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A CONVERSATION ON CLOSING THE MISINFORMATION GAP: SAMANTHA BARNCASTLE

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Samantha Barncastle is the current Executive Director of the Family Farm Alliance, having assumed the role in late 2025 following a transition period starting in August 2025.

Being one of the youngest attorneys ever licensed to practice law in New Mexico, Barncastle practices law in Las Cruces, New Mexico, with over 17 years of experience in complex litigation and policymaking related to water and natural resources at both state and federal levels. Her law focuses on farmers, ranchers, and rural business advocacy, including civil litigation, water law and rights, property/contract issues, and advising on legislative policy.

Samantha has deep agricultural roots: She was raised as a multigenerational farm kid and is married to a farmer who actively operates in the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico. She also serves as General Counsel of entities like the Elephant Butte Irrigation District.

She is passionate about protecting Western irrigated agriculture, emphasizing collaborative approaches, creative partnerships, and practical, balanced water policies to resolve conflicts (such as those involving the Rio Grande or Colorado River). Leaders praise her enthusiasm, energy, legal expertise (especially in prior appropriation doctrine and federal water law), and commitment to on-the-ground engagement with family farms.

While farmers hold high marks in public opinion polls, Barncastle in her practice encounters a clear effort by others on vilification efforts for agriculture, especially out west.

Despite this in the legal arena, farmers and the farming and agriculture sectors frequently rank at or near the top in public favorability and trust surveys in the US and UK. These polls typically measure positive views of the industry/sector or explicit favorability toward farmers as a profession, often highlighting their role in food production, environmental stewardship, and reliability.

For example, the Gallup Polls on Business/Industry Sectors have tracked Americans' views of 25 major business and industry sectors annually since 2001 using a five-point scale (very positive to very negative). The 2025 Gallup Poll (conducted August 1-20, 2025) identified Farming receiving the highest positive rating at 60% (very or somewhat positive), ahead of the computer industry (59%) and restaurants (52%). It was the only sector besides computers and restaurants with a majority-positive view. Republicans rated it notably higher than Democrats

(by 23 points), continuing a long-term pattern. Farming has received majority-positive ratings nearly every year since tracking began. In fact, it marked the first time it was clearly #1 in the poll's 20-year history. This surge occurred during the pandemic, when the sector was seen as providing essential services alongside healthcare and pharmaceuticals. These results are widely reported by farm organizations as evidence of strong public appreciation for farmers.

Additionally, A 2020 national poll by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) found that 88% of U.S. adults trusted farmers, a 4-point increase from earlier that year. Respondents also expressed positive views of farmers' sustainability practices, attributing high trust to farmers' role in the food supply during the pandemic.

Some of this positive polling on the public's attitude is a perception of the bucolic small farm on rolling hills. The image of the typical western farmer and rancher is truly unknown to the average consumer.

In the meantime, Barncastle explains what's really going on at the ground level especially in the legal arena and why the Family Farm Alliance has such an important role on behalf of farm and ranch families in the west.

Arizona Agriculture: As someone with deep roots in New Mexico agriculture and now leading the Family Farm Alliance, how would you define the "vilification" of farmers today, particularly in the context of Western family farms and ranches?



Samantha Barncastle

Barncastle: Vilification, in this context, isn't always loud or obvious — it's often subtle, but persistent. It shows up in narratives that paint farmers and ranchers as careless with resources, resistant to change, or somehow at odds with the land they depend on. For Western family farms, that couldn't be further from the truth. These are multigenerational operations built on stewardship—where water, soil, and community are treated as assets to be protected, not exploited.

The Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, and allied industries in the Western states. We are committed to the fundamental proposition that Western irrigated agriculture must be preserved and protected for a host of economic, sociological, environmental and national security reasons — many of which are often overlooked in the context of other national policy decisions. The American food consumer nationwide has access to fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and beef SEE CLOSING THE MISINFORMATION GAP PAGE 5

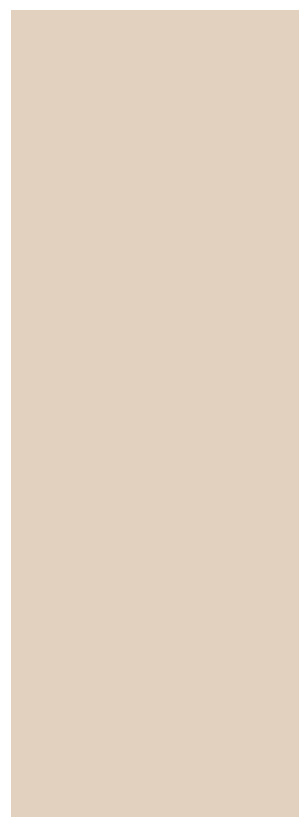
BEARING DOWN ON ARIZONA'S AGRICULTURAL FUTURE

By Suresh Garimella, University of Arizona President

At the University of Arizona, we have a distinctive rallying cry: "Bear Down." More than a stadium chant, it is a mindset that has guided generations of researchers and problem-solvers to confront challenges and anticipate what comes next. It also reflects our strategic imperatives: success for every student, research that shapes the future, and engagement with our communities to create opportunity.

We bring that Bear Down mindset to helping secure Arizona's water and agricultural futures.

As Colorado River basin states and federal partners work toward the next phase of river management, Arizona producers find themselves at the center of conversations about water efficiency, sustainability, and the future



Suresh Garimella

of food and agricultural production in the west. With current operating guidelines set to expire this year, the choices we make will determine how water supports farms, industries, communities, and ecosystems across the basin.

Land-grant universities play a unique role in moments like these as reflected by the U of A's newest strategic research initiative: Arid Lands Agriculture and Water. Our focus is to further advance Arizona's standing as a global leader in sustainable arid-lands agriculture.

This is not mere aspiration but a deliberate, outcomes-driven effort to attract investment, build partnerships, and align research with the real needs of Arizona's producers.

The challenges we face are undeniable. Chronic water scarcity, high temperatures, and increasingly variable rainfall are straining our rangelands and agricultural systems.

But Arizona has faced defining moments before.

In the early 20th century, newcomers to the desert, working alongside University of Arizona scientists, set out to determine what this land could sustain. Our experimental farms in Yuma and Phoenix became proving grounds for commodity crops like cotton, sorghum, citrus, and date palms, helping define Arizona's agricultural identity.

Cattle ranching, one of Arizona's SEE ARIZONA'S AGRICULTURAL FUTURE PAGE 2



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JOANNA ALLHANDS JOINS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

By Staff Report



We're excited to announce that former Arizona Republic columnist, Joanna Allhands, joined the Strategic Communications team.

Allhands is a seasoned communicator with deep expertise in explaining complex water, land use, and labor policies that directly impact Arizona agriculture. In her new role, she will help us tell our story clearly and effectively to policymakers, members, and the public. Joanna recently served as managing editor at Arizona State University's Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory, where she wrote about innovative efforts to transform water, energy, heat, and food production systems.

She spent more than two decades at The Arizona Republic, including 21 years as a key member of

the newspaper's editorial board. There, she held various writing and editing roles, managed the online opinions section, and authored widely read opinion columns on Arizona water policy through 2025. Joanna holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Indiana University.

Allhands was Arizona Farm Bureau's 2025 Communicator of the Year.

A Hoosier by birth, she has proudly called Arizona home since 2004. Outside

of work, Joanna is an avid cook, amateur mixologist, and—most importantly—a dedicated mom. She lives in the East Valley with her husband and son.

"For longer than I can remember, I've hoped for and periodically asked for a veteran writer that can dig in-depth into our complex policy issues, reach out to key stakeholders for interviews, attend critical meetings and do the research to reveal with clarity what's happening and what we must prepare for in agriculture and now that day has come," said Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications Julie Murphree. "It's been worth the wait considering who we now have in Allhands. My plan is for her to now write all lead features for Arizona Agriculture, provide "white papers" for Government Relations and our leadership where and when needed, and help with earned media efforts on behalf of our counties. It's a bright day for our marketing and communications department in Arizona Farm Bureau."

Please join Arizona Farm Bureau in giving Allhands a warm welcome! She brings tremendous knowledge, writing talent, and passion for Arizona agriculture that will be a real asset to our organization. She joins what we are now calling, "The J Squad," Julie, Joel and Joanna. 📸



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ARIZONA'S AGRICULTURAL FUTURE

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earliest industries, faced hard lessons when severe drought in the 1890s ravaged more than half the region's herds in what became known as the "cattle crash," exposing the limits of practices imported from wetter climates. The University responded, partnering with ranchers and the U.S. Forest Service to establish the Santa Rita Experimental Range in 1902. The result was the foundation for rotational grazing, regenerative agriculture, and rangeland stewardship principles that sustain Arizona landscapes today.

That same model of science centered on supporting our region continues to drive innovation today.

At the Maricopa Agricultural Center, researchers are developing drought-resilient crops using one of the world's largest outdoor phenotyping platforms and AI-driven analytics. At the Yuma Agricultural Center and in partnership with the U of A's Yuma Center of Excellence in Desert Agriculture, ag-tech is front and center as a new broadband network enables advances in data-enabled decision making and advanced in-field technologies. At the Santa Rita Experimental Range, long-term monitoring informs wildfire management and ecological restoration. Across the state, virtual fencing, soil health interventions, integrated pest management strategies, and controlled environment experiments are bridging science and practice.

Collaboration accelerates this progress. A recent \$3 million grant from the Arizona Board of Regents launched the Arizona Hub for Agricultural Innovation, uniting the state's three universities with industry partners to accelerate practical solutions in soil health, water conservation, and crop resilience.

This is an important investment, and we can do more. Nearly 40% of the world lives in arid or semi-arid climates, and these regions are home to more than 2 billion people, including some of the planet's fastest growing populations. Arizona research and innovations – efficient irrigation, drought-resistant crops, soil health strategies, and natural resource management principles – can be scaled and expanded globally to address food security and environmental challenges worldwide.

World-class research is not enough. To truly lead, Arizona must become a hub for the creation, commercialization, and export of next-generation agricultural technologies. This means attracting investment in ag-tech startups and creating incubators where ideas can be rapidly prototyped and brought to market.

It also means preparing our graduates to lead in this evolving economy, ensuring success for every student by connecting education, research, and workforce opportunity.

This is where our land-grant mission matters most.

Arizona is positioned to lead the future of arid-land agriculture, not simply by managing scarcity, but by creating a model for sustainable growth, global impact, and climate resilience. As we develop this initiative, we will engage communities and partners across Arizona to help bring this vision to life. Now is a moment to Bear Down. With targeted investment, strategic partnerships, and a relentless focus on innovation, Arizona will be the epicenter for technologies that will secure the future of our dryland environments. 📸

Editor's Note: Suresh Garimella serves as the 23rd president of the University of Arizona and University Distinguished Professor in the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

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CONTINUED UPDATES ON FARM BILL 2.0

By Olivia Carroll, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Intern

On March 5th, 2026, the House Committee on Agriculture, chaired by Pennsylvania Representative Glenn Thompson, passed the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. Also known as the Farm Bill 2.0, this act serves as a multiyear law that governs the mandatory and discretionary spending for the continuation of agricultural programs. Since 1933, the Farm Bill has been renewed every 5 years and covers commodities, conservation, nutrition, trade, rural development, and more.

As of the writing of this article, the bill has not yet received a full House floor vote. House leadership has indicated it could be considered in late April 2026. The Senate Agriculture Committee (chaired by John Boozman, R-AR) has signaled plans to introduce and mark up its own version "within weeks" rather than simply adopting the House text. Senate action is expected to follow House progress. If passed by both chambers, differences would need to be reconciled in a conference committee before final passage and presidential signature.

The first Farm Bill was introduced in 1933 as a part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, and [created programs to create parity \(or fair exchange value\) price support for farmers during the Great Depression](#). The soil conservation, food assistance programs, rural development, resource conservation, global climate change prevention, and forestry titles of the Farm Bill have been added over the past 80 years. The three original goals of the Farm Bill were to keep food prices fair for farmers and consumers, ensure an adequate food supply in our nation, and sustain our country's natural resources; and the recent Farm Bills (Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and the advancing Farm Bill 2.0), continue to encapsulate these objectives with a strengthened focus on sustainable farming practices and increased investment in agricultural development. The legislation in the Farm Bill affects everyone, whether you are a conservationist, farmer, grocery shopper, or rely on nutrition services.

Changes addressed by the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Reconciliation Act (also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. H.R.1) have driven the legislation presented in the Farm Bill 2.0. Reconciliations address provisions from the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) that directly affect federal spending or revenue, notably Title IV, which covers nutrition and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The FY2025 Budget Reconciliation Act represents a significant restructuring of the nutrition assistance program, by raising work and age requirements, requiring state cost-sharing, utility allowance restrictions, and removing an estimated \$186 billion of federal dollars from the program over 10 years to fund increases to commodity support programs. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, [784,609 Arizonans received SNAP benefits in the fiscal year 2022, and an average of 10.2% of Arizona households were food insecure between 2020-2022](#).

According to the Arizona Republic and [cited data from Arizona Department of Economic Security](#), Arizona has seen an approximately 47% decline in food stamp participation, the largest of any state since the reconciliations were authorized.

Provisions not included in the reconciliation process, however, have been au-

thorized to continue through fiscal year 2031 in the Farm Bill 2.0, and include:

Title I: Commodities

- Increased reference prices for Price Loss Coverage and Agriculture Risk Coverage to provide a higher safety net for major commodities
- Upwards of 30 million additional base acres are now eligible for enrollment in Price Loss Coverage and Agricultural Risk Coverage programs
- A "Specialty Crop Emergency Assistance Framework" established to create more predictable, sales-based disaster and market disruption aid for fruit, vegetable, and tree nut producers

Title II: Conservation

- Conservation Innovation Grants restored
- Federal (USDA) Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program will not incorporate precision agriculture, with cost share up to 90% for precision implementation

Title III: Trade & Title VII: Research

- Specialty crop advisory committee created to guide research priorities
- International agricultural education fellowship program extended
- Market Access Program and Food for Peace reauthorized
- McGovern-Dole International Food for Education program continued

Title V: Credit & Farm Loans

- Direct farm ownership loan cap increased from \$600,000 to \$850,000 maximum
- Direct operating loan cap increased from \$400,000 to \$750,000 maximum
- Guaranteed loan cap increased from \$1.75 million to \$3-3.5 million

Title VI: Rural Development

- Rural water and wastewater technical assistance programs updated
- Rural economic development loan and grant programs extended
- Rural microentrepreneur assistance restored

Title VIII: Forestry

- Expanding active management for the Forest Service
- Increasing timber harvests through extended contracts

Title X: Horticulture

- Increased funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (\$85 million provided in 2025, \$100 mil-


SEE UPDATES ON FARM BILL 2.0 PAGE 7



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CLOSING THE MISINFORMATION GAP *continued from Page 1*

throughout the year largely because of Western irrigated agriculture and the projects that provide water to these farmers and ranchers.

At the Family Farm Alliance, my role as Executive Director is to represent producers who are managing some of the most constrained water supplies in the country and doing so with precision and accountability. The frustration comes when that reality is overlooked in favor of simplified storylines. Farmers aren't the problem — they're the reason we still have working landscapes, open space, and a domestic food supply that this country depends on.

Arizona Agriculture: In your experience as a water and natural resources attorney, what are the most common misconceptions or stereotypes about American farmers that contribute to their negative portrayal in media and public discourse?

Barncastle: I come to this work as a water and natural resources attorney, the wife of a farmer, and someone raised in agriculture, having represented farmers, ranchers, and rural communities across New Mexico. My perspective comes from both the kitchen table and the conference room table. If there's one thing my experience has made clear, it's that producers are quietly sophisticated problem-solvers, navigating complex legal, water, and operational challenges every day—often without fanfare, and sometimes almost as if they'd rather have people not realize just how much they're managing. That makes it easy for people to underestimate what we do to put food on the table while caring for the land and resources.

Another of the most persistent misconceptions is that farmers are either stuck in the past or unwilling to adapt. In reality agriculture, especially in the West, is one of the most innovative sectors out there. Growers are constantly refining irrigation efficiency, adopting new technologies, and making hard decisions to stretch limited resources further. There's a perception that innovation happens somewhere outside of agriculture, but the reality is, a lot of it is happening on the farm. Today's producers are working hand-in-hand with universities, researchers, and ag-tech startups to deploy cutting-edge tools that stretch water supplies and reduce environmental impacts. In many ways, they're not catching up, they're setting the pace.

Another stereotype is that farming and conservation are opposing forces. For most producers I know, conservation isn't a buzzword, it's a necessity. Producers don't need to be told to conserve—they already are. Conservation is built into the day-to-day reality of farming, where every drop of water, every input, and every acre matters. Where the conversation can go sideways is when solutions are imposed that sound good on paper but don't yet work in practice—things like equipment or systems that simply aren't viable at scale today. Farmers want to keep improving, and they are, but real progress comes from workable, field-tested approaches—not one-size-fits-all ideas about what conservation is supposed to look like. You don't stay in agriculture long if you degrade your own land or run your water supply dry. The people doing this work have every incentive to get it right, because their livelihoods—and their kids' futures—depend on it, but to force outcomes that do not fit producer needs is not the way to go about conservation.

Arizona Agriculture: How do regulatory challenges, such as environmental litigation or water policy debates, play into the broader narrative that vilifies farm-

ers as obstacles to conservation efforts?

Barncastle: Regulatory debates can sometimes reinforce a false storyline that farmers are standing in the way of environmental progress. What often gets lost is that farmers are already operating within highly regulated systems, particularly when it comes to water in the West. They're not outside the framework—they're working within it every day to grow your food. And they're working with a tight budget, so extra regulatory costs mean higher cost of food. At the end of the day, it is those day-to-day realities that farmers are working through, so when regulations do not reflect farming realities and are developed without farmer input, farmers become at odds with regulations, which then perpetuates the harmful narratives.

The real issue is that policy discussions don't always reflect on-the-ground realities. What doesn't help are top-down ideas that look good in theory but don't pencil out in the field. When that happens, it can create tension and misunderstanding. Again, farmers aren't opposed to conservation—they're asking for solutions that are workable, durable, and grounded in how water systems and food production actually function.



Arizona Agriculture: From the perspective of family farmers in the West, how has the rise of urban-rural divides and shifting public opinions on issues like climate change amplified feelings of vilification?

Barncastle: There is, no doubt, a disconnect between the people producing food and the vast majority of people consuming it. As communities become more removed from agriculture, it's easier for misunderstandings to take hold. Conversations about land use, water, or climate can become abstract, rather than rooted in the practical realities farmers and ranchers deal with every day. For Western producers, that divide can feel especially sharp. Decisions made far from the farm can have immediate, real-world consequences. When those decisions are shaped without input from the people closest to the land, it can reinforce the sense that agriculture is being judged, rather than understood.

There's also a narrative out there that farmers are somehow "climate deniers," and while that may be an easy headline statement, that couldn't be more disconnected from reality. No one is more attuned to changing conditions than the people whose entire operation depends on weather, water, and timing. Farmers rely on science every single day—weather data, hydrology, soil science, crop modeling—because their livelihoods depend on it. The difference is, they don't have the luxury of debating climate in the abstract. They're planning for today, next week, next season, and decades down the line, all at once.

Where things are breaking down is capacity — and when progress doesn't happen fast enough, it's mischaracterized as denial. The large-scale infrastructure and system investments needed to adapt to long-term changes, especially in the West's water systems, are incredibly expensive, and current funding mechanisms aren't keeping up. When those systems strain or fail, it can look like willful inaction from the outside. It's not. It's a lack of resources. Farmers cannot absorb one more massive cost on their own, especially not one as big as reworking the backbone of our water supply. This is much larger than just the agriculture sector—it's about our food security and maintaining our rural communities. If people want a stable, domestic food supply, then the investment in the systems that support it must be shared, rather than forced onto one sector alone. Demonizing the people producing our food in the name of climate progress doesn't move us forward, it just makes the problem harder to solve.

Arizona Agriculture: What are the tangible effects of this vilification on family farmers—such as mental health strains, economic pressures, or barriers to attracting the next generation to agriculture?

Barncastle: The impacts are real. Beyond the economic pressures that already exist in agriculture, there's an added weight when your way of life is consistently questioned or misunderstood. That can take a toll—mentally, emotionally, and across entire communities.

To me, the most important effect is on the future of agriculture. When the next generation sees the challenges and the unfair criticism, it can make them think twice about coming back to the farm or starting a new farm of their own. That's a concern for rural communities, maintenance of green space, and more. But most importantly, it should be a major concern for anyone who cares about where their food comes from and whether we'll continue to produce it here at home.


Arizona Agriculture: Drawing from your work with irrigation districts and allied industries, how does negative public perception hinder farmers' ability to secure stable water supplies or modernize infrastructure?

Barncastle: Public perception matters, especially when it comes to large-scale investments in water infrastructure. If agriculture is viewed as inefficient or expendable, it becomes harder to build support for the projects that keep these systems functioning—whether that's storage, conveyance, or modernization. The reality is, these systems are aging, they're designed for a time and water supply that no longer reflects today's realities, and they're very expensive to maintain and improve. Most importantly, they do not just support farmers, irrigation water systems support whole communities and our national food supply.

I built my career litigating water and natural resource issues on behalf of farmers, ranchers, and irrigation districts, and I saw firsthand how necessary that work can be—but also how limited it is. You can win a case and still lose ground as an industry. Litigation is reactive by nature, and it doesn't do much to shift the public understanding or create proactive, lasting solutions.

That's why I made the transition. At the Family Farm Alliance, the focus is on changing the conversation—helping people understand what producers actually do, why it matters, and what it will take to sustain it. We don't need more courtroom battles over a shrinking pie—we need to come together and figure out how to strengthen the system itself. Water and food security aren't going to be solved by court orders. They're going to be solved by people willing to sit down, work together, and invest

SEE CLOSING THE MISINFORMATION GAP PAGE 6

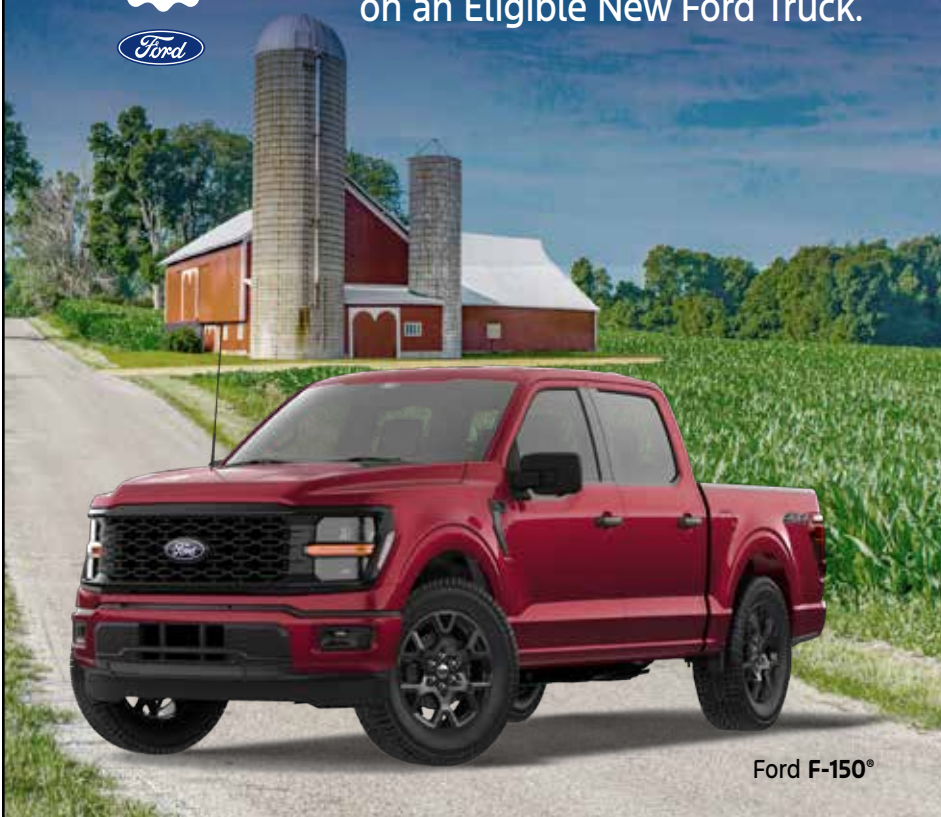


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in a future that works for everyone.

At the Alliance, we work closely with farmers, ranchers, and irrigation districts that are trying to do exactly that—improve efficiency and stretch every drop further. But those efforts require partnership and trust. When the narrative is off, it can slow down progress on solutions that benefit not just agriculture, but entire regions.

Arizona Agriculture: How can farmers themselves—through grassroots advocacy or partnerships with conservation groups—effectively counter misconceptions and build public support for sustainable agricultural practices?

Barncastle: One of the most powerful things farmers can do is simply tell their story. People trust what they can see and understand, and agriculture has a strong story to tell—about stewardship, resilience, and innovation. Opening that window, whether through local engagement, partnerships, or even just conversations, makes a difference. And I am not just talking about transparency; I'm talking about openness. Farmers also need to be open to the idea of change and progress – what they have always done may have worked for a time but may also need to be updated. Farmers should find a way to be less sensitive with feedback from others, while also maintaining a strong course built on stewardship, science, and, of course, our hard work.

Farmers are sometimes seen as less adaptive because they fear working with others, and rightly so. Sometimes work with others leads to further government regulation, red tape, and hand-tying efforts that affect our ability to grow food. However, there's also real opportunity in working alongside conservation groups where goals align. In many cases, farmers and conservationists want the same outcomes—healthy land, reliable water, and sustainable systems. Building on that shared ground helps move the conversation forward, and it is also on us to meet others halfway in that conversation. But again, number one is telling the story we live!

Arizona Agriculture: As the new Executive Director, what innovative approaches do you plan to implement at the Family Farm Alliance to address the challenges farmers face, such as through education, policy reform, or coalition-building?

Barncastle: My focus is on strengthening connections—between producers, policymakers, and the broader public. That starts with making sure the voice of Western irrigators is clearly understood in policy discussions, but it also means investing in education and outreach so people better understand how these systems work. We're also looking at ways to build broader coalitions around water infrastructure and agricultural resilience. The challenges we're facing are not isolated, and the solutions won't be either. Bringing the right partners to the table is key to making lasting progress.

In a perfect world, agriculture isn't reacting to these conversations—we're helping lead them. Farmers and ranchers should be central voices in any discussion about land and water stewardship, not sidelined by theoretical concepts that don't always translate on the ground. That means not just having a seat at the table but helping lead the conversation—bringing people together and setting a tone of practicality and shared purpose, much like farmers have always done in putting food on our tables and supporting rural communities. My goal is for our producers to lead with confidence, but also to listen, to engage in the hard conversations, and to be strong partners—and I expect and will demand the same from everyone else involved. We need to move beyond one-size-fits-all solutions or zero-sum outcomes and toward approaches that are tailored, flexible, and built to evolve over time without leaving anyone behind. That may sound ambitious, but when people are willing to work together in good faith, it's absolutely achievable.

Arizona Agriculture: What practical steps can organizations like the Family Farm Alliance and Arizona Farm Bureau take to reframe the narrative around American farmers, emphasizing their role as stewards of the land and contributors to food security?

Barncastle: It starts with consistency—showing up, telling the truth about what agriculture is and isn't, and backing that up with real-world examples. Highlighting the role farmers play as stewards of the land and water is critical, but so is connecting that work to something everyone understands: food security. Organizations like the Family Farm Alliance and the Farm Bureau can also help bridge the gap by translating complex

issues—like water management—into something more accessible and usable to our members so they can continue the education push at the grassroots level. When people understand the system, they're more likely to value the people who keep it running.

Arizona Agriculture: Looking ahead, what gives you hope that the challenges American farmers face can be overcome, and what key message would you want to share with policymakers or the public to foster greater understanding?

Barncastle: What gives me hope is the resilience I see every day in farming communities. These are people who adapt, who solve problems, and who keep going—even when the margins are tight and the challenges are real. That kind of persistence matters.

The message I'd share is simple: if you care about food, you should care about farmers. That also means working hard not to judge what you don't understand. Supporting agriculture isn't about looking backward, it's about making sure we have a stable, secure water and food supply moving forward. That's something we all have a stake in.

Arizona Agriculture: Speak to our Arizona Farm Bureau farmers and ranchers. What counsel would you give them when it comes to engaging with the public and others that are misinformed about agriculture?

Barncastle: Stay engaged, even when it's frustrating! Your voice carries more weight than you think, especially when it comes from lived experience. People want to hear from those who are actually doing the work, not just talking about it.

Highlight your hard work, your land stewardship, and your on-farm technological advances, because many people simply do not know much about what we do or how we do it. And don't underestimate the value of relationships. Whether it's with your neighbors, local leaders, or even critics—those connections matter. The more people understand what you do and why you do it, the stronger the foundation will be for the future of agriculture. 🚜

Editor's Note: This is the last "conversation" article we'll run as a lead feature as we pivot to a new editorial structure on our front page. Watch for the August issue for the new article lead!

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UPDATES ON FARM BILL 2.0 *continued from Page 4*

lion provided in 2026)

- Increased budget of the Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention program from \$75 million to \$90 million
 - % million provided to modernize systems for tracking organic imports
 - Cost-share assistance for organic certification extended through 2031
- Changes enacted by the Farm Bill 2.0 will strengthen Arizona's specialty

crop, cotton, and livestock industries, as well as provide support for drought resilience throughout the state (EQIP funding identified in Title II: Conservation). The bill aims to support farmers through higher price guarantees for commodities, streamlined insurance, and clearer payment pathways, promoting growth and sustainability within agriculture. 📄

Editor's Note: A PDF with the entirety of the bill can be found at the House Agriculture Committee [website](#).

8 REASONS TO ATTEND THIS YEAR'S SUMMER AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE

By Staff Reports

The **Summer Agricultural Conference** is around the corner and will be held once again in Flagstaff! Sponsored by Arizona Farm Bureau's Women's Leadership Committee, this year's leadership conference will be held at Little America, July 16 and 17. This year's theme Seeding, Feeding and Leading, sets the stage for a full schedule.

Why should you attend the conference this year? We've got 8 reasons for you to join us.

1. **Location, location & ...discount:** Little America in Flagstaff, Arizona, is situated on 500 acres of Ponderosa pine forest just off Interstate 40, at an elevation of approximately 7,000 feet in the Coconino National Forest. You'll be cool in the middle of the summer!
2. **Activities for everyone in the Family:** A dedicated playground with traditional equipment for younger kids, plus cornhole, ladder ball, horseshoes, and sand volleyball for family fun, with complimentary equipment available at the front desk. Plus, you'll find Onsite Trails and Disc Golf: Miles of scenic trails for hiking amidst wildflowers and beautiful pines, plus a disc golf course for friendly family competitions.
3. **Free from Event Conflicts:** The July dates for this conference don't conflict with FFA or any other agriculture organizations' conference dates.
4. **Networking:** There is plenty of time to relax and network with your fellow Aggies. Plus, you can make new friends.
5. **Meet the Influencer: Keynote - Sierra Jepsen Anthony:** is a meat scientist, lead butcher, and founder of Butcher Solutions LLC—a traveling butcher school that's injecting fresh energy and skills into America's struggling butchery and meat processing sector. From her base in Three Forks, Montana (with family ties to Dusty Rose Farm in Ohio), she packs up her knives and hits the road to deliver in-house training at meat lockers, shops, and ranches across states like Montana, Wyoming, Texas, and beyond. Her focus: hands-on butchery techniques, meat science education, and bridging the gap between producers and consumers—while addressing a real labor and knowledge shortage in the industry. A University of Idaho grad with a master's in meat science; Sierra launched Butcher Solutions in late 2022 after spotting the need for better-trained workers. In just a couple of years, she's trained dozens of butchers on-site (saving shops travel time), run cutting demos for community groups, consulted for industry players, and even competed in events like the Young Butcher challenge. Her tagline? "Building better butchers."

6. **Tailgate Conversations.** Join us at the tailgate for a friendly conversation and learn from a diverse panel on difficult topics. Panelists share their insights, experiences, challenges, and successes on topics that always seem to hit home.

7. **Anyone's Welcome.** The educational conference encourages young and old, male and female and all segments of agriculture.

8. **It's Inspirational and Encouraging:** One past conference attendee said, "This meeting is a breath of fresh air to my busy schedule. Rubbing shoulders with amazing leaders, listening and learning from amazing speakers and relaxing help motivate and inspire me in the best ways. This conference helps me be the agriculture leader this world needs!"



To register for the conference, go to www.azfb.org, then click on the events section. Register by March 20, and your conference registration is only \$100. After May 20, conference registration is \$150. If you need more information, contact Hannah DalMolin at hannahdalmolin@azfb.org. Reserve your hotel by June 17 to receive the special group rate. 📄

Special Note: Enjoy a Pre-conference event at the famous Bearizona.

NATIONWIDE SURVEY REVEALS HIGH COST OF FERTILIZER

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

An overwhelming majority of America's farmers who responded to a nationwide survey say they cannot afford to purchase enough fertilizer to get them through the year. The percentage who pre-purchased fertilizer varies significantly by region.

Conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) April 3-11, the survey shows 70% of respondents say fertilizer is so expensive that they will not be able to buy all the fertilizer they need.

More than 5,700 farmers, both Farm Bureau members and non-members, from every state and Puerto Rico took the survey. Approximately 17 farmers from Arizona took the survey as well. Farm Bureau economists analyzed the results in an mid-April Market Intel.

The analysis reveals that farmers in the western U.S. are facing particularly severe challenges, with 66% saying they can't afford all the fertilizer they need this year. This figure is significantly higher than the 48% reported in the Midwest, though slightly below the 69% in the Northeast and nearly 80% in the South.

"The survey demonstrates that here in Arizona and beyond the borders of our state, the price of skyrocketing inputs, as well as many other pressures facing farmers in the U.S., is untenable" said Arizona Farm Bureau President and Yuma farmer John Boelts. "This situation highlights what America's agriculture producers know that we can produce food for our nation, but we need to lower the cost of regulation and lower the cost of inputs to be able to stay in business to do so. This comes on the heels of 30 years of labor costs going up and up, and Congress limiting labor supplies for America's farmers, and inflation that has hit farmers and ranchers in many areas. For example, equipment costs are over 300% compared to two decades ago. We certainly appreciate the fertilizer retailers and distributors who have helped hold the line on prices, but they will need to refill their supplies soon as well."

Pre-booking rates in the West remain low, with only 31% of Western farmers securing fertilizer purchases in advance of planting season. This is far below the 67% in the Midwest and closer to the struggling rates seen in the South (19%) and Northeast (30%). Even with higher pre-booking in other areas, many producers across the country, including in the West, enter the season short on supplies.

The conflict in the Middle East sent fertilizer and fuel prices soaring. The recent closure of the Strait of Hormuz is keeping critical fertilizer supplies and crude oil from reaching global markets, putting a squeeze on supplies around the world.

As of the writing of this article, President Trump announced the Strait of Hormuz is open after a counter blockade by the United States was put in effect in April. While it's hoped that fertilizer prices will drop as oil prices on the international market are dropping, it continues to be a concern for farmers.

Added Boelts, "This situation also highlights that we have not been doing enough to produce affordable fertilizer right here in the U.S. for our farmers."

"Spring planting decisions depend heavily on access to fertilizer and diesel fuel, both of which have been impacted by geopolitical risks that have disrupted global markets," the Market Intel states. "Since the escalation of tensions in the Middle East, nitrogen fertilizer prices have risen more than 30%, while combined

fuel and fertilizer costs have increased roughly 20% to 40%. Urea prices have increased by 47% since the end of February, marking the largest month-to-month percentage increase in the price of urea. These increases are occurring when many producers were already facing tight margins for many consecutive years."

Many of the farmers surveyed said they will forego applying fertilizer this spring in hopes that prices will return to an affordable level later in the growing season.

"The biggest impact has been on urea fertilizer, which is a granular and regularly used in grain crops and for Bermuda grass," explained Pinal County Farm Bureau member and farmer Paco Ollerton. "Currently, that's not that big of a concern to me, but if it gets higher, I think I'll go back to watching it more closely before applying it. Fuel is my biggest concern right now since it's around \$5.79 a gallon for diesel at the pump. It's not much cheaper at the farm gate."

Ollerton added, "All input costs have been an issue for the last 2 to 5 years, to be honest. I don't know how much more streamlined we can get to save on fuel and fertilizer. Farmers in the West have always been conservative and careful with our costs for quite some time."

Arizona farmer respondents said input costs were too high and would either forgo fertilizer purchases or reduce acres planted.

AFBF President Zippy Duvall said, "The skyrocketing cost of fuel and fertilizer is creating more economic hardships for farmers who have already endured years of losses. Without the necessary fertilizers, we'll face lower yields, and some farmers will reduce acres altogether, which will impact food and feed supplies. It's too early to know how this will affect food availability and prices in the long run, but it's a warning light that we've shared with leaders in Washington. We look forward to working with them to find solutions so farmers can continue to feed families across America."

According to the survey, 94% of respondents reported their financial situation has worsened or remained the same since last year, while only 6% reported improvement.

Get more survey results and read the full Market Intel [here](#). 📄

Editor's Note: The Strait of Hormuz was declared open on April 17. American and Arizona Farm Bureau are closely tracking global impacts and hoping fertilizer prices will drop.

Percentage of Farmers Unable to Afford All Needed Fertilizer



JUNE MORRISON: FARM LEGACY GUARDIAN

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications



With the recent passing of June (Neely) Morrison, Gilbert and Arizona agriculture have lost one of their most gracious, precious and enduring hearts.

Her granddaughter Ellen Morrison Kennedy summed up her grandmother with heartfelt remembrances. "I will miss her dearly. Her smile. Her giggle. Her stories. Her ability to play any hymn in the hymnal without sheet music. Her date pinwheel cookies. Her steadfastness. Her love of red clothing. And nail polish. Her reassuring pats. Her joy in every visit and call.

Her care for my father. She never stopped being his mother."

Born Eunice Inez Neely in 1924, June arrived in Gilbert as an infant and grew up on the family's pioneer farm along Elliot Road. She carried the quiet strength of the land in her bones — the daughter of a hardworking Neely family that raised cotton, corn, alfalfa, and dairy cattle on thousands of acres.

In 1944, she married Marvin Morrison, uniting two deep-rooted farming families in a partnership of love, labor, and vision that would shape the community for generations. Together, June and Marvin built a life of focused dedication: raising three sons, tending the fields, and generously giving back.

They supported education, youth programs like 4-H, hospital boards, and Ar-

izona State University — helping establish the Morrison School of Agribusiness and Resource Management and the Morrison Institute for Public Policy. Their family's land, once rich with crops, thoughtfully transitioned into Morrison Ranch, a community designed to honor Gilbert's agricultural heritage while welcoming new neighbors.

June lived with remarkable vitality and grace. Even well into her nineties and beyond her 102nd birthday — joyfully celebrated by family, friends, and the town she loved — she remained a storyteller, a matriarch, and a gentle presence rooted in the original Neely farmhouse.

She embodied resilience, kindness, and a deep sense of place. To those who knew her, June was more than a pioneer's daughter or a farmer's wife. She was the warm heart of a family legacy, the steady hand that helped turn hard work into lasting community, and a shining example of a life lived with humility, generosity, and enduring love for the land and its people. Her spirit will continue to bloom in the fields she once helped cultivate, in the stories her family still tells, and in the caring community she helped nurture.

Always rooted in service, June was recognized with the Maricopa County Farm Bureau's Legacy Award. Her husband, Marvin, served as Arizona Farm Bureau's President from 1958 to 1963.

Rest gently, dear June. The Arizona sun will always shine a little brighter because you walked these rows. 🌻

AFBF NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2027 AG INNOVATION CHALLENGE

By Staff Reports

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), in partnership with Farm Credit, is now accepting online applications for the 2027 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. The deadline to apply is June 5.

Now in its 13th year, this national business competition highlights U.S. startup companies that are creating innovative solutions to challenges facing America's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

The overall winner will receive \$100,000 in startup funds, the runner-up will be awarded \$25,000, and the two additional businesses that advance to the final four will each receive \$10,000.

"Encouraging innovation is essential to keeping American agriculture strong," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "If you're building a business that can help farmers and rural communities thrive, don't wait—apply today."

Across the competition, Farm Bureau will award a total of \$145,000 in startup funds. After applications close on June 5, 10 semi-finalist teams will be selected and announced on September 2. Those teams will then deliver virtual pitches to compete for a spot in the final four.

The final four teams will each receive \$10,000 and advance to a live pitch competition in front of Farm Bureau members, investors, and industry leaders at the AFBF Convention in January 2027 in Charlotte, North Carolina. There, they will compete for:

- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Winner: \$90,000 additional (for a total of \$100,000)
- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Runner-up: \$15,000 additional (for a total of \$25,000)

Farm Bureau is proud to support these innovative businesses in partnership with sponsors Farm Credit, Bayer, John Deere, Farm Bureau Bank, Farm Bureau Financial Services, ClearPath, and T-Mobile.

Recent winners include FarmMind (2026), which unifies farm workflows from GIS to compliance and agronomic insights, and Gripp (2025), which offers an operator-focused tool for asset tracking and team communication.

Arizona Farm Bureau also celebrated success in the competition. In 2018, Tucson-based Merchant's Garden AgroTech, led by Arizona Farm Bureau member Chaz Shelton, earned a spot as one of the national top 10 semi-finalists, receiving \$10,000 and valuable national recognition that helped advance the company's innovative urban aquaponics approach to year-round, low-cost food production.

Additional examples of successful Ag Innovation Challenge participants, along with detailed eligibility guidelines and the full competition

timeline, are available at fb.org/challenge.

To qualify as one of the top 10 semi-finalists, entrepreneurs must be members of a county or parish Farm Bureau in their state of residence. Those who are not currently members can learn how to join at <https://www.fb.org/about/get-involved>.

Applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on June 5. 🌻



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