

Conversation on Drought Monitoring: How Advances Help Us Tackle Climate Challenges

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Mike Crimmins is on the faculty of the Department of Environmental Science at the University of Arizona and is an Extension Specialist in Climate Science for Arizona Cooperative Extension. He has been in this role for 15 years working with ranchers, farmers and natural resource managers across Arizona to integrate climate information in their planning and decision making and assisting them in developing strategies to adapt to a changing climate.

The improved drought monitoring systems and connecting weather data to practical applications has become a critical part of managing for an ever-changing climate. Dr. Crimmins insights show how critical climatology research is to agriculture in our desert state.

My conversation with him, especially about DroughtView, an online tool that makes it easy to access and plot near-real time satellite data, caused me to conclude that even our biggest challenges in this arid state have truly hopeful outcomes. After a all-inclusive scientific approach, key ingredients involve a mix of patience and tenacity.

Arizona Agriculture: Explain your lead role for the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Climate Science Applications Program?

Crimmins: I started this position in 2005 when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration partnered with University of Arizona Cooperative Extension to create an extension position focused on climate data and information. I was a weather nerd as a kid and received my undergraduate degree in meteorology from the University of Michigan. I was all set to work for the National Weather Service as a weather forecaster, but decided to go back to school and study climate. My wife and I ended up going to graduate school at University of Arizona where I studied climatology. I was lucky to have this position open up just as I was finishing my Ph.D. It was a perfect match for my interests in understanding regional weather and climate patterns and figuring out how to make this research useful for people who live and work here.

My extension program is focused on thinking through weather and climate information needs for farmers, ranchers and natural resource managers who work here in the Southwest and developing ways for them to use this information. There is an ever-increasing amount of weather and climate data from new weather stations, satellites, and modeling efforts, but it often gets lost on a website or parked in a journal some-

where. I am excited about connecting these data to practical applications. This involves getting to know how our stakeholders do their jobs and what their information needs are and then thinking about what data and information sources there are out there that may be useful.

Arizona Agriculture: What are some examples of this kind of work?

Crimmins: I was part of a team of University of Arizona researchers who worked with a group of ranchers and the U.S. Forest Service on collaborative drought planning. One need that surfaced in our discussions was the need for better tools for monitoring precipitation at remote locations on pastures and allotments. We collaboratively came up with some innovative ways to build rugged rain gauges that can be deployed at these locations and then designed some web tools that use existing climate data estimates to help interpret the observations collected at these remote locations. This blends some tried and true low-tech approaches like using manual rain gauges with high tech climate data sources available through smartphone apps. Having a better handle on local precipitation amounts and being able to compare these observations to historical estimates can help trigger actions in drought plans and inform proactive decision making. The webtool is called My-RAINge Log available at <https://myraingelog.arizona.edu/>. more information on other tools from this project are available at <https://cals.arizona.edu/droughtandgrazing/>.

Another example is DroughtView (<https://droughtview.arizona.edu/>), an online tool that makes it easy to access and plot near-real time satellite data. I am a member of the team of University of Arizona researchers that developed this tool to monitor drought impacts on vegetation using 'greenness' measurements from several different satellites. The exciting thing about DroughtView is that it takes historical data from these different satellites that have been collecting data for decades and communicates how unusual current conditions are with respect to long-term averages.

For example, we can look at how the record dry conditions impacted forage conditions across the region at the end of September. All of central Arizona and especially southeast Arizona was way off in terms of expected 'greenness' with the record dry and hot conditions. Having this high-resolution depiction of actual drought impacts helps us guide drought monitoring efforts like the U.S. Drought Monitor.

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Unveiling the Next Century at UA's Learning Lab

By Joel Badzinski, University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Communications

For more than a century, the Campus Agricultural Center (CAC) has served a vital role for the university as a hub of instruction, research, and extension. University of Arizona Vice President of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension Shane Burgess knows generations of students and faculty consider the 185-acre research facility as a second home, just as important to their UA experience as any classroom or laboratory on the main campus three miles to the south.

Now Burgess and the UA are planning for the CAC's next century, envisioning and building the infrastructures critical for the university to be a national leader in a multi-college, multi-disciplinary circular bioeconomy initiative.



Burgess envisions the Campus Agricultural Center as the birthplace of Arizona's circular bioeconomy. Simply defined, a circular bioeconomy is the creation of value-added secondary raw materials from waste biomass.

"The CAC became part of Arizona's statewide Experiment Station system in 1909," Burgess said. "Since then, it has provided state-of-the art infrastructure support enabling UA innovations in agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, human wellness, biomedicine, and engineering, to name a few. Research done at CAC helped Arizona's growers create today's \$40 billion agricultural economy. Our

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Arizona Agriculture: What's the most unique aspect of Arizona climate that we take for granted?

Crimmins: I am fascinated by the distinct seasons we have here in Arizona that are unlike seasons in other parts of the country. We have a seasonal climate that is marked largely by precipitation rather than temperature. The onset of the monsoon in summer is dramatic, with a distinct jump in low-level moisture and precipitation in late June into early July. This has an impact on agriculture from heat stress to crops and irrigation requirements, but also ushers in precipitation that is critical to growing forage on rangelands. Once the monsoon season wanes in late September we can occasionally have epic rains from tropical storms but are often just waiting for the winter storms to drop far enough south to give us soaking rains and high elevation snow. We can get different types of drought situations that emerge from missing precipitation from either of these 'wet' seasons. Missing winter precipitation can create problems for reservoirs and water availability, while missing summer can create forage and vegetation impacts.

Unfortunately, we are currently in a situation where we may miss both, with record dry summer 2020 conditions linking up with the presently dry winter, driven by a strong La Nia event in the Pacific Ocean.

Arizona Agriculture: In Arizona, what is the critical issue or issues we must face in agriculture when it comes to drought and climate change?

Crimmins: I think tracking different kinds of drought is going to be a challenge, where short-term drought conditions may improve (for example, during a summer monsoon with plentiful rainfall across the region), but longer-term drought conditions remain. The warming temperatures across the region create an increasingly thirsty atmosphere with higher levels of evapotranspiration, which can reduce the effective precipitation and increase irrigation needs. We need to develop tools and drought monitoring strategies that can track these subtle changes even when short-term conditions appear to be wet.

Arizona Agriculture: As a desert state we've already made remarkable technology adjustments to handle our climate challenges regardless of climate change. But, what's next for us in agriculture to do?

Crimmins: I think agriculture in Arizona has an exciting role to think through on how to adapt to a changing climate and lead the way for other arid regions around the world. Thinking through how to increase irrigation efficiency, rotations through longer growing seasons, and crop varieties that can tolerate different temperature ranges and water quality levels are all great tools for the adaptation toolbox. Growers in Arizona are already doing many of these things and it is a matter of how research can quickly develop new innovations in these areas and help growers implement them.

There are also exciting opportunities on the greenhouse gas mitigation side with agriculture being an important player in helping to 'farm carbon' and sequester it through agricultural activities. These sequestration efforts can help bring down CO2 levels in the atmosphere and reduce the impacts of climate change. Some of these efforts are being explored in new partnerships like the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (<https://agclimatealliance.com/>), of which the Farm Bureau is a member.

Arizona Agriculture: If climate change is the big issue for the next decade, from your scientific perspective, are you hopeful or concerned and if so why?

Crimmins: Climate change is a big issue for the coming decade, probably the biggest issue for us to tackle, but I am hopeful. There are exciting innovations in the way we make and use energy, water, and food, all of which are tied to climate. Here in the Southwest we will need to wrestle with all three, but we have the tools and research to tackle these challenges head on. Agriculture is not only important to the economy, but the fabric of Arizona and I see it is a critical partner in tackling these challenges and flourishing from the innovations. 🚗

Smallhouse Testifies Before Congress on Opportunities to Tackle Climate Challenges

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Arizona Farm Bureau (AZFB) President Stefanie Smallhouse recently testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on the agriculture, food and forestry sector's role in delivering climate solutions. She was part of a group representing the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance's (FACA) founding organizations and co-chairs – American Farm Bureau Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives and National Farmers Union, a diverse and growing alliance focused on sensible, market-based solutions to climate challenges. Their testimonies took place late last week.



During testimony before a U.S. Senate Committee, AZFB President Stefanie Smallhouse also stressed the need for the planning and funding of water infrastructure in the west to offset the severe drought conditions which threaten the sustainability of farmers along the Colorado River system.

"We've reduced carbon emissions in the beef industry by 30% since the 1970s," said AZFB President Smallhouse during her testimony. "We should be rewarded for that and American consumers should feel happy about eating beef and other livestock products produced in the U.S. knowing we've done so much work to decrease our carbon footprint."

Smallhouse and the other testimonies stressed how farmers, ranchers and forest owners are both on the frontlines of climate impacts and offer innovative, natural solutions through increased carbon sequestration in trees and soils and reduced GHG emissions.

In response to a question posed by Senator Thune of South Dakota Smallhouse said, "Shifting Livestock production to other countries makes no sense. America's producers are the most efficient. We produce 18% of the beef [globally] with 6% of the herd. Beef is an affordable, easily accessible source of nutritious, high protein. And these improved feed and breeding practices have happened over recent decades as we've advanced our livestock handling practices."

In accordance with FACA's guiding principles, the four representatives testifying stressed to lawmakers that federal climate policy must be built upon voluntary, incentive-based programs and market-driven opportunities, promote resilience and adaptation in rural communities, and be grounded in scientific evidence. In addition, solutions proposed by Congress and the Biden administration must be strongly bipartisan and accommodate the diverse needs of producers and landowners, regardless of size, geographic region, or commodity.

On the scientific evidence side, Smallhouse stated, "In order to develop innovative technologies to capture more carbon in our croplands, forests, and grasslands, we need increased investment in agriculture research aimed at

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circular bioeconomy initiative vision fulfills our mandate as a Land Grant University of making imagined inventions real, and then taking risks too great for the private sector to bear, to demonstrate economic feasibility.”

The Details

Specifically, the new College of Veterinary Medicine facilities at the CAC are almost complete. Next on the list is Food Product and Safety Lab modernization and building an animal feeding and sustainability facility, both inspired by UA President Robbins’ Fourth Industrial Revolution strategic intention: artificial intelligence, robotics and the future for animal welfare and human nutrition.



University of Arizona Vice President of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension Shane Burgess extols the Campus Agricultural Center’s (CAC) history when he makes one of his frequent visits to the property.

“We simply must either plan to create the future, or get out of the game,” Burgess said. “We must either be a national leader or quit while we are behind. We must produce graduates who are the most employable for the world’s employers, and who can out-compete any other graduate for the world’s best graduate and professional schools. Our graduates must be able to do jobs that do not yet exist and create the new business and even whole economies of the future. We must be able to attract the best faculty in the world. This will cost money, and we will need to find the money. And Arizona’s parents, children and employers should expect nothing less.”

UA’s College of Veterinary Medicine students will learn in the Food Product and Safety Lab and this will give them a competitive edge in a high-need area.

The School of Animal and Comparative Biomedical Sciences faculty are rebuilding the Animal Sciences degree from the ground up. They are creating a degree for the highest paying jobs in

work from animal production to bio-medical-technology, to reproductive surgery to human and veterinary health professions to zookeeping.

“In animal production alone, what we’ve known for a long time now has been re-emphasized during the pandemic: world demand for animal protein is growing, and consumers want meat products that also taste great and prevent cancer, heart disease and obesity, be a positive for the planet, and be good for the animals themselves,” Burgess said. “We know now that this is not impossible. To do this requires a ‘clouds to consumer’ approach; agility, risk and accepting nothing less. We are one of only a very few universities in the world who can make this a reality. If we could write the final chapter

to get Arizona a public vet school in the middle of the great recession, we can do this.”

Arizona’s Circular Bioeconomy

Burgess envisions the CAC as the birthplace of Arizona’s circular bioeconomy. Simply defined, a circular bioeconomy is the creation of value-added secondary raw materials from waste biomass.

“The circular bioeconomy is simply what the planet does,” Burgess explained. “It is not the failed circular economy of fossil fuels, which creates massive amounts of plastic that is not actually recycled and has become a serious environmental problem for the planet.”

There are already solar panels in place at the property, which he said are an example of “first generation green energy” and the next generations must go further.

“Energy is fundamental to the Fourth Industrial Revolution that UA President Robert Robbins talks about,” Burgess said. “Nothing in the Fourth Industrial Revolution can be done without it; data sciences, robotics, computers, everything we do. But societal pressures are to have low carbon energy. This is something our national administration wants, previous administrations wanted, and something that consumers are pulling. Arizona doesn’t have the petro-economic legacy; and that isn’t a handicap today. Arizona is a state of the future economy.”

“Our students must be learning in tomorrow’s ruminant and other animal feeding systems,” he added. “We already have a great example in Pinal County built by UA alums and dairy pioneers. We need to catch up to what they are doing already. Our 70-year-old facilities don’t cut it. We are going to build a new Animal Feeding and Sustainability facility to capture everything, ‘use everything but the moo’, to steal a phase, and capture methane and the other volatiles, and all the waste. This will be used for energy and for new more valuable products. Moreover, we will have accurate information on methane that the private sector needs to help craft national policy.”

Burgess emphasized that the work at the CAC is simply the continuation of the vision established more than a century ago: “It’s our job to be a leading bio-economic development engine for Arizona.”

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developing innovative solutions that can be efficiently utilized.”

Smallhouse also stressed the need for the planning and funding of water infrastructure in the west to offset the severe drought conditions which threaten the sustainability of farmers along the Colorado River system.

“Policy which addresses proactive measures to influence climate conditions cannot be one-size-fits-all,” added Smallhouse. “Just as I have highlighted the unique needs of Arizona’s farmers and ranchers in the West, all regions of the U.S. can explain ways in which any given climate policy may or may not work for the landscape, industry and ecology present in that region.”

FACA members developed more than 40 joint recommendations to guide the development of federal climate policy. Download the recommendations and see a full list of member organizations at agclimatealliance.com.

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More than a Nuisance: Why Strengthening Right-to-Farm Laws is a Key Legislative Priority.

By Chelsea McGuire, Government Relations Director

In the mid-2010s, residents of rural North Carolina started seeing some new billboards in town. A radical environmental group had begun a strategic public relations campaign with signs along rural roads, encouraging residents of the area to “Raise a Stink” about industrial hog farming.

In the coming months, these billboards weren’t the only new things in town. Out-of-state lawyers, seeing an opportunity for a cash cow (or should I say, cash hog) of a lawsuit began recruiting potential plaintiffs who would have standing to file a nuisance lawsuit against neighboring hog operations. And by the end of 2018, these efforts paid off exactly as they had been calculated to: Hundreds of millions of dollars in damages against the hog feeding operation.

This tragic story raised the alarm for agriculture across the nation. If this model could be successful in North Carolina, what was stopping it from being successful in any other state? And if it can be brought against a hog farm, what’s to stop it from coming against a dairy, a cattle feedlot, or even a crop farm, because of the inconvenience of dust and smell that inevitably comes from even a perfectly managed operation? And with urban development encroaching more and more into farm country, how could we protect our farms from enterprising attorneys looking to make big money and big headlines from these lawsuits?

These questions threw so-called Right to Farm Laws -- laws that limit what can and cannot be considered a nuisance in an agricultural context -- into the forefront of agricultural policy discussions. While all 50 states, Arizona included, already have some kind of Right to Farm provisions, North Carolina made it clear that these weren’t enough to protect farms from frivolous nuisance lawsuits or egregious financial penalties as a result of nuisance claims.

What is a Nuisance Lawsuit?

Nuisance is a common law tort under which a plaintiff can sue a defendant, claiming that the defendant’s activities are interfering with the reasonable use and enjoyment of the plaintiff’s property. (Arizona actually heard one of the nation’s keystone cases on nuisance, and it’s a case dealing with a cattle feeding operation.) In the agricultural context, this would manifest in a neighbor suing a farmer because of dust, smell, flies, or noise that emanates from the operation.

Thankfully, the presence of dust or smell alone isn’t enough to sustain a nuisance lawsuit. The plaintiff must show that these elements lead to a substantial interference with their use and enjoyment of property. And in Arizona, our existing Right to Farm laws state that if a nuisance case is brought against an ag operation, “substantial interference” must be proven by showing that there has been a threat to the public health and safety because of the farm’s practices.

Now, let’s be clear: our Right to Farm law is not a vehicle by which to give an agricultural operation carte blanche to do whatever it wants. Local ordinances about noise and lights are still applicable. City and county zoning laws are still applicable. State and federal pollution prevention laws are absolutely still applicable (and operations spend tens of thousands of dollars every year to ensure that they can comply). The only thing that is prevented or modified by our law is whether an agricultural operation’s activities can be classified as a common law nuisance. It’s a very narrow restriction, but one that has proved essential. No agricultural operation can be free from dust, smell, or other

elements that “city folk” might find objectionable. But that doesn’t mean that the operation is unsafe, harmful, or violating anybody’s rights.

The 2021 Legislature

Since the 2018 verdicts in North Carolina, Arizona ag policy leaders have been looking for opportunities to strengthen our Right to Farm statute, in anticipation that these kinds of lawsuits are not going away. And we found an opportunity in an unexpected place: COVID-19. When the pandemic-induced food supply chain disruptions had everybody discussing ways to strengthen our food distribution systems, we knew that one important factor was to remove the threat of frivolous lawsuits and outrageous jury verdicts from the equation. And that’s when Arizona’s ag groups came together to make sure that our laws were strong enough to prevent history from repeating itself.

While an initial draft of the legislation was ready as early as January, it took us until March to get all of the agricultural community on board with the details of the legislation. In doing so, the bill now boils down to two major elements: preventing frivolous legal filings and limiting the scope of punitive damages.

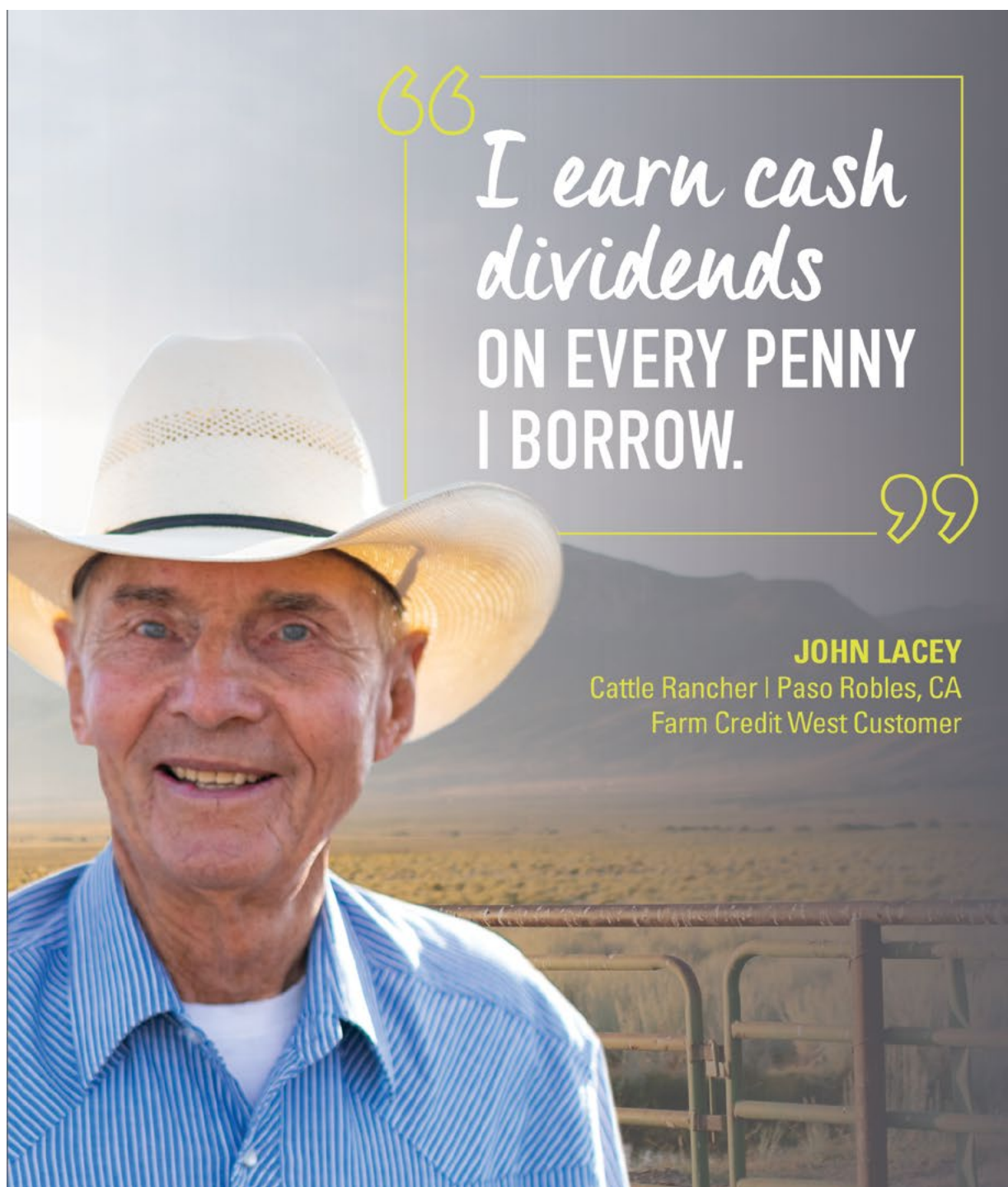
If I learned anything in law school, it was that if your client has made it into the courtroom, it doesn’t matter the outcome: he’s already lost. The cost of engaging legal council and responding to legal claims alone is enough to make any business owner fear for its longevity, much less the cost of preparing for and winning a trial. So, one of the major elements of this bill is preventing any lawsuit that doesn’t have merit from beginning in the first place. It does so by giving the Court discretion to award attorneys fees and costs in favor of the agricultural operation (meaning, the suing party must pay for the farm’s lawyer) if the Court finds the lawsuit was filed in bad faith or for an ulterior purpose. This is like the provisions that we find in family law, which are meant to prevent bickering ex-spouses from bringing each other to court unnecessarily.

The bill also prevents punitive damages awards against an agricultural operation unless that operation has been convicted of a criminal or civil offense in relation to the nuisance. As opposed to compensatory damages, which are the damages that are awarded to compensate for the actual damage caused, punitive damages are awarded to punish bad action or send a message to the rest of the world that society will not stand for this kind of behavior. In the North Carolina case, the hog farm was punished with a range of damages that at one point totaled over \$430 million. While North Carolina’s damages laws ultimately ended up capping that award at \$94 million, it showed us that leaving open the extent of punitive damages is risky.

The bill was offered as a strike-everything amendment to SB1448 on March 15. The amendment passed on party lines out of the House Land and Agriculture Committee, chaired by Rep. Tim Dunn. Now, we’re continuing to tell the story of why good agriculture is worth protecting to ensure that it has the votes to pass off of the House and Senate floor later this month.

Farmers and ranchers shouldn’t have to constantly look over their shoulders and wonder where the next big threat will come from. Strengthening our Right to Farm law is a big step in the right direction in keeping our food supply safe, stable, and strong.

For more information and up-to-date information about the bill, don’t forget to subscribe to our Action Alerts and the weekly While You Were Working newsletter. 📧



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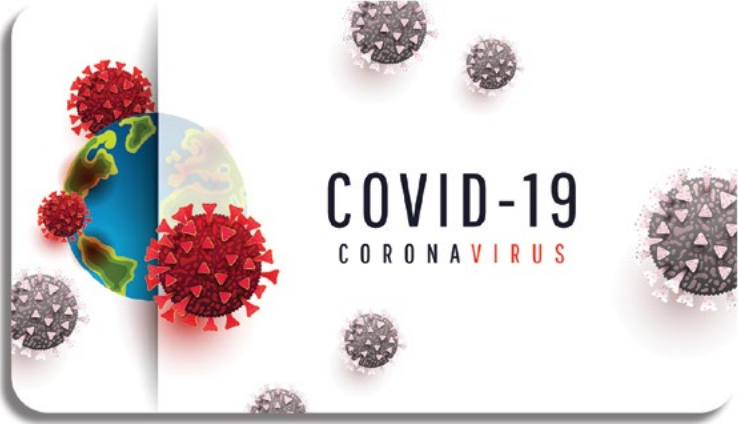
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Latest COVID-19 Relief Package and What it Includes for Agriculture

By Victoria Okula, Government Relations Manager

Since the start of the pandemic, Congress passed several stimulus packages to provide targeted relief to families, small businesses, and local governments. When the Biden Administration took office in January, their top priority was passing a fifth economic stimulus package.



Democrats supported President Biden's proposed \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, while Republicans favored a pared down version. Since Congress wanted to get this out the door quickly, Democratic leadership

decided to pass COVID-19 relief via budget reconciliation. This meant that instead of passing a stand-alone bill with specific provisions and appropriations to address the pandemic, the FY2021 budget included funding earmarked for COVID-19 relief. Because they used budget reconciliation, only 51 affirmative votes were needed in the Senate (rather than 60 needed for the filibuster) and a simple majority in the House.

After several weeks of committee mark up and amendments, the House passed the

latest round of relief on February 27 and the Senate took it up soon after. On March 11, President Biden signed the bill into law. The provisions that aid farmers, ranchers, and rural communities include:

- \$3.6 billion in aid for the food supply chain
- \$5 billion in Farm Loan forgiveness for socially disadvantaged farmers
- \$100 million in overtime fee relief to small meat and poultry processors currently grappling with COVID-19 related backlogs
- \$1 billion in assistance to support for community-based organizations and 1890 Land Grant and other minority serving institutions
- \$800 million for the Food for Peace program, including for purchases of U.S.-grown crops used in international humanitarian aid
- \$37 million to the Commodity Supplemental Food Program

A notable aspect of the bill is something that is not included: an increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Since Congress used the budget reconciliation process to pass this package, the Senate determined that its rules would not allow that policy piece to be included in the bill. That proposal, a priority of the Administration, will have to go through more traditional routes.

The Arizona Farm Bureau supports the provisions in this package that will help farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. Moving forward, we are calling upon Congress to ensure they are holding constructive and bipartisan discussions. 🗳️

Erin Kuiper joins Arizona Farm Bureau as the Newest Member of the Outreach Team

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director



The Outreach team is proud to introduce our newest member, Erin Kuiper. Kuiper joined our team in February as Outreach Manager – Membership Value.

Kuiper has a diverse background from working on her family's dairy farm, coaching girls' basketball and helping families find temporary housing after being displaced by disaster. Her familiarity with agriculture and the Arizona Farm Bureau makes her an ideal fit for this position.

Prior to raising a family, Kuiper was Territory Sales Manager for CRS Temporary Housing, a job that took her all over the country, visiting areas just after disasters struck. She was often working with insurance agents from various companies managing

on-site disaster relief, coordinating housing and hotel accommodations and more. Her previous work with insurance companies and agents will be an ideal fit with her liaison work with Farm Bureau Financial Services' agency force in her new position.

Kuiper is a proud graduate of Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, where she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science. She attended Fort Lewis on a NCAA Division II Scholarship in Women's basketball and was team captain in 2008 and 2009.

She grew up in the West Valley in Buckeye, where she spent many hours working in her family's dairy, the Kerr Family Dairy.

"Growing up on my family's dairy farm instilled a love for Arizona Agriculture that runs deep in my bones," said Kuiper. "The opportunity to work for the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation as an Outreach Manager is truly a dream job for me. I get to work alongside incredible people as we advocate, communicate and educate on behalf of Farm and Ranch families - it just doesn't get much better than this!"

Welcome to the Farm Bureau family, Erin! 🗳️

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Delay, Delay, Delay: Redistricting Process off to a Slow Start

By **Chelsea McGuire**, Government Relations Director

Aside from the election's normal importance, you might remember that one of the reasons we worked so hard to drive our members to the polls in 2020 was the Independent Redistricting Commission, or IRC. The IRC is the bipartisan group of individuals appointed every ten years to draw new legislative and congressional district maps for the state. Made up of two Republicans, two Democrats, and one Independent chairperson, this group attempts to uphold the "one person, one vote" mission by drawing political districts that contain roughly the same number of people per district.

The reason this group meets every 10 years is because the U.S. Census also takes place every ten years. New maps are based on updated census data showing how many people live in our state and where they are located. And while it's always interesting to see how Arizona's demographics have shifted in the past decade, this year brings with it a new layer of excitement: the near certainty that Arizona will gain an additional Congressional district, increasing our number of congressmen from nine to ten.

So how much progress have we made so far in the process of drawing the next decade's maps?

We have a full commission and an Executive Director. Arizona's process for drawing these maps is unique. It was voter-created in 2000 to try and limit the influence of the Legislature (and other political forces) in redrawing the State's political boundaries. Of the five people on the commission, four are appointed by legislative leadership – namely, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and minority leaders in both chambers. The fifth member, who also serves as the chair, must be independent of any political party (i.e., not registered with any party). And by January 21, all five commissioners had been selected to serve. And on Tuesday, March 16, a key staff member was chosen by a 3-2 vote of the commissioners. Brian Schmitt, who was the chief of staff for a Phoenix City Councilman, was selected as the commission's executive director from a field of more than 40 candidates who had applied for the position.

Soon, we will have legal and mapping consultants. Now that the Executive Director has been selected, the next step will be to hire a mapping consultant and a legal consultant. Veterans of this process will remember that these hires caused significant turmoil on the IRC the last time around, so how the pool of candidates for those positions is determined may be key in keeping the peace this time around.

But we still don't have Census Data. But no matter how capable the staff or how ready the commissioners, it won't be possible for the IRC to get much done without numbers. And unfortunately, Census data is still not available. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the U.S. Census Bureau to suspend normal operations for a significant period, so already, the data was delayed. Then-President Trump also issued a directive regarding whether those who are in the United States illegally could be included in the count – a directive which was later rescinded by current-President Biden, which has caused the need for additional time to fix data irregularities. So with all of that, the numbers that should have been available in early 2021 are now delayed until late September.

In addition to leaving us all in suspense as to where our new lines will be drawn, this delay has also thrown a curve ball at the next class of hopeful elected officials – how can you start collecting signatures to get your name on the ballot if you don't even know what district you live in? To try and alleviate that problem, Senator JD Mesnard proposed a bill that would allow candidates to start gathering signatures based on current district boundaries, irrespective of how the maps might change. The measure has broad bipartisan support and is slated for a vote in the House in a matter of days. 🗳️

Can You Escape the Classroom?

By **Katie Aikins**, Arizona Farm Bureau Education Director

Arizona Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom (AZFB AITC) is encouraging students to break out of the classroom! Have you ever experienced one of those popular break-out or escape rooms? Gathered your friends for a fun night out of solving clues while trying to succeed under the pressure of the clock? Well, AZFB AITC has brought this excitement to the classroom.



Students can now use their wits and the clues provided to escape the AZFB AITC Breakout Rooms. Students can choose from an FFA Room, an Arizona Agriculture Room, and an Arizona Five C's Room. Try your luck and see if you can escape at <https://www.azfb.org/Programs/Agriculture-in-the-Classroom/Bitmoji-Classrooms> 🗳️



Follow "Friends of Arizona Farm Bureau" and "Fill Your Plate" on Facebook.

Arizona Makes its Mark at Fusion Reimagined

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

For the last 6 years every other year the leadership programs of the American Farm Bureau Converge for the FUSION Conference. This conference brings Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R), Women's Leadership (WLC) and Promotion and Education Committees together for Leadership Development workshops, motivational speakers and networking. This year because of COVID-19 the conference went virtual. This gave attendees the ability to attend the conference from the comfort of their home or office.

Approximately 30 members from Arizona attended the conference from our YF&R and WLC programs. As American Farm Bureau (AFBF) President Zippy Duval said in his opening remarks, "Fusion Reimagined is designed to bring our members, our Farm Bureau Leaders, Ag Groups and even future leaders to the table so that they can share with each other and grow in their abilities to lead."

This year, Arizona Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers had a contestant in the AFBF Collegiate Discussion Meet competition. Kaylee Faria, a student from the University of Arizona, competed against 24 other students from across the country to make it to the Final Four.

The Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet, conducted using web conferencing again this year, is designed to replicate a committee meeting where discussion and active participation are expected from each collegiate participant. Participants are judged on their ability to exchange ideas and information on an agricultural topic and find answers or solutions related to it.

Discussion Meet questions ranged from "how to fix the struggling farm economy" to "international trade." AZFB's Faria made it all the way to the Final Four.

"The Discussion Meet has been my favorite Farm Bureau experience so far," contestant Kaylee Faria said. "Competing in the Discussion Meet has shown me how important hard work and a strong support system are."

The Final Four phase of the competition was a tough. But, along with three other Collegiate Contestants, Faria took home \$1,500 She did such a fantastic job, representing Arizona very well.

While the Women's Leadership doesn't have contests, there are a lot of beneficial workshops on leadership development and advocating on behalf of agriculture. This year's Fusion also featured a comedy show and virtual networking opportunities. The Women's Leadership was also leading the way with workshops on legislative updates and farm economy outlooks for 2021.

Arizona Farm Bureau was so proud to see our American Farm Bureau Western Regional Representative, Shawn Wood, participating in introductions and conducting the Power Hour breakout on Agribusiness Careers.

"If there's any way to make the best of an experience FUSION truly set the bar," said Shawn Wood, Maricopa County Women's Leadership Chair and AFBF WLC member. "The AFBF Staff and Committees turned another virtual conference from spilled milk to ice cream!"

During the Women's Leadership Celebration Isabela Chism used Play Dough to talk about molding leaders and leadership changes in "a time such as this." Fusion was the place to get inspired to lead during these changing times.

Though we were miles apart, Fusion helped us feel the excitement of watching someone compete in a contest or share a laugh while watching a comedy routine. Our hope is to be together again next year for the AFBF Convention in Atlanta, Georgia.

If you are interested in the Young Farmer and Ranchers or the Women's Leadership program, contact us and get signed up today. 🗳️



Arizona Farm Bureau's Kaylee Faria made it to the Final Four during the FUSION Reimagined 2021 Collegiate Discussion Meet Competition.

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Arizona Producers are Top Tier Responders to USDA Data Collection

American Farm Bureau and the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service Collaborate on Efforts to Improve Reporting and Data Collection.

By **Dave DeWalt**, State Statistician, Arizona Field Office for USDA-NASS

Recently, I held a virtual meeting with Arizona Farm Bureau leadership to talk about the recent collaboration of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) and the report released by the AFBF. The recommendations that AFBF had for NASS to consider revolved primarily around transparency and technology.

Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse pointed out that the U.S. Corn Belt states' issues are not the same as Arizona issues. There is truth to that in that corn and soybean estimates do not appear to directly impact Arizona producers that much, until one looks at the Livestock Forage Program that is handled by the USDA Farm Services Administration. Arizona ranchers that signed up for the program may not realize that the national corn price that NASS estimates monthly and annually is used as part of the payment calculation when excessive drought conditions prevail. These corn prices are set based on information that NASS receives from those entities that buy corn directly from corn producers.

This is one reason why response to NASS data collection efforts is so vital. The statistics may be used in ways unknown to many producers. The more information that is available from producers, the more accurate the statistics will likely be. The samples for each data collection effort are randomly selected and statistically defensible. The larger a producer's impact on the total estimate, the higher probability this larger producer will be sampled.

I'm proud to tell you that Arizona producers respond to our data collection efforts very well when compared to other states. For example, Arizona had the 6th highest response rate from the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Arizona's useable rates are consistently in the top 10 and often in the top 5 nationally in some of our major quarterly acreage and production data collection efforts. Thank you, Arizona Farm Bureau members!

NASS looks forward to more outreach efforts with Farm Bureau members and others in the agricultural community. NASS also looks forward to using current technology to complete our work as efficiently as we can. One of the great ways that Farm Bureau members can help, when sampled, is to complete data collection efforts online. Each producer that is sampled will be mailed a pre-survey letter that will contain a unique 12-digit survey code that can be used to submit information on-line easily and safely. When you have your code, the NASS Online Survey (usda.gov) link takes you right to your online survey.

No one outside of NASS will have access to any individual data, by law. Confidentiality of personal data is paramount in all of our data collection efforts.

I thank every one of you Farm Bureau farmers and ranchers who produce food and fiber for the rest of the world. I also thank each of you for providing information about your farming or ranching entities. Together, NASS and the American Farm Bureau and Arizona Farm Bureau members can provide information that gives NASS the ability to set agricultural estimates in service to U.S. and Arizona agriculture. 📱



Instagram live!

**Remember talk to a farmer/
rancher occurs every
Friday morning at 10:00 am**

Food Company Connecting Farmers to Grocery Stores; Bashaa' Family of Stores First in Arizona To Leverage the Online Sourcing Tool.

Staff Reports

A recent online start up just partnered with Arizona's Bashas' Family of Stores to support their local food sourcing efforts. The partnership is expected to net some solid outcomes. They are also looking for other farmers to partner with on the supplier side.

A mission-based technology company, Forager

started in 2015 with the goal of making locally sourced food more widely available by using a seamless and easy-to-use online platform. Inspired by the strong agricultural heritage of their home state of Maine and the vibrant local food community, Forager digitized the local supply chain to bring the health, environmental, and economic benefits of local food to everyone. Realizing the potential of a national online sourcing venue, they extended their reach beyond Maine.

"We are so excited to be working with Bashas'," said Joe Blunda, Forager CEO. "They are deeply committed to expanding their local sourcing and building new relationships with suppliers throughout Arizona. Our commitment and theirs is to support the growth of local food and help producers grow and thrive."

Their web-based platform reduces the cost and friction of local procurement by managing all day-to-day activities associated with direct, local buying and central-

izes activities between suppliers (farmers and ranchers) and buyers such as communication, browsing product lists and order guides, placing orders, and approving and paying invoices out of a single system. Plus, the intent is to help their online Marketplace help suppliers grow their retail business.

Forager is built around three core capabilities:

1. Simplify and streamline the lifecycle of the local procurement process from order to payment,
2. Create new direct relationships between buyers and suppliers through the Forager Marketplace, and
3. Provide robust analytics and transparent audit trails to better understand local program performance.

Forager is comprised of a passionate group of farmers, chefs, food lovers, and industry professionals who understand the challenges of sourcing local food and are dedicated to the success of their customers. From initial onboarding and training all the way through to providing promotional support and making new connections, they are behind their supplier and buyer partners every step of the way.

"After using Forager for a few weeks, I've seen increased sales with my buyers now that they can see all of my products in one place," explained Sean Hagan, farmer and owner of Left Field Farm.

Forager currently works with 40 independent grocers, restaurants, and institutions and nearly 400 suppliers from farmers to consumer-packaged goods companies in 13 states.

For more information contact Beth Dembia, Customer Success for Forager, beth@goforager.com, or call her at 312.399.7529. 📱



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