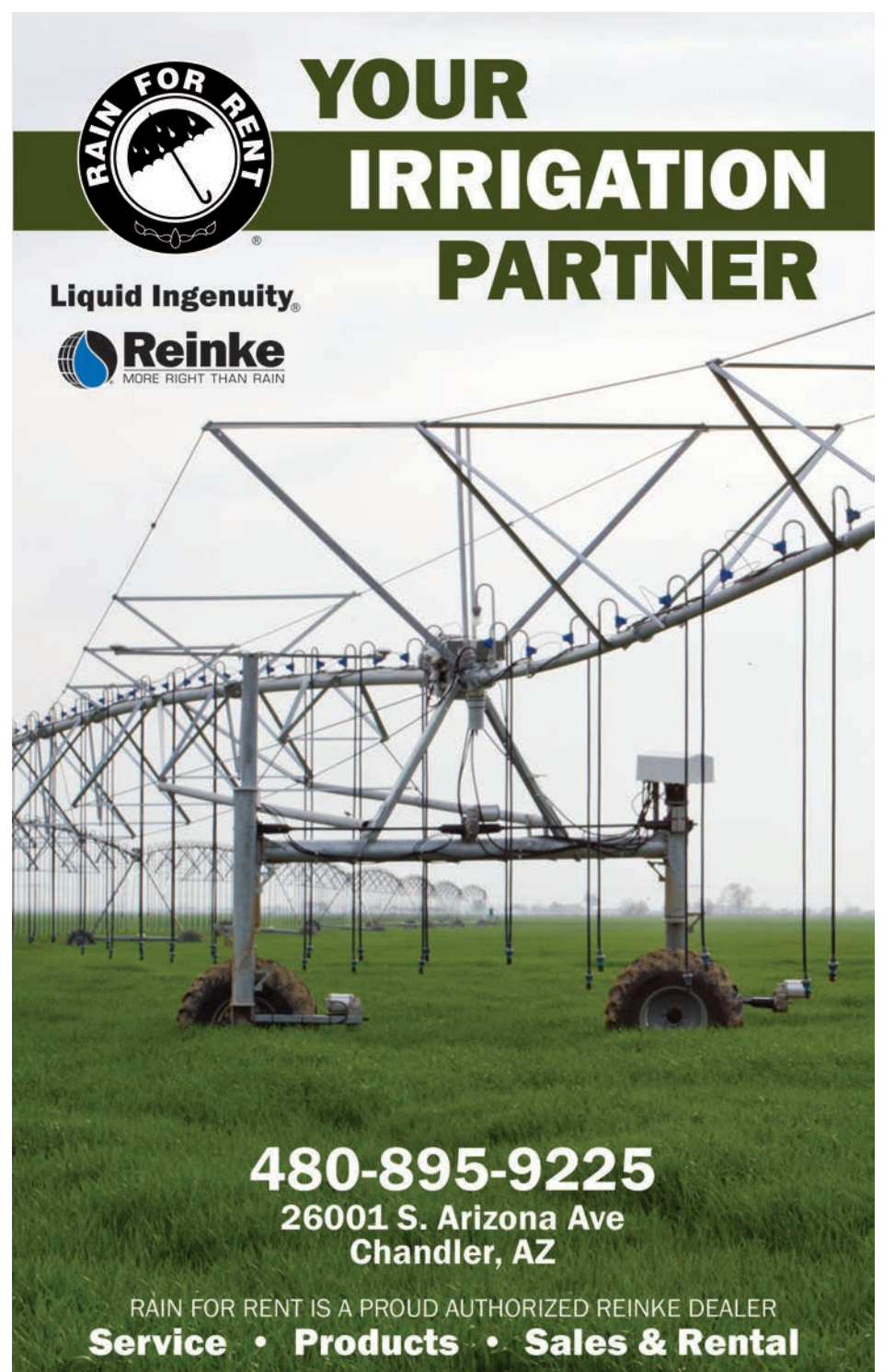
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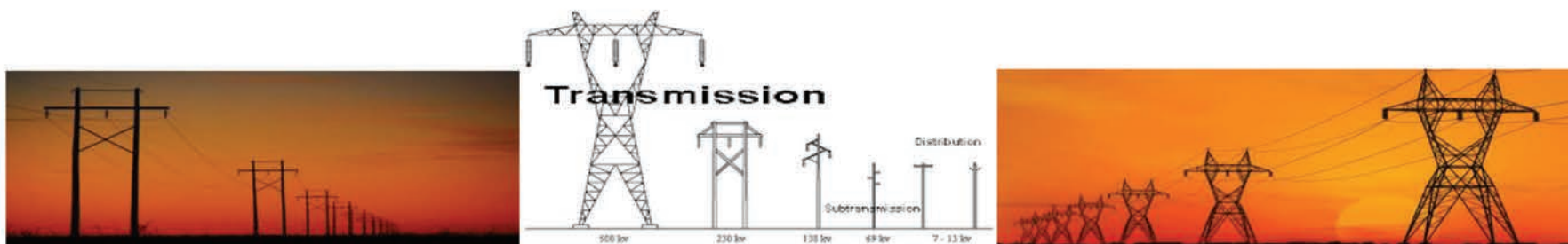
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Policy *continued from page 1*

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What issues did our farm and ranch leaders feel need to be solved? Everything from securing water rights to securing a reliable supply of legal labor, from reforming the Endangered Species Act to stopping the expansion of the Mexican Gray Wolf recovery area, and from protecting the right to grow genetically modified crops to dealing with air quality non-attainment designations.

What do YOU think needs to be done? If you have thoughts or ideas on ways to address these or other issues, be sure to be part of the solution by participating in our Policy Development process. This summer, you'll be invited to attend your county's Policy Development (PD) meeting. Be sure to attend. It's where you can devise new policy, proposals to be approved at the county, state and/or national Farm Bureau annual meetings and become part of our official policy which is then worked on for implementation. If you can't make the meeting, feel free to call or email your field managers. They'll be

sure your ideas become part of the conversations that guide the Farm Bureau's work on our members' behalf.

Stefanie Smallhouse is 1st vice-president of the Arizona Farm Bureau and chair of the Policy Development Committee. "Our Commodity Advisory Committees surfaced a lot of important issues that need addressing. Now it's time for our Ag members in each county to surface solutions for us to implement," says Smallhouse. "You can be part of the solution by participating in your county's PD meeting."

You can find updated meeting information at www.azfb.org/apps/calendar, where you can select your county's calendar of events. Current policies and information on key issues can be found at www.azfb.org under the Public Policy tab.

To discuss how you can be the solution to the Ag issues that concern you or to learn about the many ways to get involved and make a difference, contact Amber Morin at 480-635-3611 or email ambermorin@azfb.org, or Christy Davis at 480.635.3615, email christydavis@azfb.org.

Arizona Agriculture is Primary, Not Secondary

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Communication & Organization Director

Last month, the University of Arizona hosted the 2017 Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) Conference, "Irrigated Agriculture in Arizona: A Fresh Perspective." Vice President and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Shane Burgess, opened the meeting reminding us that without agriculture you can't have any other industry.

"This conference, which examines the connections between water and our \$17.1 billion dollar Arizona agriculture industry, can also help to remind us that agriculture is a primary industry that must exist to allow all of our secondary industries to operate," said Dean Burgess. "And for our state's economy to continue to boom we must have irrigated agriculture."

Burgess added, "Water converts the energy of the sun to life."

Burgess also went on to explain that Arizona's farmers and ranchers are some of the most efficient in the nation when it comes to maximizing desert crops and managing water, highlighting the Yuma County example where irrigation water diverted to farms has decreased 15% since 1990.

Burgess mentioned others. Tom Buschatzke, director of the Arizona Department



Vice President and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Shane Burgess reminds us that agriculture is a primary industry along with mining and forestry and without it, no secondary industries could exist.

of Water Resources and one of the keynote speakers during the water conference, has called Yuma agribusiness, "A world class venture that is a model for efficiently using water to maximize agricultural production and economic value."

During the water conference, former Deputy General Manager for Salt River Project John Sullivan, also highlighted how efficient water management efforts have become. Here's what Sullivan said about water recharge: "If you look at depth of groundwater for the East Valley alone [metro Phoenix area], you'll discover underground basin improvements. In the 1940s, wells were a typical depth of 100 feet. In the 1950s that went to 200 feet. In the 1960s, up to 250. And, by the 1970s well depth was over 250 feet. 1980s Groundwater Act passes and groundwater levels begin to recover. Well levels in the East Valley are back to the 150-foot depth levels. Driven by conservation and water banking, improved efficiency is the byword for agriculture and stewardship."

Water continues to be a priority issue for Arizona Farm Bureau's farm and ranch leaders. Watch for more on this topic on an ongoing basis.

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Food Equals Work, Work Equals Respect

By Amber Morin, Arizona Farm Bureau Field Manager

As an agriculturalist, I have a deep appreciation for how our food is produced. It's hard work! The hours are not 8 to 5, but sun up to sun down, and for many farmers and ranchers, well into the night. Did I mention there is work every single day? Free weekends are rare, as crops and animals don't know the difference between Sunday and Monday.

Growing food is hard work, but it's also smart science. Farmers and ranchers from across the nation implement best management practices for environmental concerns, animal health, and food safety. My ranching family focus on any practices that protect and improve the land and provide the best care for our cattle. We want to make sure that consumers are getting the highest quality and safest food possible. We take pride in our products and the land that we grow it on.

We are also a heavily regulated industry, with layers of government controls to adhere to: another way to ensure the public food supply is safe. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency all regulate the agricultural industry at the national level, along with a generous number of state agencies. What does a heavily regulated product mean for the farmer and rancher? More work! Work that ensures the regulatory paperwork is filled out, safety steps are taken, and the highest food standards are met.

Despite the efforts to provide the safest, healthiest, and most accessible and affordable food in the world, terms like factory farms, industrialized agriculture, and "Big Ag" are all thrown around to shame our industry. My own experience, which contradicts these labels, is that agriculture is dominated by hard working family farmers and ranchers. It doesn't pay well, and it's often thankless. However, we don't attack people who want to have a backyard garden, we encourage it. We don't avoid questions about our operations, we welcome them. We don't demean people who have never stepped

foot on a farm or ranch, we tell them to bring their boots and hats. Most importantly, we believe that there is a place for all agriculture from the rooftop garden to the thousand-acre farm, and that we are lucky to live in a country where we have an abundance of food choices.

In conclusion, my question for modern agriculture's faultfinders is: why the character assassination without the lived experience? If you pursued agriculture or attempted to put yourself in our shoes, you may just begin to understand the amount of work and dedication to care that goes into food production in the U.S. Subsequently, something terrifying might happen, you may end up having more respect for farmers and ranchers. Until then, we will continue to feed you despite the egg dripping down our faces. 🐔



Arizona Farm Bureau Field Manager Amber Morin grew up on a ranch in southern Arizona with her parents and sister.

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in "The Voice" blog on azfb.org.

Planning for Central Arizona's Looming Water Shortage

By Dan Thelander, Pinal County Farmer

The potential for a water shortage is something our family is worried about and trying to plan for. But, how do you plan for a future water shortage?

I farm with my nephew and son in the Maricopa Stanfield Irrigation & Drainage District (MSIDD). This year in our farming operation, we have 1,600 acres of Durum Wheat in production, 2,200 in alfalfa (400 acres of that is drip irrigated), 1,000 acres of cotton (400 in drip and 400 in furrow and 200 of double crop following wheat, the Rayner system).

Last year, we had less cotton and wheat and 1,000 acres of silage corn.

In thinking about what to do now regarding water and shortage considerations, I believe there might be four ways to try to prepare for water shortages.

- Install expensive irrigation improvements.
- Experiment with different low-water-use crops.
- Find higher-value crops to grow.
- Farm to increase and maintain higher soil organic matter.

Install expensive irrigation improvements

This is easy to suggest; hard to accomplish. Right now, most agriculture commodity prices are in the tank. Alfalfa is probably \$50 to \$75 per ton less than a few years ago, wheat is down \$4 per hundredweight (100 pounds). Cotton, which is up some, is still about the same price at 70 cents-per-pound as when I started farming in 1974, more than 40 years ago.

See **WATER** Page 8



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Water continued from page 7

So, with commodity prices low and margins thin, or upside down, it's difficult to consider expensive irrigation system improvements, like installing drip irrigation systems. A quality drip system runs about \$2,500-per-acre, and even though it is extremely efficient, it will take many years to recover that investment. Will there be sufficient water supplies in 6 to 8 years when, hopefully, a new system has paid for itself? Or, will water supplies diminish leaving a farmer with a nice system, but not enough water to run through it?



Pinal County Farmer Dan Thelander contends it's not fair for farms to dry up and blow away when others are receiving most of their water allocations.

Barley is one of the lowest consumptive use crops grown in our area, but with the low price of corn in the Midwest, barley prices are super low, and planting it guarantees a nice big loss by year end. Even wheat, which uses just slightly more water, will probably lose a little this year, unless we make a higher than normal yield.

Experiment now with different low-water-use crops

I often get asked, "Why don't you plant crops that use less water?" That certainly would save water, but it wouldn't keep our farm in business year in and year out.

Barley is one of the lowest consumptive use crops grown in our area, but with the low price of corn in the Midwest, barley prices are super low, and planting it guarantees a nice big loss by year end. Even wheat, which uses just slightly more water, will probably lose a little this year, unless we make a higher than normal yield.

Try to find higher value crops to grow

This one is similar to experimenting with low-water-use crops, but in this case, low water use is not really the benchmark. The payoff for any high-value crop is profitability. If a farmer can grow a higher-water-use crop that is also high value, then a farmer might have to fallow more acres to be able to plant and irrigate the crop, but in doing so, make a profit.

Take alfalfa a few years ago, for example. The price per ton was very good, but alfalfa probably uses in the 6-acre-foot range. Farmers could afford to fallow some land if needed to be able to irrigate this alfalfa. This is probably going to be the main way farmers deal with reduced water supplies, by fallowing enough land to grow the crops they consider to be the most profitable. Unfortunately, the downside of this is overhead goes up on farms and the local economy that depends on those farms, really suffers as a result of reducing crop production.

A really nice scenario would be a new, high value, low-water-use crop! And Guayule just might be that crop in the future. Guayule is a desert crop that has rubber under its bark, like rubber trees. But, unlike latex rubber from trees, people are not allergic to Guayule rubber. Rubber production from rubber trees probably can't expand enough as the world demands more natural rubber for medical uses, tire production, and other uses. Guayule should be able to fill that void.

It would be a great fit for irrigated desert farms where production could be increased to meet future demand. A few companies in recent years have devoted a ton of money and effort to figure out how to efficiently grow the crop and process the crop. Bridgestone Tire probably is the main company today conducting research with Guayule. In addition, other companies are doing re-

search in Italy as well. The market is ready and waiting if the production problems can be solved.

Farming to increase and maintain higher soil organic matter levels

I call this the RAYNER method of crop production. Ron Rayner is a farmer in Arizona's west valley that has taken no-till farming to the next level. A typical cropping rotation for Ron Rayner's farm family is planting wheat in December, follow that with Cotton in June (cotton is typically planted in early spring in Central Arizona), harvested in November, and back to wheat again for the next year and so on.

When they want to go to alfalfa, the Rayners plant sorghum silage after the wheat, then alfalfa in the fall. Their whole program keeps something growing year around on most acres. But, the amazing thing they have seen is reduced water use for their crops. They attribute that to increasing levels of organic matter, and have seen wheat and cotton crops make good yields on all 4-acre-feet of water per acre total. Also, this could be a game changer in the MSIDD district (Pinal County area) as we go more to wells with less CAP water. It will allow the wells to operate more year round and not have the huge demand in the middle of the summer when normal cotton production water use is the highest. We are going to try this at our Stanfield farm this year and see if we can duplicate Rayner's success.

The farms in Central Arizona are already very efficient with modern irrigation methods such as basin level, high head systems, drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, and maybe soon to be farming for high organic matter. Farmers will keep chasing efficiency as best we can, if

we don't, we won't stay in business.

The Future

Part of planning for future water shortages is trying to avoid them as much as possible. For this reason, we also have our eye on the potential causes of these shortages. And, in addition to drought in the Colorado Basin, which thankfully this year has lessened with a much better snowpack, the state negotiations to keep Lake Mead at elevation 1,075 or higher has some pitfalls for CAP agriculture districts such as MSIDD. We in agriculture are at the table and will continue to support the concept of the Drought Contingency Plan, but some models show that the entire agriculture pool goes away when the Lake falls below 1,075. We cannot support a plan that leaves us with no water in that scenario especially if our sons and daughters, the next generation, are interested in farming. There has got to be mitigation, or the opportunity for us to buy affordable priced surface water from the CAP, Indian Tribes, or cities. We just don't think it's fair for farms to dry up and blow away when others are receiving most of their water allocations.

So, farmers will strive to keep farming profitably with less water, searching for better methods, better crops, and better systems to farm those crops. At the same time. We will be at the table to ensure that we have a fair shake in the event that lake levels continue to drop. **FB**

Editor's Note: Thelander originally shared his story last month to a group of peers and agriculture industry professionals at the University of Arizona's WRRC Conference 2017, themed Irrigated Agriculture in Arizona: A Fresh Perspective.



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Electrical District No. 4 of Pinal County is seeking applications from interested and qualified candidates for a Deputy General Manager. For details please visit our website www.ed4.com. The deadline for applying for this position is Wednesday, May 24th, 2017.