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# Conversation about Amazon's Big Food Move: A Rancher's Perspective

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

If you haven't heard about Amazon's purchase of Whole Foods in the last few months, you might be asleep at the proverbial food truck wheel. Tracking the evolution of this \$13.7 billion acquisition has been compelling and certainly worthy of agriculture's notice.

So, I thought a conversation interview with a rancher and farmer was warranted. I got my rancher but my two produce growers I reached out to happen to be in the middle of the 2017 produce season in Yuma (bad timing on my part, though who'd have guessed Whole Foods would become Amazon's newest baby).

My rancher, Stefanie Smallhouse, has some intriguing insights on the new deal. Arizona Farm Bureau's First Vice President, Smallhouse has spent a good chunk of her professional career involved in natural resources management after earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife and Rangeland Science from New Mexico State University. She began her career as a wildlife biologist working for the Bureau of Land Management in Southern Utah. In this position, she participated in local research projects, reviewed land use applications and carried out habitat and species surveys. In 1999 she married Andrew Smallhouse, a fifth-generation Southern Arizona rancher, and shifted her work to the private sector while learning the business of the family farming and ranching operation. While she has tested her skills and husband's patience at operating farm equipment and gathering cattle in the Lower San Pedro River Valley, she passionately advocates for the sustainability and profitability of farming and ranching as an industry in Arizona.

In 2014, she was appointed by the Director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources to fill the executive director position to manage a statewide grant program which grants funds for the implementation of locally-led conservation projects which enhance water quality, quantity and riparian habitats in the State of Arizona.



Growing a family first, business second, the Smallhouse family doesn't take for granted any changes taking place in the market and certainly in their core agriculture industry, beef.

Since 2000 Smallhouse volunteered at the county and state level for the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation. Says Smallhouse, "I am able to exchange the knowledge of my own family operation with others in the agricultural industry while engaging with consumers and policy makers about the lifestyle and science behind growing food."

**Arizona Agriculture:** Regarding Amazon's latest entry into the retail food business by purchasing Whole Foods, what's your take as a rancher?

**Smallhouse:** First, I'm just a grower who provides a specialty product and Amazon obviously knows an opportunity when they see it. Amazon is known for making anything available on the internet a commodity, excuse the play on words, and anytime a healthy protein such as beef can be made more available to the consumer, I'm for it. We'll have to wait and see how excited the customer base of Whole Foods is about buying the same products online and having it dropped from a drone in their yard. If you have ever been in a Whole Foods, you

know it's not just grocery shopping, it's a sensory experience.

They are the cyber Walmart. Walmart can demand lower prices from wholesalers because of the massive amounts they order. However, we do not produce widgets, we produce food with limited resources. Organics are more expensive because of inputs, process, certifications and more. We [Carlink Ranch] sell beef to Whole Foods because of our certifications for animal welfare. If we don't get a premium, then we will not do the certifications and not provide the same beef. I can see how they might be able to bring down the cost as Costco has, but eventually the organic argument will face the reality of imminent short supply due to grower limitations. Of course, there is always vertical farming.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Chris McCabe, a former Amazon performance evaluation and policy enforcement investigator, recently said, "Amazon's using the same playbook they always have when competing with booksellers and other retailers. They take out

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## Congressional Trip Allowed for Real-Time Issues Pivoting as Current Events in D.C. Unfolded

By Chelsea McGuire, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Director

In September, a group of Farm Bureau leaders traded the desert for the Potomac for our fall visit to the Capitol. The trip was a productive and successful one that included meetings in the offices of every member of our congressional delegation (especially thankful that Representatives Martha McSally (R-District 2), Paul Gosar (R-District 4), Trend Franks (R-District 8), David Schweikert (R-District 6), Kyrsten Sinema (D-District 9), Tom O'Halleran (D-District 1), and Senator Jeff Flake were all able to meet with us in person) and to BLM, USDA, and EPA.



Congressman Schweikert's spunky and "cuter-than-a-doll" daughter hosted the Arizona Farm Bureau delegation at the congressman's office. First Vice President Stefanie Smallhouse, Navajo County Farm Bureau President Marguerite Tan, Cochise County Farm Bureau President Stephen Klump, Arizona Farm Bureau President Kevin Rogers and La Paz Farm Bureau President Ava Alcaida were able to connect with nearly the entire Congressional Delegation from Arizona.

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## Arizona Agriculture Teacher Shortage Can be Solved

By Joyce Lobeck, Agriculture writer investigating the agriculture education issue on behalf of Arizona Agricultural Education/FFA Foundation and Arizona Farm Bureau.

Second in a two-part series.

A decade ago it would have been accurate to describe the shortage of qualified, certified agriculture teachers in classrooms across the nation as a “crisis.”

While today there is still a shortage, the situation has been improving as a variety of efforts have been undertaken on national, state and local levels to address the problem, said Ellen Thompson, project director of the National Teach Ag Campaign launched in 2009 to recruit and support agriculture teachers.

The multipronged efforts seek to address three areas:

1. Recruit interested high school and college students to pursue a career in agriculture education.
2. Retain those who are majoring in agriculture education.
3. Retain current agriculture teachers, helping ensure that they thrive professionally and personally.

Arizona leaders are embracing the challenge and are presenting some solutions of their own.

The Arizona Agricultural Education/FFA Foundation is “highly concerned and is actively working to address the challenge (of the ag educator shortage),” said Neil A. Schneider, director of development for the organization.

One step the foundation has undertaken is to join forces with the Arizona Farm Bureau to fund the Arizona Ag Education Program Evaluation Instrument, a multi-phased effort to help ag teachers evaluate their programs and plan for professional development.



Recently retired, FFA ag teacher and advisor Jose Bernal can tell you about the long hours and dedication of our state's agriculture teachers.

program improvement plans. More seasoned teachers were paired with younger teachers to assist them with goals and objectives for their local curriculum and program improvement and to guide them to the most successful outcomes, lending some experience.

Other phases will follow as AAPEI continues to be developed.

So far AAPEI has been well received by teachers, Scibienski said. “Conversation around the table was helpful. We’re trying to find out if there are areas we need to focus on for professional development ... to be sure we’re targeting the needs of ag teachers, not just picking a general topic.”

Recognizing that ag teachers are already over-extended, they’re being provided a grant for participating in AAPEI.

“Arizona Farm Bureau recognizes the importance of this tool for assessing our local programs and understands the time and effort that is required to complete it,” said Katie Aikins, director of education for the organization. “Our Arizona ag teachers are already stretched for time and over-committed so we wanted to reward them for the time they dedicated to the process.”

Therefore, for each of the last two years, Arizona Farm Bureau has provided a stipend for each teacher who has completed the evaluation, she said.

Funding is also being provided by the Arizona Agricultural Education/FFA Foundation, but needs industry support. Said Schneider: “As the primary funding body for FFA and agricultural education in Arizona, we are seeking companies and individuals who can step forward and help fund this new teacher recognition program, which is designed for improving local agriculture programs.”

Schneider explained that the program will reward teachers who improve their programs by holding them to rigorous standards in three main areas: Classroom and laboratory instruction, work-based learning and their impacts on leadership and personal development through their local FFA chapter.

“AAPEI is a way to reward motivated teachers who strive to improve their local program,” he said. “We believe AAPEI is one important step in helping retain agriculture teachers in our high school classrooms.”

On another front, there’s an effort to help compensate ag teachers for the additional hours they put in as teachers and FFA advisors. While the terms vary, many high school districts across the state offer summer contracts to pay the teachers for the work they put in during the summer months, such as continuing to work with students on their supervised projects, maintaining land labs and accompanying FFA members to various meetings, conventions and competitions.

For example, the Gilbert High School District offers a 30-day extended contract for 240 hours of additional work the ag teachers put in during the summer, explained Doug Daley, career and technical education director for the district.

“A student’s supervised agricultural experiences don’t stop when school is out,” he said. “They have jobs, animals and crops to take care of. In a lot of cases, schools have facilities like greenhouses to maintain.”

The project was first proposed several years ago, by two agriculture teachers who are members of Team Ag Ed: April Scibienski of Desert Edge High School in Goodyear and Curtis Willems from Highland High School in Gilbert. It was at a Team Ag Ed meeting that the collaboration took place to take the document the two teachers had put together and model it after the National Quality Program.

The AAPEI provides Arizona ag teachers with a tool to self-evaluate what their programs are doing well and determine in what areas they need improvement. This tool can be used for the teacher’s own reference, or it can even be used by advisory boards and school administrators as evidence of areas they need assistance with, such as equipment and contacts.

In the second phase of AAPEI, ag teachers are asked to “go deeper and submit evidence of what they’re doing with their program, such as photos,” Scibienski said.

This summer, teachers met in Tucson and peer reviewed those second-phase pro-

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# Amazon continued from page 1

their revenue stream by killing them slowly on price.” While we might guess the impact on local grocery stores, is there a residual impact for farmers and ranchers even though you’re further up the food supply chain?

**Smallhouse:** Agriculture is extremely sensitive to supply and demand on a global scale which means it is very important to diversify what you grow. There are many growers providing traditional crops while at the same time growing niche products like organic, ancient grains and specialty proteins. It seems as if Amazon is trying to bring these niche products to the masses knowing the masses are not willing to pay niche prices. In the short-term, I believe it will increase demand for these products which is good for growers. In the long term, I think it will be challenging for the entire supply chain to maintain- to include farmers and ranchers.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Can Amazon get truly cheaper organic product in its Whole Foods grocery Stores?

**Smallhouse:** For the most part, farmers and ranchers are price takers. When we grow specialty products we can have more impact on the price either directly or indirectly depending upon the product and the market. As these products are provided by more growers and available in more places, they naturally become more affordable to the consumer through competition at the retail level. However, the price to produce them does not necessarily become more economical for the grower unless operations merge. Folks who shop at Whole Foods don’t generally like the idea of agricultural mergers at any level. Amazon may be the cyber Walmart but farmers and ranchers do not produce widgets, we produce food with limited resources.

The cost of production for many specialty products is higher than that for traditional crops and therefore demands a higher price, otherwise growers would not put in the effort. In a beef industry example, to participate in the Global Animal Partnership(GAP) program with our beef, we must meet certain standards and obtain certifications which also have fees associated with them. This makes our beef marketable to Whole Foods. There are not a lot of growers who qualify for this program which forces the price up throughout the supply chain. If Amazon were to make our GAP 4 certified ribeye less expensive to the masses, then either they lose or we do. Our production costs are not likely to decrease and we have the freedom to walk away from the certification process if it doesn’t pencil out. A program like GAP only works with certain operations. It was not difficult to meet the animal care standards because that is the way we have always operated, but the record keeping, certification and audit process is intense and costly.

These food products are not necessities for people and the traditional product provides the same nutritional value. If Amazon is successful in broadening the customer base by lowering the price, that does not mean we as growers will be able to meet the demand at the same rate. Even if growers could increase production, you are eventually faced with the law of finite resources amidst compliance with label restrictions.

So, to answer your question, in the short term yes because Costco is already doing it, but in the long term I would think something must give which will change the product.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Often disruptive businesses can help fix kinks or weaknesses in supply chains. Can some of these moves by Amazon be kink fixers?

**Smallhouse:** There are already a handful of entrepreneurs with major financial backing growing meat in petri dishes. Disruption can force change and sometimes that change is permanent and sometimes it’s a trend. With the speed of technology, we see paradigm shifts much faster now. Who knows, maybe someday we will get a premium for our beef just because it comes from an actual animal. I think Amazon’s acquisition will force the Krogers-of-the-world to rethink convenience but you’re either a Ford Escort or a Lamborghini. You can’t be all things to all people.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Is there an opportunity here to tell consumers more of our agriculture story based on the attention Amazon is getting from their moves? If so, how?

**Smallhouse:** Amazon’s entrance into the grocery business via Whole Foods tells me they have an interest in the whole food system from the bottom to the top. It will no doubt be a learning experience for them as to sourcing mass amounts of distinct food products. Along the way, it will provide an opportunity for us to educate the consumer about the differences between traditional- and specialty-food production systems in how they are grown, what consumer they satisfy, and production limitations.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Between high standards in food safety regulations set by Arizona and California in the leafy greens market and more, will this price pressure set by Amazon be disruptive in other ways besides price? 🚗

**Editor’s note:** Stay tuned. I still plan to have the produce farmer perspective on this Amazon story. A dual conversation at times will bring more than one voice to an issue.



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# Delegates to Farm Bureau's Annual Convention Make the Difference

Staff Reports

## Your Vote Carries the Ultimate Power in Farm Bureau

You campaigned or received encouragement from your County Farm Bureau president, and earned the coveted slot of being a delegate representing your county at the Arizona Farm Bureau Annual Convention in November, 1, 2 and 3. Or maybe you didn't attend your county Farm Bureau meeting and they elected you as a delegate. Either way, delegates are sitting atop a golden opportunity to influence agriculture's most important and hot topics while having a good time, learning a lot and visiting with fellow farmers and ranchers throughout Arizona.

In preparation for the meeting and exercising your vote, it's a good idea to visit with your County President or Policy Development Chair to learn which policies your county has submitted for consideration at the state level and key policies that other counties have submitted. This is often discussed at your county's October board meeting, so you'll want to attend this month's scheduled county board meetings if one is being held.

Of course, if you were in the thick of your county's policy development you already know what policy issues are most important to your county. The value of being involved in such discussion is by the time you make it to the state's November Annual Meeting is that your opinion is established and you're informed about the issues.



Mindy and Randall Claridge were delegates from Greenlee County in 2016. Delegates from County Farm Bureaus around the state discuss and vote on policies that lead Farm Bureau's work on key issues that will affect agriculture. Delegates should be prepared to weigh in on proposed policies.

Be sure to register for the hotel and convention (see Registration Form in this issue), and then it's on to the convention this year in Mesa, Arizona.

Thursday, November the 2nd is a full day of working on resolutions, as well as hearing from some great speakers. All Farm Bureau policies start at the county level and are discussed, amended and approved by delegates elected by the grassroots members. Working together during the resolutions session, your county delegates will be able to influence the final language to be adopted as state policy or sent on to American Farm Bureau. This may mean convincing delegates from other counties to support your policy positions.

The day ends with an elegant awards banquet recognizing people who have made their mark on agriculture and Farm Bureau. Great music and dancing will finish off Thursday night. Friday has a great line-up of political and informational speakers that you won't want to miss. This year we will be releasing the latest economic numbers for Arizona agriculture.

So be sure to get registered and prepared to fully participate in the Annual Convention. You'll go home to the farm or ranch reinvigorated with new knowledge and new friendships. And you'll have made a mark on the industry that you love and want to see prosper in our country – agriculture. 🚗

## IT'S TIME TO REGISTER

### Arizona Farm Bureau Federation 96th Annual Convention

#### "Economics of Arizona Farming & Ranching: Does it Add Up?"

- WHO:** Ag Members of the Arizona Farm Bureau  
**WHAT:** Farm Bureau members from throughout Arizona will set policy, elect leaders, hear informational and political speakers, attend awards and recognition events and the Ag Trade Show.  
**WHEN:** November 1, 2 and 3, 2017  
**WHERE:** Mesa Convention Center  
 263 N Center Street  
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 Book your group rate for AZFB Annual Meeting - Attendees or call 800.228.9290.

#### Hotel deadline is October 11, 2017

Book your group rate for AZFB Annual Meeting - Attendees

**HOW:** To book your hotel reservation, call 800.228.9290 and ask for the Arizona Farm Bureau annual meeting group rate. The special Arizona Farm Bureau per night room rate is \$119 single/double.



Use the form at right to register for the convention by Oct. 20, 2017

## HIGHLIGHTS



- Wednesday, Nov 1:**
- YF&R Annual Convention & Workshops 12:30 p.m.
  - Registration opens 5:00 p.m.
  - County Farm Bureau Appreciation Dinner 5:45 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov 2:**
- Registration Opens 6:30 a.m.
  - Trade Show Opens 7:30 a.m.
  - Auction Block Opens 7:30 a.m.
  - General Session Begins & Resolutions 8:00 a.m.
  - Keynote Speaker 11:00 a.m.
  - President's Luncheon 12:00 p.m.
  - Service to Agriculture Awards Banquet and Dance 6:15 p.m.
- Friday, Nov 3:**
- Early Bird Breakfast 7:00 a.m.
  - General Session Reconvenes with informative speakers 9:00 a.m.
  - Meeting adjourns 11:00 a.m.
  - State Board Meeting 11:30 a.m.



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Fill out the adjoining form or go to [www.azfb.org](http://www.azfb.org) to download the Annual Meeting registration. Look for the registration photo in rotation and select it.

## 2017 AZFB Annual Convention Registration Form

**\*\* Submit before Oct. 20\*\*  
 One Form for each family!**



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"Check box for ALL events you will attend!"

Adults	Self (check all that apply)	Spouse	Cost
<input type="checkbox"/> No Meals Wednesday, Thursday and Friday	_____	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Young Farmer & Rancher Convention Wednesday 12:30 p.m.	_____	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> County Farm Bureau Appreciation Dinner...FREE Wed., 5:45 p.m. (County Farm Bureau and spouses only)	_____	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> President's Luncheon..... \$45 per person Thurs., 12:00 p.m.	_____	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Service to Agriculture Awards Dinner \$55 per person Thurs., 6:15 p.m.	_____	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Bird Breakfast.....\$35 per person Fri., 7:00 a.m.	_____	_____	\$ _____

#### Children

- President's Luncheon..... Child meal \$30 ea # \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Thurs., 12:00 p.m.
- Service to Agriculture Awards Dinner....Child meal \$30 ea # \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Thurs., 6:15 p.m.
- Early Bird Breakfast.....Child meal \$25 ea # \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Fri., 7:00 a.m.

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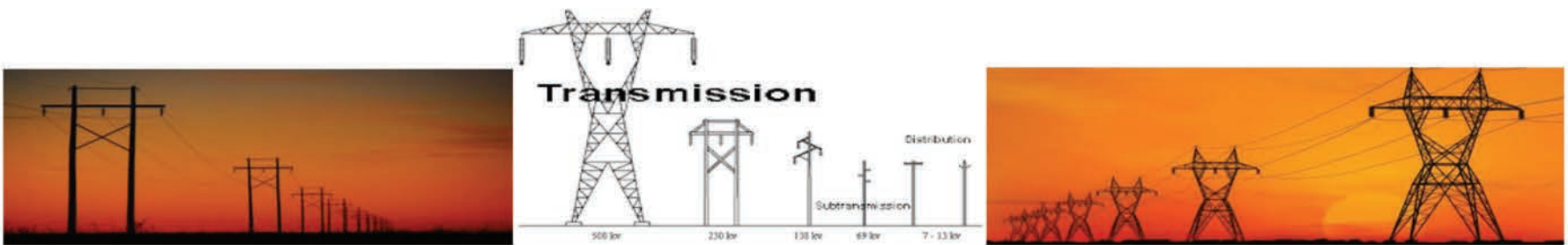




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**Teachers** *continued from page 2*

He said all 10 ag teachers in the GILBERT district take advantage of the summer program. "It definitely is helping to retain teachers."

There are benefits besides economic to the summer contracts, Daley said. "Teachers get to work with students one-on-one ... they build relationships." And students receive personalized instruction in skills "above and beyond the classroom."

Parents and FFA alumni can help by making sure school administrators are aware of summer contracts and their importance to content and impact of the ag education program, Daley said.

That's but one way parents and FFA alumni can support their local agriculture education program.

The Yuma High School District, for example, has an active booster club that provides a variety of assistance, "anyway we can relieve their burden," said Raney Embree, president of the Yuma Territorial FFA Alumni Club. It raises funds to help transport FFA members to state conferences, meetings and competitions as well as offer scholarships for students to participate. And it provides jackets for those who can't afford them.

The club will also provide coaches for career events, mentors for projects, judges for competitions, industry experts for classroom presentations and advocates for the importance of career and technical education.

"Ag teachers put in a lot of work because of all the outside activities. We try to help wherever we're needed," Embree said. "We're kind of on speed-dial."

Meanwhile, a scholarship fund established by Wellton-area farmer Jerry Cullison is having a positive impact on students who want to become agriculture teachers. Cullison's father, Joseph Ralph "J.R." Cullison, was a highly recognized agricultural education teacher in Arizona. To continue his father's legacy, Cullison established a \$1 million endowment fund that provides scholarships to University of Arizona agricultural education students. It also provides funding support for their student teaching.

"It's outstanding that someone would come to us with that support ... that kind of money," said Bruce Watkins, who oversees agricultural education for the Arizona Department of Education. "It's starting to show benefits. It's bringing in kids. We're seeing a pick-up of graduates through the UA program."

Last year a total of \$33,000 was given to 11 scholarship recipients, said Dr. Robert Torres, University of Arizona department head of agriculture education and Neely Family Endowed professor. He noted that the scholarships especially are helpful for recipients during the most challenging part of their education when they have the living expenses of student teaching while also having to pay college tuition.

Cullison's funding also supports an award program that recognizes young students who have been identified as potential agriculture teachers, students who become the "A list" for recruiting into UA's agricultural education study program, said Torres.

"It doesn't mean we'll get them all," he said of the Cullison scholars. "But the ones we do will be a great thing."

Perhaps, he added, some who choose to go to work in the ag industry instead of the classroom at some point will come back into ag education. "That influence lasts forever. They decide they want to make a difference in the lives of others like someone did me."

See **TEACHERS** Page 8

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## Congressional Trip continued from page 1

Our prepared talking points centered around tax reform, the Farm Bill, labor reform, NAFTA, and gray wolf and wild burro control. But, as tends to happen in Washington, not all the conversations went as planned. This was partially because the trip fell at an interesting time: the same week we were there, President Trump announced his executive order repealing the Obama-era DACA rules, and the House brought the remainder of the omnibus spending bill, and the hundreds of amendments thereto, to a vote on the floor. So even though it meant some shuffling of appointments and a little more chaos than usual, we had the unique opportunity to see our delegation's real-time response to two major issues.

Every member we spoke with expressed a commitment to filling the gap left by President Trump's announcement. The fixes proposed varied widely from office to office, but one thing was consistent: DACA is viewed as a problem requiring swift action, and an opportunity for broader reform along the way. We fully expect any DACA fix to have broader immigration reform attached to it, and the recent discussion between the White House and leading Democrats only affirm this expectation. From Farm Bureau's perspective, we're hopeful: DACA may pose one of the first real opportunities in quite some time to get workable immigration reform, such as a guest worker program, passed. As one staffer put it, "it's highly likely that President Trump will be the one who signs actual immigration reform into law."

Another topic at the forefront of our conversations was tax reform. Consistently, we heard that tax reform will happen, but it may not happen as quickly or

as transparently as many of our delegation and members would like. We also heard multiple times that the talks are happening "behind closed doors," much to the frustration of those who aren't invited into the conversation. We also discussed the upcoming Farm Bill, and were happy to hear many of our officials express a commitment to putting cotton back into Title I.

But if I were asked to express the biggest takeaway from our trip to Washington, I'd have to say it was most prevalent in our agency meetings with BLM, USDA, and EPA. For years, we've been saying that major administrative and procedural changes are necessary to make those agencies more effective and less burdensome. We've been saying for a while now that we finally feel like Washington is listening, and we saw confirmation of that during this trip. From a proposal for reorganization at USDA, to a common-sense approach to fixing a decades-old land access issue at BLM, to a new EPA official dedicated solely to improving processes and communication within that agency, real change isn't just being discussed: it's actually being implemented. Of course, the change may not be happening as quickly as we'd like – it will be helpful when more appointed positions are nominated and Senate-confirmed, for example – but the wheels of change are turning in the right direction.

So, now more than ever, it's time for us to strike while the irons are hot by reaching out to our officials and explaining to them the needs of our industry and the ways they can help make government work for us, and not against us. 🐄

## Teachers continued from page 7

Torres noted that UA has the largest number of freshmen majoring in ag education in years. And 11 students – more than in recent years – are going out to student teach in ag education next spring.

Torres is further encouraged by the joint efforts made by many groups to address the ag teacher shortage and the improvements that have been made in recent years.

"It takes a community to raise awareness of the value of ag teachers ... to promote it as a career choice," he said.

Concluded Schneider, "Rewarding teachers for local program improvement (AAPEI), scholarships, FFA Alumni support and experienced industry members coming into the classroom are all viable options to maintain a steady supply of teachers and hopefully keep them in the classroom impacting our youth. I would encourage anyone who wants to help support these efforts to contact me at the Foundation." 🐄

**Editor's Note:** For more information, contact Neil Schneider at [neil@azffaoundation.org](mailto:neil@azffaoundation.org) or 602.705.9211.



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