

BALANCING RECREATION AND AGRICULTURE: ARIZONA'S OHV BOOM AND THE PATH FORWARD

BY CHAD SMITH, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Americans rediscovered the value of the great outdoors. In Arizona, public lands—from U.S. Forest Service areas to state-managed and even in some cases private lands—became popular destinations for campers, hikers, and outdoor enthusiasts. This surge in interest also fueled a dramatic rise in off-highway vehicle (OHV) use across the state.

Arizona's expansive public land system—boasting over 40,000 miles of trails and roads—now ranks among the top two states nationwide for OHV access. Since the Off-Highway Vehicle decal program launched in 2010 with just 90,000 registered OHVs, Arizona has seen a dramatic increase in registrations. This growth accelerated during the pandemic: in 2020, 115,000 decals were sold, and by 2024, that number had surged to over 400,000. This represents a 250% increase since 2020 and an overall growth of 344% since the program began.

But this popularity comes with challenges, especially for Arizona's agricultural community. Many of these trails run through or adjacent to working ranches and farms, where private and public land often interconnect. As the OHV industry continues to grow, farmers and ranchers are increasingly working to balance recreational access with responsible land stewardship and operational safety.

A SHARED LANDSCAPE, A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Modern OHVs are not only more popular—they're also larger, faster, and capable of accessing remote areas. While many Arizona ranchers use OHVs in their daily operations, they also witness firsthand the risks and impacts of improper use. From degraded range conditions and damaged fencing to disturbing wildlife and even witnessing accidents, landowners are feeling the effects.

In response, the agricultural community has identified three core areas of focus to manage the growing use of OHVs: **law enforcement, safety and education, and land mitigation.**

STRENGTHENING EDUCATION AND SAFETY

Education is the cornerstone of responsible recreation. Recognizing this, the Arizona Legislature passed a law in 2024 requiring all OHV users to complete a safety education course before registering or renewing their decals. The program, which began in January 2025, includes a short online course covering both safety protocols and responsible trail usage. Over 30,000 users have al-



ready completed the course. However, this requirement is currently set to sunset in 2027 unless reauthorized by future legislation.

CLARIFYING REGISTRATION AND FUNDING

Arizona's OHV registration system is complex, involving multiple agencies and fee structures depending on how the vehicle is used. For exclusively off-road use, owners pay a \$25 decal fee and a minimal registration fee. For dual-use vehicles primarily used on roads, the cost includes the decal fee, an \$8 registration fee, and the full vehicle license tax (VLT),

calculated based on the purchase price. Vehicles over 2,500 lbs. must be registered and taxed as conventional vehicles, regardless of usage.

Revenue collected from these fees is managed by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), which retains 30% and distributes the remaining 70% to Arizona State Parks & Trails. These funds are further divided:

- 35% to the Arizona Game and Fish Department
- 5% to the Arizona State Land Department
- Remaining funds go toward administration, law enforcement, education, trail development, and land mitigation.

Since 2019, Arizona State Parks has allocated over \$4.5 million (26%) of these funds to law enforcement through grants, with another \$13.4 million supporting trail planning, education, and land repair efforts.

INVESTING IN LAND MITIGATION

Perhaps the most vital yet underfunded area is land mitigation—restoring and preserving the trails and landscapes damaged by increased OHV use. In 2024, just 11% of OHV-related revenue went toward these efforts, despite the heavy use of Arizona's trail systems. Without consistent investment in maintenance and repair, the very resources that make Arizona a premier outdoor destination could be compromised for recreationists, ranchers, and wildlife alike.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

The surge in OHV use has placed significant strain on Arizona's already resource-limited law enforcement agencies. Despite their best efforts, many agencies simply lack the personnel, equipment, and funding to adequately patrol the vast, often remote landscapes where OHV activity occurs. This has made consistent

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PUBLIC LANDS: HOW WE RESPECT THEM

BY JULIE MURPHREE, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Hey there, adventure seekers! Let's chat about America's public lands—those wide-open spaces that feel like a gift from nature itself. Imagine you're standing in Arizona, surrounded by jaw-dropping views, with a cow or two munching grasses nearby like they own the place.

That's the vibe of our public lands: a shared playground for hikers, wildlife, history buffs, and even our four-legged, mooing friends.

WHY THESE LANDS ARE A BIG DEAL

Public lands are like the ultimate family heirloom. They're home to epic ecosystems, ancient trees that could tell stories, and animals that roam free. They're not just for snapping epic selfies (though, go for it).

These spaces protect biodiversity, hold clues to our past, and give future generations a place to explore. They're the real MVPs of nature.

PACK IT OUT, DON'T TRASH IT

Okay, real talk: nobody likes a litterbug. That candy wrapper you "accidentally" leave behind?

Multiply that by a thousand visitors, and suddenly our pristine lands look like a landfill. Leave No Trace isn't just a slogan—it's a promise. Pack out every bit of trash you bring in. It's a small act that keeps these places stunning for everyone.

This was certainly brought home to me years ago when we floated down the Colorado River. Everything we brought in; we had to back up and pack out. I mean everything.

STICK TO THE TRAILS

Trails are like nature's GPS, guiding us through the good stuff without wrecking it. Going off-trail might seem like a fun shortcut, but it can crush delicate plants or mess up the soil. That rare flower one might trample? It might not get a second chance. Stay on the path—it's there to protect the land and keep your adventure guilt-free. Plus, trails protect us.

GIVE WILDLIFE SOME SPACE

Wild animals aren't here for our amusement—they're not auditioning for a Disney movie. Feeding them or getting too close can mess with their natural vibes, turning them into beggars or worse. Keep your distance, whip out those binoculars, and let them do their wild thing. You'll both be happier for it.

CATTLE: THE UNSUNG HEROES

Now, let's give a shoutout to the cows. On multi-use lands, these guys aren't just chilling—they're working.

By grazing, they clear out dry grass that could fuel wildfires and help keep the soil healthy. They're like nature's landscapers! If you see a gate, leave it as you found it (or follow any signs). It's a small way to respect the ranchers who keep these lands thriving.



RANCHERS ARE THE REAL DEAL

Speaking of ranchers, they're out here doing heavy lifting so we can enjoy the views. They reseed native grasses, maintain water sources for wildlife and cattle, and keep invasive plants in check. Plus, they're boosting local economies—grazing on public lands brings in over \$1 billion nationwide, with Arizona alone kicking in \$54 million, according to the U.S. Forest Service. That's some serious cash flow for keeping our lands healthy.

CATTLE GRAZING = ECOSYSTEM WINS

Cattle don't just help ranchers; they're eco-superstars. Their grazing provides benefits like cleaner water and healthier soil, worth an estimated \$3.7 billion across the U.S. It's like every cow is depositing a little something into nature's savings account, and we're all cashing in on the returns.

Cattle have been on public lands for generations. Ranchers continue to make improvements and as other management practices and improvements are discovered and applied more benefits are netted by us, the public.

KEEP THE NOISE DOWN

Public lands are a place to soak in nature's soundtrack—birds chirping, wind rustling, maybe a cow mooing. Loud off-highway vehicles or blasting music?

That's like playing heavy metal at a yoga class. It stresses out wildlife and cattle, so keep the volume low and let nature's playlist shine.

HONOR THE HISTORY

These lands are like living history books, with petroglyphs, old homesteads, and stories carved into the dirt. Treat them with respect—not just as cool photo ops, but as pieces of our shared past.

Leave artifacts where they are, and let the history live on.

PROTECT THE WATERSHED

Here's a fun fact: the grasslands you're hiking through aren't just pretty—they're part of the system that keeps clean water flowing to places like Phoenix. Every step you take (and every piece of trash you pack out) helps keep that water pure.

So, keep it green and keep it clean.

BE A GUARDIAN, NOT JUST A GUEST

When you hit up public lands, you're not just visiting—you're part of the team that keeps them awesome.

Respect the land, the wildlife, the cattle, and the ranchers who make it all work. Enjoy the views, make some memories, and leave the place better than you found it. Let's keep these lands beautiful, productive, and open for everyone—today and for generations to come.

Ready to join the movement? Let's respect our public lands and keep the adventure alive! 🌵

THE TOP TIPS FOR PAIRING WINE

BY JULIE MURPHREE, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

CHOICES: “What’s a pairing you swear by that most people wouldn’t think of?”

Ibarra: A super easy pairing that’s a go-to for me is popcorn and Chardonnay. While I’m not particularly a fan of that grape varietal on its own, I really enjoy the complementary buttery notes in both the popcorn and an Oakey Chardonnay. Better yet, grate a light dusting of parmigiana on top and the flavors intensify. Why this works? The buttery weight and intensity of the popcorn matches the weight and intensity of the wine

CHOICES: “If I’m cooking salmon, what wine would you pick and why?” Also, what wine should I stay away from if I’m cooking salmon?

Ibarra: It depends entirely on how you prepare the salmon. Roasted salmon, especially if brushed with mustard and herbs, requires a wine with a lot of structure and acidity to stand up to the high heat roasting method, which brings a greater depth of flavor than poached salmon, for instance. For a dish like this, I would choose a fruit forward wine with fairly high acidity and low tannins. The wine’s acidity would stand up to the heft of the cooking method and flavor components. Same would apply if you were to grill the salmon.

Now, if you were to poach the salmon, a light to medium bodied white or red wine would do the trick as the cooking method does not interrupt the purity and natural sweetness of the fish. I would definitely stay away from a wine high in tannins which often clashes with fish and makes the wine taste metallic.

CHOICES: “Are there any rules about pairing I should just ignore?”

Ibarra: Good question! That totally depends on the purpose of the pairing but assuming you want to explore and have fun then you could throw out the old rule, white with fish and chicken and red with meat. Preparation of the protein alters weight and intensity and ultimately matters much more than that rule.

CHOICES: “What’s a budget bottle that punches above its weight for pairing with any type of meal?”



Ibarra: You can find great bottles of Garnacha/Grenache that are very reasonably priced and super enjoyable and because of the relatively medium-plus acidity level inherent with this grape varietal, they pair very well with many protein choices. Cooking method may need to be adjusted as mentioned previously.

CHOICES: “How do you tweak a pairing if the dish has a bold spice or sauce?” Think curry or a tangy chimichurri—

Ibarra: Acidity levels the playing field in a lot of ways. It balances sweet and bitter components in a dish, not to mention salt. Curry has very complex flavors as well as heat, sweetness and herbaceous tension that only acid can handle. The function of acid is to contribute freshness to a dish and a wine. Too little and the wine will taste flat and flabby, too much and it will taste sharp and sour.

When it comes to big, bold sauces and spicy character, I love a red Zinfandel or Merlot, with soft tannins (low) and relatively high acidity. The fruit character is a nice counterpoint to the spiciness of the dish.

CHOICES: What are three ongoing tips you always share with people to help them feel at ease about pairing the right wine with what they are cooking?

Ibarra: **First** - cooking method. Think weight of the dish vis-a-vis weight of the wine.

- Intensity. Make sure a highly flavored dish has a lively and intensely flavored wine. Example, Asian food, particularly Thai which is not typically heavy (weight) but is intensely flavored and pair with a bright (acid) and intensely flavored Riesling or Gewurtztraminer.

First and Second are basically about balance.

Third - have fun. Always eat and drink what you like but experiment. A lot! It gets easier and is a ton of fun to try new and different wines. 🍷

Editor’s Note: Valeree Halsey Ibarra is a wine consultant based in Arizona who has done work for the Arizona Wine Growers Association and others.

JUST ONE STEP: SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

BY STAFF REPORTS

May is Mental Health Month, a time to reflect, connect, and act. The Arizona Farm Bureau and American Farm Bureau are encouraging everyone in the agricultural and business community to take “just one step” toward supporting their own mental well-being or helping someone who might be struggling. It’s a simple idea with the power to change everything.

For business owners, farmers and ranchers and others, long hours, financial pressures, and isolation can take a toll on even the toughest among us. The good news? You don’t have to have it all figured out to feel better. Improving your mental health doesn’t have to be overwhelming—it starts with just one step.

ONE STEP CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

What does “just one step” look like? It could be as simple as having a conversation with a friend, taking a quiet walk through your fields or the neighborhood, or asking for help when you need it. On those days when everything feels like too much, even small actions—like journaling your thoughts, creating a free [Togetherall](#)

[account](#), or opening up to someone you trust—can lift the weight off your shoulders. You don’t have to suffer in silence; reaching out is a strength, not a weakness.

There are countless ways to ease stress and anxiety, and they’re often closer than you think. Try going for a drive down a familiar country road, pausing to take a few deep breaths, or watching the sunset after a long day. These small, intentional moments can calm your mind and remind you that you’re not alone.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER, ONE STEP AT A TIME

Mental health isn’t just about looking after yourself—it’s also about helping those around you. If you know a friend or loved one who’s struggling, your support can make a real difference. Start with just one step: listen without judgment, show them you care, or gently encourage them to seek professional help. Be patient and consistent—small gestures can have a big impact.

Sometimes, it’s hard to tell when someone needs help. Keep an eye out for signs **SEE SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH PAGE 5**

DESERTS GROW VEGGIES

BY KATIE AIKINS, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE EDUCATION

As the seasons change, many states are beginning to see the sun and feel the warmth for the first time in months. For Arizona, this is a feeling that never really goes away. In fact, the desert climate that we all love provides more than sunshine and a beautiful winter for Arizona residents, but also a plethora of leafy greens and other vegetables to consumers across the country.

Known as the Winter Lettuce Capitol of the World, Yuma Arizona produces nearly 90% of all leafy greens in the months of November through March. Something local author Elizabeth Cooley knows better than most. Cooley, a former educator, resides in the southwest desert and has a daily reminder of the bounty that comes from her community to folks throughout the world.

We had the opportunity to sit down with our author and learn a little more about what inspired this savory story.

Arizona Agriculture: What inspired you to write this story?

Cooley: My first inspiration for writing a children's book on agriculture actually happened when I was teaching first grade in Seattle, Washington. I was teaching a food unit to my students and during this time I discovered that at our local Costco, all the green leafy vegetables in the produce section had stickers that said, "Grown in Yuma, Arizona." So, the next day I told my students about this and their reactions were hilarious. They knew that I was from Arizona, and in their minds all they could picture were deserts, cacti and tumbleweeds, so they couldn't believe that their



lettuce and broccoli was coming from the desert!

The next event that really made me start writing was driving with my family one Saturday morning on our way to an early 8:00 a.m. soccer game. I live near tons of agricultural fields and during this time of the year the fields were filled with beautiful heads of lettuce for miles and miles. As I was looking out my car window I said to my husband, "You know, no one has written a children's book about agriculture here in Yuma," to which he responded, "You should write one," and that afternoon I began writing.

Arizona Agriculture: Why did you pick Minnesota for the story?

Cooley: I love this question because to many readers it seems very random, but there's actually a great connection! When I was writing my story, I spoke to many leaders in the agriculture industry in Yuma to check the facts and to make sure the information I was writing about was accurate. I asked them, "Where exactly does all of the produce that we grow in Yuma actually go to?" As one could guess, it goes pretty much all throughout the United States, but there was a big presence of Yuma's agriculture sent to Minnesota, and I wanted to have my main character live in a place that was completely different from Yuma. In the winter, Yuma's weather is perfect. It's in the 70s most days and it's the sunniest city in the world! Minnesota is the complete opposite in the wintertime so that was a big draw to me as well.

Arizona Agriculture: What was the most difficult part about writing the book?

Cooley: I would hon-

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enforcement of OHV laws increasingly difficult, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

Agricultural stakeholders have voiced growing concerns over this gap. Ranchers and farmers frequently report a visible lack of enforcement presence, even as issues on the ground, ranging from trespassing to environmental damage, continue to rise. While Arizona's OHV grant program has provided some relief, funding cycles are limited to a maximum of three years. This short-term structure makes it difficult for law enforcement agencies to plan for sustained staffing and resource investments, adding to the overall challenge of ensuring safe and responsible OHV use across the state.

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like changes in routines, increased accidents, or signs of stress in their children. Recognizing these clues could be the first step toward getting them the support they need.

One truth that resonates with so many and a common story: The one call you made to a friend made all the difference on a day when that friend was struggling.

TAKE THAT STEP TODAY

Mental Health Month is a reminder that you don't have to face challenges alone. For many, you may be the backbone of your community, and your well-being matters. Whether it's for yourself or someone you care about, taking just one step can set you on a path to feeling better. It's not about fixing everything at once—it's about starting somewhere.

So, today, take that step. Call a friend, step outside, or journal. You've got this—one step at a time. 🧱

LOOKING AHEAD: COLLABORATION IS KEY

Arizona's OHV landscape is a shared one. It belongs to the families seeking adventure, the farmers tending land, the ranchers managing herds, and the wildlife that calls it home. As OHV use continues to grow, so must our collective commitment to sustainable recreation.

Continued collaboration between state agencies, federal land managers, and local communities, especially our agricultural producers, is essential. Together, we can ensure Arizona's trails remain open, safe, and sustainable for generations to come. 🧱



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EXPLORING THE CARNIVORE DIET: A MEAT-LOVER'S PARADISE OR NUTRITIONAL MIRAGE?

BY JOEL CARR, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

There's nothing quite like indulging in a perfectly smoked brisket—tender, juicy, and flavorful. When I discovered the carnivore diet, I became intrigued and decided to learn more about it.

The carnivore diet has emerged as a polarizing topic in the ever-evolving world of dietary trends. Advocates hail it as a return to ancestral eating habits, while critics warn of potential health risks. Let's examine this all-meat regimen and its implications.

Of note, the popularity of this diet took off a few years ago when Rogan discussed the diet during his podcast.

WHAT IS THE CARNIVORE DIET?

The carnivore diet is simple: Consume only animal products. This means a menu rich in beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, and, for some, dairy. All plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, are off-limits. It is a **zero-carb, high-protein, and high-fat diet**, making it the opposite of veganism.

WHY SOME SWEAR BY IT

Supporters claim the carnivore diet offers several benefits, including:

- **Weight loss:** High-protein intake can promote satiety, potentially reducing calorie consumption.
- **Simplified eating:** Limited food choices make meal planning straightforward.
- **Autoimmune relief:** Some individuals report symptom relief due to eliminating dietary triggers found in other foods.

Notable figures like podcaster Joe Rogan have publicly experimented with the diet, highlighting both positive effects and challenges.

POTENTIAL HEALTH RISKS

Dietitians caution that the carnivore diet poses several health risks due to its restrictive nature. According to experts cited by MyGeneFood, eliminating plant-based foods can lead to deficiencies in essential nutrients like fiber, vitamin C, and phytonutrients, which play crucial roles in gut health and immune function.

Additionally, the diet's heavy reliance on animal fats and proteins may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, inflammation, and long-term metabolic imbalances. Dietitians advocate for a more balanced approach that includes a variety of food sources to support overall health ([MyGeneFood](#)).

While some individuals report positive outcomes, medical experts caution against potential health risks:

- **Nutrient deficiencies:** A diet limited to animal products can lack essential plant nutrients, such as vitamin C, fiber, and antioxidants.
- **Cardiovascular concerns:** Diets high in saturated fats may elevate LDL cholesterol levels, increasing the risk of heart disease for some.
- **Digestive issues:** The absence of fiber can lead to consti-



pation and other digestive discomforts.

A case study highlighted a 68-year-old man who developed kidney stones after adopting the carnivore diet, suggesting potential renal complications.

A ZERO-CARB APPROACH

Unlike the ketogenic diet, which allows low-carb vegetables and aims to keep the body in ketosis, the carnivore diet is entirely **carb-free**, except for trace amounts in eggs and dairy. This shift forces the body to rely almost exclusively on fat for energy, which may result in:

- **Increased ketone production:** The body burns fat instead of glucose, potentially benefiting cognition and metabolism.
- **Energy fluctuations:** Some individuals experience the "carnivore flu," marked by fatigue as the body adjusts.
- **Improved insulin sensitivity:** Some individuals report better blood sugar regulation and reduced inflammation since carbohydrates do not spike blood sugar. 🍌

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estly say the hardest part was finishing my manuscript. It's easy to have an idea but then to turn that idea into an easy-to-understand children's book was a challenge for me in the beginning. Once I had my first draft written though, I felt like everything flowed really nicely. I am obsessed with children's books and as a former teacher I knew what children would want to see and read, so I knew what I wanted the story to look and sound like.

From the time I wrote my story to having my book sold in stores, it took thirteen months from start to end.

Arizona Agriculture: What was your favorite part about the writing process?

Cooley: The illustrations! I feel so lucky to have had Pervin Özcan illustrate my book. She turned my words into a vibrant, playful children's book and what's so amazing and kind of mind blowing is that Pervin is from Turkey and she has never been to Arizona, so for her to capture Yuma the way she did was so fun and beautiful. I emailed tons of pictures and descriptions to her so she could get the best sense of what Yuma's agriculture landscape looks like and she nailed it.

I waited for six months to get the first drafts of the illustrations,



and it was like Christmas day for me when I saw them for the first time.

Arizona Agriculture: Can we look for more books in the future?

Cooley: I sure hope so! I have so many ideas and I can definitely see Lucy (the main character) going on some adventures and learning more about agriculture in the future. Publishing this book has been a dream come true, and getting to read it to children and teach them about agriculture in the desert southwest is so special to me.

Nearly 25,000 students across the state will be learning all about the wide variety of crops that come from the Arizona desert during Ag in the Classrooms Spring Ag Literacy Event. The program will be donating over 900 books to classrooms across the State that are participating in the event. Along with the book, students will each be receiving one of our five Farmer Player Cards! Be on the lookout to collect all!

Get your copy of *Deserts Grow Veggies* on Amazon or other online distributors! 📖

Editor's Note: Be sure to check out our AITC YouTube Channel for a very special author book reading *Deserts Grow Veggies*! @AZFB AITC

DISCOVER LOCAL AND FRESH EATING WITH "FILL YOUR PLATE NOW" PODCAST

BY STAFF REPORTS

Imagine a world where you know exactly where your food comes from, support local farmers, and enjoy meals that are both fresh and deliciously cost-effective. That's the vision behind the new podcast, "Fill Your Plate Now." This innovative show aims to connect you directly with the source of your sustenance, transforming the way you think about food.

"Fill Your Plate Now" isn't just about feeding bodies; it's about enriching lives. Hosted by the dynamic duo of Julie Murphree, a farm girl with a passion for agriculture, and Tammy Baker, known as the "Nutrition Ninja," this podcast offers listeners a unique blend of educational content and practical advice. Each episode delves into the world of sustainable farming practices, revealing how these methods can benefit both your health and your wallet.

Listeners will discover nutritional home-cooking hacks that make it easy to prepare meals that are both healthy and economical. The podcast also explores the latest in food and farm technology, showing how innovation in agriculture can lead to better, more accessible food choices.

Every Thursday morning at 7:00, "Fill Your Plate Now" airs,



inviting you to join a growing movement. This isn't just about eating; it's about embracing a journey to wellness and wealth. With each bite, you'll get closer to the farm gate, distancing yourself from the unhealthy, processed foods that dominate modern diets.

By tuning in, you're not only becoming a smarter consumer but also contributing to a community that values health, happiness, and financial wisdom in food shopping. Whether you're a food enthusiast,

a health-conscious individual, or someone looking to support local economies, "Fill Your Plate Now" promises to be your weekly guide to a better, more connected way of living through food.

This weekly podcast is sponsored by the Arizona Milk Producers and Arizona Farm Bureau. You can find the show on your favorite podcast channels including Apple and Spotify. It's also available on [Fill Your Plate NOW | STAR WORLDWIDE NETWORKS](https://arizonamilk.org/), <https://arizonamilk.org/>, <https://www.azfb.org/News/Videos/Fill-Your-Plate-Now>, or <https://www.fillyourplate.org/podcast.html>. 📖



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