

Ag's Survival Skills Shine During the Pandemic

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Overnight, Arizona Farm Bureau member Robert (Bob) McClendon of McClendon's Select Farms lost 75% to 80% of his business due to the COVID-19 pandemic's statewide shutdown. Yes, agriculture was declared essential and we're #StillFarming and #StillRanching as our now-famous hashtag indicates, but one of his core business streams was restaurants.

And just as quickly, the McClendon family pivoted toward a new market to try and survive and keep their employees, especially as the U.S. Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program languished for many small businesses. "Our newly-minted Grab and Go box program have kept everybody on our farm employed; it has been our lifeline to keep our people," says Bob McClendon. "When all our other business went away, this program is helping a lot. I think we're going to make it."

McClendon's story is not unusual. Head south 120 miles and you'll run into Arizona Farm Bureau member Chaz Shelton in Tucson. Co-owner of controlled-environment aquaponics farm, Merchant's Garden, Shelton's business served the local restaurant sector and the Tucson School district. With those revenue streams vanishing they've opened their farm stand business months earlier than planned.

It's what Shelton has described as drive-by produce pickup. Sending him a texted question on April 16 Shelton said, "Our drive through is going really well." But he does have concerns. he'd signed up for the "Friends of the Farm" Initiative the day Governor Doug Ducey announced a new \$250,000 investment to address food insecurity in Arizona. The new initiative is intended to strengthen the state's agricultural economy while improving access to healthy foods for Arizonans struggling with



Here with his grandson, local retail produce farmer Robert McClendon says despite everything that's happened these last few weeks, he believes they will make it. As the Outreach team talks to Arizona farmers and ranchers, the pain in the agriculture market is evident.

The "farm to food bank" program is a partnership between the Arizona Food Bank Network, formerly known as the Association of Arizona Food Banks, and Arizona's agriculture industry. The hope is to bring more fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein to food banks as well as create a reliable market for Arizona farmers.

Arizona Farm Bureau's Outreach team is hearing about the pain and strategies for survival as of late last month we'd called nearly 200 Arizona farm and ranch families and plan to continue calling through these tough times.

The Pain is Pervasive in All Sectors of American Agriculture

Updated analysis by the American Farm Bureau Federation shows crop and livestock prices falling to levels that threaten the livelihoods of many Arizona and U.S. farmers and ranchers. While Arizona and other states are planning to slowly reopen the economy, as of this writing shuttered schools, universities, restaurants, bars and cafeterias are no longer buying milk, meat, fruits, vegetables and other food. The resulting downward spiral in crop and livestock prices are having devastating consequences.

Futures prices for nearly all the major crops have dropped by double-digit percentages. Pushed down by a 40% plunge in ethanol prices, corn prices have fallen 15%. Soybean prices are down 10%, while the price for cotton, which is heavily dependent on foreign manufacturing capacity, sank nearly 30%. Buoyed by demand in the U.S. and China,

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Pandemic or Not, the 2020 Election Must Go On!

By Chelsea McGuire, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Director

As the world continues fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States is also gearing up for another fight: the 2020 election. The global health crisis has delayed primaries in several states, has halted signature gathering for ballot initiatives, and has even caused the Democratic party to postpone it national convention. Regardless, the election must go on, and last month, we got a much clearer picture of the state of several key races.

Arizona State Races

In the race for the Arizona legislature, candidates' ballot petitions were due to the Secretary of State's office on Monday, April 6. By April 7, we confirmed what we had been suspecting all along: we're looking for some contentious races, familiar faces, and plenty of campaign watching to keep us busy until November.

When it comes to the Senate, there are a handful of races where we can already call a winner, so long as no one launches a successful legal challenge or write-in campaign. In legislative districts (LD) 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, and 30, the races for the single Senate seat are uncontested. And we'll recognize all the (presumptive) winners, because they're all the incumbent. True to form, the House is gearing up to be much more contentious. In that chamber, LD5 is the only district with an uncontested general. By contrast, in LD1 alone, six Republican candidates and one Democrat candidate have thrown their hats into the ring for two open House seats. Among the pack is a familiar face: Judy Burgess, who was previously a Senator representing LD22.

Other races we're keeping a close eye on include some key ag districts. One is the House race in LD4, which spans the southern half of Yuma, part of the West Phoenix valley, and parts of Pima and Pinal counties. The two incumbent Democrats are being challenged by Republican Joel John, a Farm Bureau member and owner/operator of an irrigation technology company in Buckeye. This is the first time since 2014 that a Republican has run for the House in that district, which leans heavily Democrat. Not only that, but one of the incumbents is the current House Minority Leader, Charlene Fernandez which means that race will receive plenty of press and donor attention, regardless of who the challenger is.

Legislative District 6 is another where the contest is shaping up to be fierce, both on the House and the Senate sides. With one open seat in the House, vacated

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by Rep. Bob Thorpe, incumbent Walt Blackman and returning candidate and former House agriculture committee chair Brenda Barton are up against Democrat Coral Evans, the current Mayor of Flagstaff. In the Senate, Republican incumbent Sylvia Allen is facing a primary challenger in Wendy Rogers, a frequent flyer in Arizona’s Congressional races and a notoriously fire-and-brimstone kind of campaigner. We’ll keep a close eye on this race, since LD6 covers some extremely important ranching territory in Northern Arizona.

Legislative District 8 is another one where we may see a much more contentious race than normal. The House primary will be contested by three Republicans: incumbent David Cook, challenger Neal Carter, and current Senator Pratt, who has termed out and is running for the House (where he will presumably be swapping seats with Representative TJ Shope, who is running for the Senate). While there’s no primary challenge in the Senate, Republican and current House Speaker Pro Tempore Shope will be up against another familiar face in November: Barbara McGuire, who held the LD8 Senate seat from 2013-2017.

Finally, in LD13, the stage is set for a primary challenge between Republican incumbents Tim Dunn and Joanne Osborne and yet another familiar face: Steve Montenegro, who served as a representative for LD13 from 2013 to 2017, followed by a brief stint in the Arizona Senate before he stepped down to run for Congress (a race in which he was ultimately defeated by Debbie Lesko).

Federal Races

Early last month, what was once an impossibly large field of Democratic presidential candidates was finally whittled down to one. With the exit of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, former Vice President Joe Biden became the presumptive Democratic nominee. Though the Trump/Sanders ticket comes as no surprise to anyone, it took a couple of runaway primary wins to encourage Sanders to exit and throw his support behind Biden. Biden also has significant support from Arizona voters. A recent OH Predictive Insights poll shows Biden with a six-point lead over President Trump, but also indicates that enthusiasm amongst Trump supporters is higher than enthusiasm amongst Biden supporters.

The same OH Poll, released in the middle of April, shows that the Democrats have a strong lead in Arizona’s most contentious 2020 election: the race between Senator Martha McSally and Mark Kelly. Kelly holds a nine-point lead over McSally, as well as having a significant fundraising advantage over the incumbent Senator: Kelly raised \$11 million dollars in the first quarter and has nearly \$20 million in cash-on-hand, compared to McSally’s \$6.3 million raised and just over \$10 million on hand.

All of these numbers confirm what analysts have been predicting for months: Arizona’s Red State status is trending purple. And if the Senate race fundraising numbers didn’t already give it away, it’s also going to be one of the most expensive races in history, as the Democrats see an opportunity to drive voters to the polls and claim the majority in one or more of Arizona’s legislative chambers. As the COVID-19 crisis abates and campaigning can begin in earnest once again, expect to see the most politically saturated advertising cycle ever – and clear out your recycling bin, because the advertising mailers are going to start flooding your mailbox soon, too.

Quarantine or not, the election must go on. Your participation in the democratic process is always important, but never more so than now. The momentum from this political cycle will carry the successful candidates for some time, leading to what we believe will be an increased appetite for reform on topics from water to taxes, business climate to environmental regulations. The most important thing you can do for the future of Arizona agriculture in 2020 is to vote! 🚗

I Sometimes Cry Over Spilled Milk

By Sine Kerr, A West Valley Dairy Farmer and Senator in the Arizona Legislature

2020 was looking to be the year of recovery for the dairy industry after five long years of low milk prices. The milk futures were looking strong, we were prioritizing much needed repairs, equipment replacement, hiring of new employees, and more. Things were finally looking up!

Then, what seemed like a matter of moments, everything changed. The COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States and eventually Arizona. A catastrophic series of cascading events is set into motion the likes of which we have never seen.

The second week of March, shoppers began taking notice of the rising Coronavirus warnings and start inundating the grocery stores. In order to keep up with the demand, milk bottling plants start ordering double to triple the



Says Senator Kerr, “Through all of this, Arizona never had a food supply shortage, rather we had plenty of supply chain issues that took incredible collaboration to sort out.”

amount of milk they normally order in a given week. Arizona dairy farmers have no problem keeping up with the demand. It’s our peak production time or “spring flush.”

The grocers are not able to keep their shelves stocked due to the sheer volume of people changing their purchasing habits by panic shopping. The grocery stores begin placing limits on milk to keep their dairy cases full. By the third week of March, the frenzy dies down but there are still limits on milk purchases at the stores.

Now, bottling plants drastically reduce the amount of milk ordered because their coolers are full. Additionally,

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SURVIVAL *continued from page 1*

wheat prices have declined only 3%. These numbers are constantly changing, and further outcomes are telling.

“Arizona’s farmers and ranchers have been adopting new technologies and practices for over a century in order to be sustainable and prepared to provide an abundance of affordable and safe food in such a crisis,” said Arizona Farm Bureau (AZFB) President Stefanie Smallhouse. “The supply is not the problem for the consumer right now, but the demand behaviors have shifted to the extent that it’s wreaking havoc on normal supply chain operations and commodity prices for the producer.”

On the livestock front, since the beginning of the year, both beef and pork futures prices have declined more than 30%. Milk futures prices have also fallen sharply, with the price for milk used to make cheese down 28% and the price for milk used to make nonfat dry milk falling by 34%.

“The resilience of farmers and ranchers has been nothing short of stunning, but we must not take for granted their ability to hold on with prices spiraling, taking all hope of breaking even with them,” said American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall. “I stand by my assurance that our food supply remains strong, but America will have fewer farms and ranches supplying it unless USDA acts quickly to deliver aid and our economy is released from the grips of this pandemic soon.”

Dr. John Newton, AFBF chief economist, said, “The drop in demand is pushing the prices farmers would get paid for their crops to lows that may make it very difficult for them to justify putting another crop in the ground this spring. While the whole country is optimistic there is an end in sight, the question of when the economy will be healthy again is fueling further market uncertainty.”

The prices at the grocery store don’t tell the story at the farmgate. “It’s worth noting that these prices are in no way tied to what shoppers pay in the grocery store. There are a lot of hands through which these commodities pass from the farm to the fork, so a drop in prices paid to farmers very rarely, if ever, translates into lower consumer prices immediately,” Newton explained.

Some in the retail industry call this “sticky” pricing: While a food commodity might drop dramatically in the open market as we’re seeing now, it takes a bit for that lower price to have sticking power in the grocery store.

Indeed, AFBF President Smallhouse highlights how intricate our food system is in America. “The food system is incredibly complex. For example, while a very small number of farm-to-plate growers might be seeing a spike in demand and price, they face problems getting the product to the consumer. Ranchers who sell beef direct have very limited options to deal with a sudden increase in demand when local packing houses are few and the supply was based upon much different consumer behaviors a few months ago. Much of what we grow is perishable and you can’t just shut the supply valve off. Dairy cows are milked every day, leafy greens and produce are picked and delivered to market within a matter of hours while one pound of beef takes two years to produce.”

Smallhouse highlights how these are the timelines Arizona farmers and ranchers operate within and American farmers throughout the country. “If consumers have drastically shifted their eating habits away from what we know and expect, we can neither shut off the supply of milk or suddenly increase direct boxed beef.”

The pain is being felt in all agriculture commodities. “Those farmers growing crops which are not perishable like cotton or other commodities which can be stored for longer periods of time like small grains, nuts and frozen meat product are also feeling the strain through drastically lower commodity prices,” explained Smallhouse, who ranches with her husband in southern Arizona. “Farmers were already facing record losses before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and so this is quite a punch in the gut for those who were depending upon the China trade deal to kick in back in February and uninterrupted trade with Canada and Mexico for products such as dairy and beef.”

Beyond Commodity Prices, Labor and Supply Chains Continues to Challenge Agriculture

“Dairy and produce are particularly laborious products to get to market and we are worried about our already insufficient labor supply becoming even more strained given the changes in processing immigrant labor visas in Mexico,” added Smallhouse. “We have needed a viable agriculture worker visa program for decades and this crisis is exasperating that issue. The State Department has provided some temporary fixes to address worker movement across the border, but at this point our system is very fragile and cannot withstand impacts to what little labor we have now.”

With what’s going on in the dairy industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic it’s worth noting milk production per cow has steadily increased due to nutrition, genetics and operating efficiencies so supply is more than secure, however; the overall number of licensed dairies in the U.S. has declined by over 50% since 2003. Last year saw the largest decline in U.S. dairies in 15 years. In Arizona we lost 10 dairies in 2019. And,

now dairies forced to dump milk is exacerbating the problem (see editorial by dairy farmer Sine Kerr nearby).

When the shift in demand from food services (think restaurants) changed so quickly and so completely, some supply chain experts explained the dramatic change using a boat analogy. Unlike a speed boat, the dairy industry with large food service orders is like a freighter, you can’t turn it on a dime. So, while there is plenty of milk, moving away from food services to retail is causing logistical bottlenecks in everything from storage to packaging.

Hope on the Horizon?

Late last month, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). This new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program takes several actions to assist farmers, ranchers, and consumers in response to the COVID-19 national emergency. President Trump directed USDA to craft this \$19 billion immediate relief program to provide critical support to farmers and ranchers, maintain the integrity of the food supply chain, and ensure every American continues to receive and have access to the food they need.

West Valley farmer McClendon had mentioned concern that USDA wasn’t helping beyond the traditional offerings. “There’s very little help for farmers,” he said. “Especially small farms, they neglected that completely when they did all these bailout programs and emergency loan programs. SBA won’t loan anything to the farms and USDA all they do is crop loans. We are hoping that could change. You know, to get a small-interest loan as a bridge since we lost about 75% of our revenue when all the restaurants closed.”

Arizona Farm Bureau and American Farm Bureau applauded the \$19 billion economic aid package for farmers and ranchers but wonder if it will cover the depth of the economic collapse. The package includes \$16 billion in much-needed direct payments to producers with another \$3 billion to purchase meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables.

“We’re grateful to President Trump and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue for working together to come to the aid of America’s farmers and ranchers,” said AFBF President Duvall. “The coronavirus pandemic forced the closing of restaurants, schools and college cafeterias, causing commodity prices to fall off a cliff and serious disruptions to food supply chains. This aid will help keep food on Americans’ tables by providing a lifeline to farm families that were already hit by trade wars and severe weather.

“The plan to purchase \$3 billion in meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables will help to stabilize markets and keep farms afloat so they can go about the business of feeding America. Farmers and ranchers proudly accept the responsibility of feeding this nation and it’s heartbreaking to be forced to dispose of milk and plow under crops of fresh food at a time when others are going hungry. We also appreciate the additional funding from other sources to help deliver food from farms to food banks.”

“The announcement of \$19 billion in relief for U.S. farmers and ranchers is an important down payment,” said U.S. House of Representative Agriculture Committee Ranking Member K. Michael Conaway (R-TX). “Secretary Perdue was spot-on when he indicated that significant additional support will be absolutely necessary to see our farmers and ranchers through the coronavirus crisis.”

“Volatility and uncertainties are not new to the farming and ranching community and we will undoubtedly survive because that is what we do,” concluded Arizona Farm Bureau President Smallhouse. “We keep working no matter what. We just need to stay healthy and our ingrained optimism and faith will carry us through this crisis as it always does.”

For local, retail Arizona farmers McClendon and Shelton, will USDA’s new aid package help them? It’s the hope. For those picking through the details with a fine-toothed comb, the program appears to be designed especially for farmers who normally sell their products into the restaurant and food service supply chain, which has been dramatically disrupted by shuttered schools and restaurants.

Time will tell. In the meantime, our Arizona farmers and ranchers employ their finest survival skills.

Postscript: Just as this publication was heading to the presses, we’ve heard that seven retail farms have submitted their proposals to the “farm to food bank” program, a partnership between the Arizona Food Bank Network, including working with the Sun Produce Cooperative too. We have heard some dollars have been distributed to farmers. If the program can move forward several food banks can easily benefit. For Tucson farmer Chaz Shelton, he’s in the queue and they are reaching out to him.



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restaurants, hotels, and schools are either closed or have reduced their hours of operation thus reducing the amount of milk needed to supply those outlets. Consequently, United Dairymen of Arizona’s (UDA) largest customer reduces their milk order from seven days a week to three. They largely serve the restaurant industry.

To further complicate things, the Mexican Ministry of Health closes their agency which oversees import permits, adversely affecting UDA. Of UDA’s total production, roughly 16% to 17% goes to our export market and of that percentage, 70% goes to Mexico.

All these factors happening so suddenly and severely led to UDA making the difficult decision to immediately reduce the supply of milk by dumping about a million pounds of milk a day or roughly 125,000 gallon of milk daily. (This time, tears do flow over spilled milk knowing that so many families are in dire need.) This occurred for eleven days adding up to about twelve million pounds of milk total having to be dumped. The further downturn in the beef market could also be felt immediately as dairy farmers needed to cull heavier than usual which flooded the beef market.

All Hands On Deck

All hands were on deck to try to mitigate the lost outlets for milk by concentrating on new or expanded outlets including more milk to school lunch sites, more milk and dairy to the food banks, and working with the grocers to lift the limits on milk as well as many other solutions. It’s during these times that we come to a greater understand-

ing of how critical our local food supply is and understanding how important it is to have people on the ground who fully understand the food supply chain and who work tirelessly to identify and find solutions to physical limitations and regulatory obstacles.

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey intervened by writing a letter to Secretary of State Pompeo and Secretary of Agriculture Purdue imploring them to work with the Mexican government to re-open import permits. This has proven to be helpful in that Mexico has begun taking orders for UDA powdered milk. The Governor’s office was also proactive in communicating with Arizona’s farmers and ranchers to be helpful where they could in mitigating solutions.

Some glimmer of light is ahead as UDA’s largest customer began increasing their milk order to make cheese which is storable. A USDA waiver has been enacted allowing our schools to receive different size containers of milk, as well as whole fat milk, and chocolate milk for the school lunch sites which helps get milk to more families.

Through all of this, Arizona never had a food supply shortage, rather we had plenty of supply chain issues that took incredible collaboration to sort out. We got the message out that we would keep Arizona well fed and we have! Farmers and ranchers remain the most innovative, resourceful, and resilient people around. While the days ahead remain shaky for most of our agriculture markets, we are, by and large, a people of hope and faith and we trust in better days ahead! While I may cry for a moment over spilled milk, I quickly wipe those tears away because I know we will get through this and we will be stronger and wiser for it! 🚜

COVID-19 and Agriculture: Impacts and Responses

By **Chelsea McGuire**, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Director

For the average consumer, the most visible food system impact of COVID-19 has been empty, or emptier, grocery store shelves. As many agricultural leaders have explained over the past few months, this represents a demand issue, not a supply issue.

Demand Disruptions

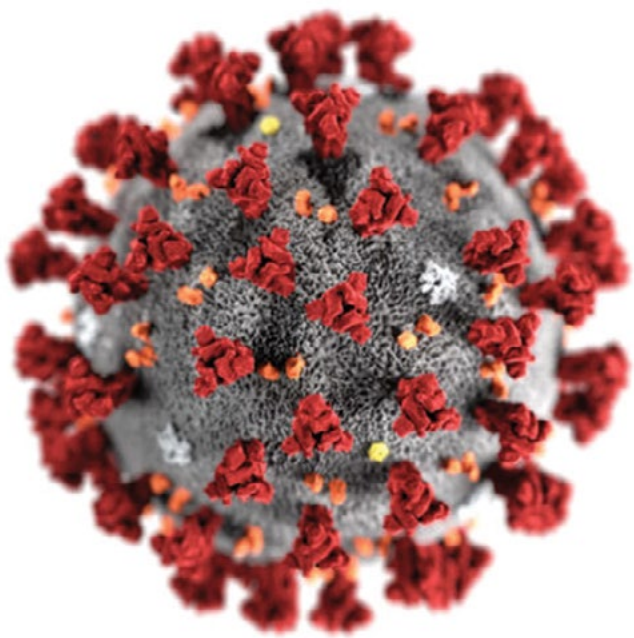
Just as quickly as the government’s response to COVID-19 evolved, so did consumer buying patterns. And that led to drastic, simultaneous changes in two demand curves. The first was hoarding behavior. Consumers, afraid at the possibility of being unable to leave the house for a long period of time, began panic buying both perishable and non-perishable products. Key ag products like milk and eggs disappeared from store shelves at record pace. Center-of-the-store staples, which have seen a significant decline in demand thanks to the past 10 years of diet trends, suddenly became the most popular products as people stocked their pantry with dry pasta, canned goods, flour, sugar, and yeast. That seismic shift in demand meant that, for a short time, shelves were empty, not because there wasn’t enough raw product, but because the processing of that product couldn’t shift as quickly as the demand for it did.

Despite all this, there’s an extremely important point to note: America is not in the middle of a food shortage. This isn’t a broken supply chain, it’s a disrupted one. There may be holes on grocery store shelves where we are used to seeing specific products. But that doesn’t mean that there is not enough food to meet our nutritional needs. While many of us might miss the specialty flavored coffee creamer or the “rustic cut” shredded cheddar cheese, there’s still plain half-and-half and blocks of cheddar for us to use in the meantime.

Increased Demand, Excess Product?

If the demand for food products is so high, why are we still seeing reports of dairy farmers and fresh produce growers having to dump product? Once again, we owe this disruption to a massive, unexpected change in demand patterns. At the very same time that retail consumers were flooding supermarkets, a major segment of the demand went offline: schools and restaurants, responding to state-wide closure mandates and social distancing measures, closed or scaled back almost overnight. Commercial kitchens,

although they require the same products, need very different kinds of production and packaging. A paper carton of milk handed out to a school student is produced on a completely different line, with completely different equipment and packaging, than the gallon jugs of milk that were so quickly flying off store shelves. And once again transitioning that production couldn’t happen overnight. All the while, cows still needed milked and lettuce still needed harvested. But, the ability to transfer those products from the foodservice needs for which they were intended and into the packaging and labeling required for retail sale required time. And that was the perfect equation for excess supply.



Depressed Prices

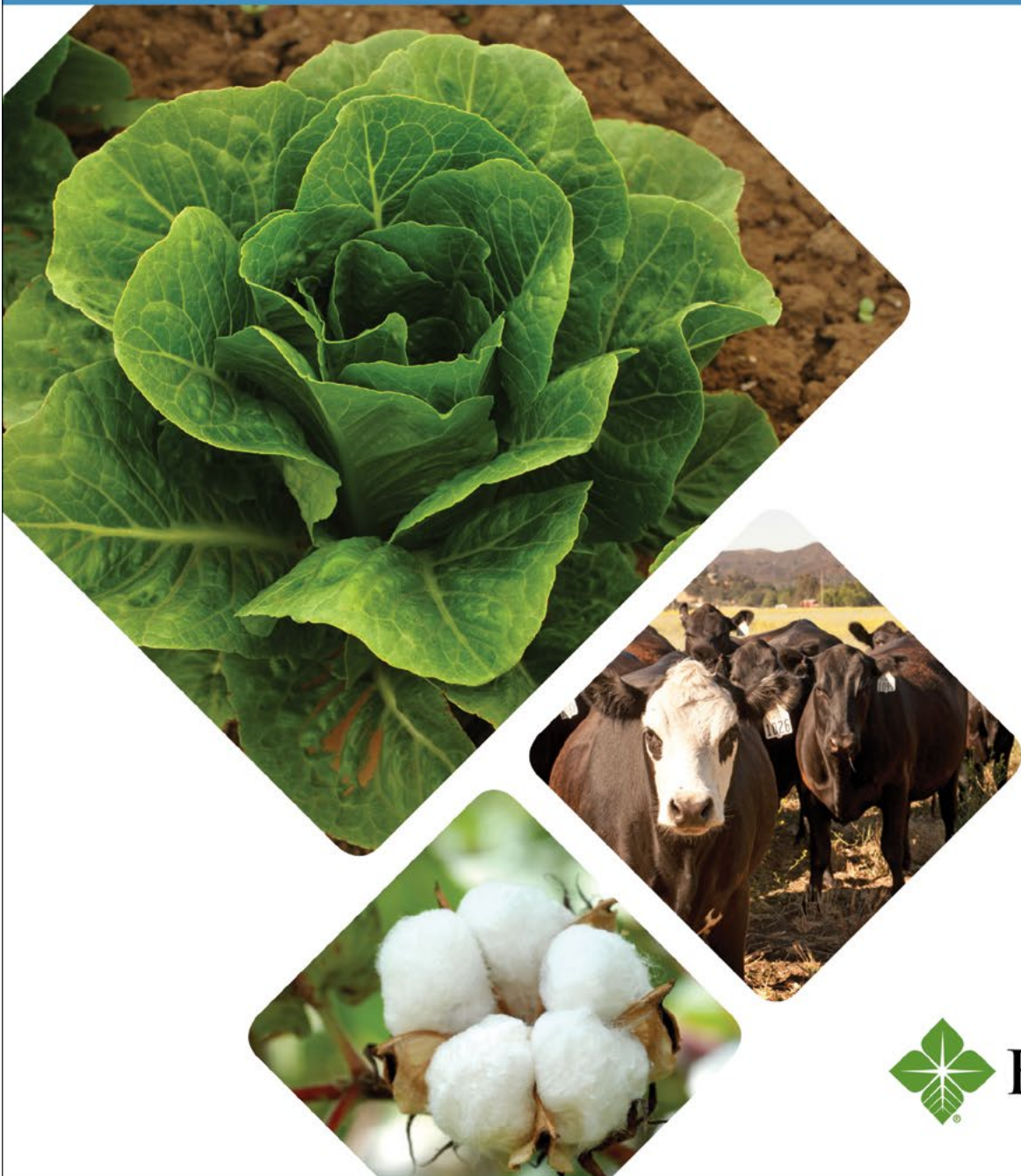
These devastating demand shifts didn’t just have an impact on American ag. As a global pandemic, COVID-19 has shut down processing and manufacturing capability across the globe, leading to severely depressed commodity prices: in mid-April, cotton futures were down nearly 30% and corn was down 15%. The foodservice exposure in the meat industry led to unheard of price drops: pork bellies cheaper than ham, and beef tenderloins cheaper than round. On the non-commodity side, direct-to-market producers, left with no place to sell their product, have no way to recoup their investments in their often specialty product.

Help is Coming... Slowly

All these impacts were the impetus of several billion in federal relief for American farmers. As of the writing of this article, USDA newly announced its relief program with preliminary details of what that relief will look like, when it will be available, and who will qualify (see nearby Article “Ag’s Survival Skills Shine During the Pandemic.” Early in April, the American Farm Bureau partnered with state


Farm Bureaus to send a list of industry requests to USDA, outlining the specific needs of each sector of the industry. By mid-April, Secretary of Ag Sonny Purdue signaled that he was receptive to many of those requests, including a direct payment to growers of several commodities and USDA-backed buyups of excess supply of dairy and specialty crops.

The new Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will hopefully help relieve some of the pain in the agriculture market. But we need to be well on our way to seeing producers with cash-in-hand. 🚜




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Recent Meat Packing Plant Closures Lead Farm Bureau & Livestock Industry to Reach Out to President Trump

Staff Reports

State Farm Bureaus, American Farm Bureau and other livestock organizations joined forces to send a letter to President Trump underscoring the importance of livestock processing facilities and urging that they be allowed to continue operations while safeguarding the health and safety of their employees.

The joint effort highlighted concerns about possible disruptions in the food supply chain emphasizing the critical nature of meat processing facilities. The letter follows increasing reports of facilities that have either been temporarily closed or that have suspended operations due to the coronavirus emergency.

The letter emphasized how the nation’s food supply is critical to the security and welfare of America. In it, the collaborators shared how the food chain – from farm and ranch to table – has a special responsibility to maintain operations to the fullest extent possible during this national emergency.

Key links in the livestock food chain are facing substantial challenges to their ability to protect their workers, while also maintaining operations. More than a million cattle, hog, and poultry producers and growers rely on meat and poultry packers and processors to convert their livestock and birds into food.

Like medical professionals, processors have noted the importance of personal protection equipment (PPE) for their employees and the challenge to ensure adequate PPE supplies. Those processors have taken – and are taking – actions to ensure the safety of their employees.

Yet there have been circumstances where plants have been threatened with closures or forced to close for indefinite and varying periods of time, in part because of the inconsistency from state to state in governing health and safety actions when employees are not at work.

To ensure livestock producers, poultry growers, and all food processors and their workers can continue to feed the nation, the letter requested the President emphasize the importance of allowing critical infrastructure food companies to responsibly and safely continue their operations to the fullest extent possible without undue disruption.

The joint effort emphasized in the letter their continued desire to support the strongest, most effective methods to protect these critical workers. Their health and safety must remain a top priority. They urged government health experts to work with the processing industry to continue developing and refining guidance specific to these critical plants to ensure the safest procedures are followed.

The continued operation of these plants is critical to the nourishment of American consumers now and when America is reopened.

Conversation with an Agri-Businessman: Jim Compton

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Born and raised in Buckeye, Jim Compton grew up learning to rope from this grandfather, Carl Arnold. Discovering his love of roping and that competitive spirit, Jim even competed in the National Finals Rodeo in 1977 and 1978 (event held in Oklahoma City, OK). He still competes in World Series of Team Roping events.

His love for rodeo sports, the outdoors and agriculture in general translated into his approach to business. In 1980, Jim purchased Arizona Feeds ag-chem division. Now known as Fertizona, his company has seven retail locations in Arizona. He also has Fertizona de Mexico in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico and Compton Ag Services in Blythe, California.

Jim has been married 42 years to Cindy. They have two children and six grandchildren.

It’s always fascinating to read or hear of Jim’s take on things to I thought I’d ask him a few questions about his perspective on Arizona agriculture. Short and sweet, he gets to the point, but shares some insights we don’t always think about.

Arizona Agriculture: What’s most important to you as a business owner in the agriculture industry that’s distinct from any other industry?



Compton reminds us that agriculture easily affords us the opportunity to nurture business relationships that can last for decades; trust and confidence continue to be key character traits of customer relationships.

See JIM COMPTON Page 7

Eleven Reasons to Attend the Women in Agriculture Conference

By Christy Davis, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Manager – Program Excellence

It’s time to register for the 24th Annual Women in Agriculture Conference that will be held at the Wigwam Resort, July 9th and 10th. This year’s theme is Ag Stands Together!



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You are invited to attend the twenty-fourth annual Arizona Women in Agriculture Conference in Litchfield, Az.
REGISTER TODAY!

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

1. **Location, location, location!** Deeply entwined with Arizona history since 1929, The Wigwam welcomes you to come make a little history of your own. Stretching over 440 lushly landscaped acres, our elegantly crafted adobe-and-timber luxury resort provides a rich palette of experiences to suit your every occasion-whether business, romance, relaxation or rollicking family fun.
1. **Location, location, location!** Deeply entwined with Arizona history since 1929, The Wigwam welcomes you to come make a little history of your own. Stretching over 440 lushly landscaped acres, our elegantly crafted adobe-and-timber luxury resort provides a rich palette of experiences to suit your every occasion-whether business, romance, relaxation or rollicking family fun.
2. **Activities** for everyone in the Family: From pools with water slides and lawn games the Wigwam has entertainment for everyone from kids to kids at heart!
3. **Free from Conflict.** The July dates for this conference don’t conflict with FFA or the Summer Ag Institute activities.
4. **Enjoy music and great conversation on the Patio.** Thursday night the Women’s Leadership committee invites you to relax with them on the patio of the Wigwam and enjoy live music and company of your fellow Women in Ag!
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.** Michele Payn of Cause Matters shows us how to handle food bullies. Take Food Bullying by the Horns: Michele Payn will illustrate the impact of the \$5.75 trillion food business and how it controls your future. Food bullying has become a trend that is taking away choice on farms and ranches across the world, while changing perceptions about farming.
7. **Tailgate Conversations- The Consumer Experience.** Join us on the tailgate as we visit with a diverse panel of consumers. Let’s sit together and learn as they share their experiences, challenges & successes in their food choices.
8. **Your Just Desserts.** Enjoy homemade fruit cobbler and other goodies.
9. **Anyone’s Welcome.** The educational conference encourages young and old, male and female and all segments of agriculture.
10. **Green Leafy from Farm to Plate.** Learn what Farmers are doing to ensure that the leafy greens in the Produce aisle are safe and how you can ensure food safety after you purchase and bring them home.
11. **It’s Inspirational and Encouraging:** One 2019 conference attendee said, “I have attended the conference each year for the past 11 years and I always learn something to apply to both my personal and professional life.” Another attendee said, “I’ve been to 7 or 8 and each time it gets better!”

To register for the conference, go to www.azfb.org, then click on the AG Stands Together theme photo. If you need more information, contact Christy Davis 480.635.3615 or christydavis@azfb.org.

Reserve your hotel by June 18, 2020 to receive the special group rate. Women in Agriculture 2020 Conference.



Jim Compton *continued from page 6*

Compton: In agriculture you have business relations that can last for generations. There is a trust and confidence between customers and the company, knowing we stand behind our products and we strive to provide the most efficient and timely service possible.

Arizona Agriculture: What’s been the biggest transformation you’ve seen in Arizona agriculture in the last decade?

Compton: There are fewer farmers now than there have been in the past. There are fewer people with knowledge of production agriculture. Social media has become a powerful determinate of opinion. Right or wrong, substantiated or guessed at, anyone can put anything on social media, it is even more important than ever to get accurate information to the public.

Arizona Agriculture: From your agri-business perspective and as a business owner, give the “Compton Inside Baseball” on agriculture in Arizona?

Compton: It is essential to get up and try your best every day.

Arizona Agriculture: What’s the best business advice you were given as you launched your business in 1980? And, what’s your philosophy for maintaining a successful business?

Compton: The best advice I received is that customers and employees are your most important assets.

Arizona Agriculture: Of course, we all have water concerns in this desert state. How do we get to successful stakeholder solutions especially for farmers, rural residents and cities?

Compton: If I knew the answer to the water issue, I would be a billionaire.

Arizona Agriculture: In your business, what technology advances will have the most impact?

Compton: Smart phones have had a huge impact on business, information exchange is immediate. Going forward, drone technology in farm equipment has the potential to radically change the future of farming.

Arizona Agriculture: Last year the various agriculture groups, including Arizona Farm Bureau, successfully collaborated to pass House Bill 2275, that eliminates requirements of sales tax for many essential agricultural inputs. Provide us some perspective on how that bill impacts the agriculture industry moving forward.

Compton: Everyone in agriculture got a raise when the sales tax was eliminated on agriculture inputs. Arizona farmers were put on an even playing field with New Mexico and Texas agriculture.

Arizona Agriculture: The diversity of Arizona’s agriculture is perhaps one of our strongest points as an industry; we can grow the Mediterranean Diet here in the desert. But what’s your favorite thing to highlight about this state’s agriculture?

Compton: Every day of the year there is farming going on in some part of Arizona. 🌾

4th Annual FFA Blue & Gold Gala Huge Success

By Rochelle Planty, Arizona Agricultural Education/FFA Foundation Executive Director

The 4th Annual Blue & Gold Gala was a sold-out event this year with 600 attendees gathering to support agriculture education and FFA in Arizona. ‘The Biggest Night in Arizona Agriculture,’ presented by Arizona Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau Financial Services, brought together passionate advocates for FFA.

The 4th Annual Blue & Gold Gala raised more than \$257,260 for the Arizona Agricultural Education/FFA Foundation on February 22, 2020 at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Scottsdale. Respected Emmy award-winning television personality, Jan D’Atri served as the evening’s emcee. Local members from AAEC Red Mountain FFA, Peoria FFA, and Westwood FFA were an integral part of the entire evening from FFA members assisting with set up and greeting guests to the centerpieces created by Westwood FFA members. The opening entertainment was provided by Danny Walls and Past State FFA Officer John Bishop of Canyon Walls Band. The very talented Kaitlin Hacker of Buckeye FFA Chapter performed the National Anthem and the Arizona State FFA Officers presented the official opening ceremonies.



Presenting sponsors, Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse gave remarks during the 4th Annual Blue & Gold Gala where 600 supporters attended the gathering.

As guests entered the ballroom, they were amazed by the stunning backdrop of 97 FFA Jackets representing members from across Arizona. Each jacket was sponsored by a generous donor and then distributed the end of the week to an FFA members who applied through the Arizona FFA Foundation jacket program.

A highlight of the evening for the Foundation is to present the Blue & Gold Award. This year the prestigious award was presented by Board Vice President and Gala Chair Heather Rayner to the Otto & Edna Neely Foundation. Kevin Berrigan, State FFA President had the honor on behalf of the Arizona Association FFA to recognize Jose Bernal as the 2020 Agriculturalist of the Year.

The Blue & Gold Award recognizes an individual, group or organization that best supports the Foundation, Arizona FFA youth, and agriculture education. The Neely Foundation has made a significant impact on many FFA students over the years through their support of the Arizona FFA Scholarship Program providing several scholarships each year to help further the education of FFA members from the east valley. They have also supported the Arizona State FFA Leadership Camp, Career Development Events and other programs that have furthered the leadership development of members.

The Agriculturalist of the Year is given annually to a member of the agriculture community who has a strong spirit of leadership and has made a significant contribution to Arizona agriculture and the community. The State FFA Officers from the Arizona Association FFA make the selection annually from nominations from FFA members across Arizona.

Jose Bernal, an outstanding agriculture education teacher and pillar of his community, is the recipient of the Agriculturalist of the Year. This award is given annually to a member of the agriculture community who has a strong spirit of leadership and has made a significant contribution to Arizona agriculture and the community. Jose has made a tremendous impact in the teaching profession and served as a mentor for more than 40 years to students, student teachers and others in the industry. He has served as the agriculture education teacher at Pima JTED for the past six years.

Another highlight of the evening was the drawing of the FFA Gator Raffle sponsored by Stotz Equipment with the lucky winner being Dennis and Laurel Lindenau.

The 5th annual Blue & Gold Gala presented by the Arizona Farm Bureau & Farm Bureau Financial Services will be held February 20, 2021. More details will be shared as they develop at www.blueandgoldgala.org. 🌾



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AITC is Online to Better Serve You!

By Katie Aikins, Arizona Farm Bureau Education Director

Spring has sprung and students and teachers are still at home. In this interesting time Arizona Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom is working hard to provide online and digital resources to parents and teachers to keep our student’s learning. What better way to keep learning engaging and fun than bringing in a little agriculture!!

Pop on over to www.azfb.org/aitc and view the many online resources that are now available for teachers.

Online Story Time

This online platform allows students to build their digital library and enjoy an online reading of some of the very best ag accurate books. Google slide activities accompany online story time to keep students engaged and remembering what they read.

Online Presentations

The AITC Team has been able to record several fun and engaging video lessons. Want to know how bees communicate? Want to know where your pizza really comes from? Want to learn how cows and people are different? Maybe you want to sprout some seeds? Be sure to check these video lesson and more!

Hatch at Home

The #hatchathome project now has nine incubators being used by teachers and parents! It has been a neat experience watching students gather around the computer screen to check in on their classroom eggs. Happy hatching to all our #hatchathome participants!

What are teachers saying about AITC’s new online resources?
“Thank you so much for all the resources you have shared with us! You have no idea how much we appreciate just being able to plug in those activities! This is a huge learning curve for all of us and you have made this so much easier! – The 2nd grade team at Desert Mountain Elementary really appreciates you!” 🐝



The AITC Team has been able to record several fun and engaging video lessons. Pop on over to www.azfb.org/aitc and view the many online resources that are now available for teachers.

Food Supply Chain: Outlier Moments

More than ever, Americans are discovering just how important the entire U.S. food supply chain is. The farm-to-fork process for America’s variety of agriculture products moves along a complex set of links that have been given more recognition than ever before: farmers and ranchers, packers, processors, wholesale distributors, truckers, grocery stores, restaurants and more. In the meantime, the supply chain disruptions as parts of the economy closed created a unique set of circumstances.



Here’s a few insights.

- The volume of meat sold at grocery stores across the U.S. increased 78% during the week ending March 22, when compared to the same week in 2019. Meanwhile, restaurant sales decreased 65%.
- Just a 5% reduction in pork packing plant capacity – the equivalent of about two average-size federally inspected plants going offline – could mean 3.5 million fewer pounds of pork in the marketplace (Source: National Pork Board estimate based on USDA data).
- The quantity of meat sold at grocery stores during the week ending March 22 was 78% higher than the same time in 2019, according to IRI data.
- Retailers also have experienced a 75% increase in online grocery sales in the weeks following the COVID outbreak, creating issues for labor, stocking, and slot availability for online shoppers.
- With Easter approaching, the week ending March 28 saw demand for spiral hams surge 413% versus the prior year.

Two-thirds of consumers are highly concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic, a number that has held stead over the last three weeks, according to Datassential. And they know food is essential. So, look for buying patterns to be unique to the times. 🐷



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