

PINAL COUNTY WATER’S FUTURE: A CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN MILLER

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Supervisor Stephen “Steve” Q. Miller is a proud Arizona native and current Chairman of the Board of Supervisors representing District 3 in Pinal County.

Miller is an accomplished public servant with over 20 years of public service as a county supervisor, city council member, and Elected Board Member of the Central Arizona Project (CAP).

In addition, he is an active member of the Pinal County Water Augmentation Authority (PCWAA), Groundwater Users Advisory Council (GUAC), and the Pinal County Groundwater Stakeholders Group, as well as past President of the County Supervisors Association.

Miller takes pride in serving as the voice of his constituency. As a former small business owner and homebuilder, Miller understands what it takes to create sound policy that promotes sustainable growth and a healthy local economy to meet the needs of the communities he serves. Steve is a firm believer in “community first” leadership and always leads by example.

He has been named to several water committees by the Governor’s Office and was asked to Chair an ad-hoc committee that was called by Rep. Cook to address the Pinal AMA’s water profile.

With his wife Laurie, Miller raised three children who, as adults now, also call Pinal County home. They have seven grandchildren.

I’ve known Supervisor Miller for quite some time. When I’m back in my home turf (Pinal County) and I see him at a meeting, along with my farmer/rancher friends, I always feel home. That’s how embedded in the community Miller and county leaders seem to be. As we dive into Pinal County’s water situation we are reminded how every county in Arizona has a different water profile.

Arizona Agriculture: Reflecting on your role as one of the supervisors for Pinal County, what do you think this position can bring to the table on behalf of our agriculture industry in Pinal County?

Supervisor Miller: I support protecting your property rights – the battle between ag and urban will always be in play; coexist, in existence. What I bring is my experience having been a part of an agricultural family, a homebuilder and a developer. I try to find common ground for each other.

Arizona Agriculture: What drew you to making this level of public service?

Supervisor Miller: I was asked, after several years of being on the city



For Pinal County Supervisor Stephen Miller, failure regarding the water issue is not an option. This perhaps reflects the mindset and “never give” up attitude of everyone in agriculture.

council, to run for the Board of Supervisors using the same type of leadership skills that I developed while on the city council. That was at the time when the board expanded from three to five supervisors.

Arizona Agriculture: Imagine you’ve been given the podium to address all Pinal County residents, what would be your key talking points and specifically about water in our county, what would you highlight?

Supervisor Miller: I would highlight that we are not out of water either for homes or agriculture. We need to be prepared for rapid growth as we do live in one of the fastest growing states, as well as one of the fastest growing counties. If there is vacant land near you, it will not be vacant for long.

Arizona Agriculture: Along with so many of us, I know you are disappointed with the outcome of last year’s water legislation in the last legislative session – where do you see this going from here?

Supervisor Miller: I foresee more mudwrestling with very little difference in outcome. I believe that any and all water legislation will take multiple years to accomplish an agreement where everyone can come together. Even that agreement could be short-lived.

Arizona Agriculture: For Pinal County, surface water cuts from the Colorado River are already in the history books. This is surface water that will most likely never come back. So, from your perch, what is the future of Pinal County agriculture?

Supervisor Miller: I believe that agriculture will exist in this county for many foreseeable years as long as growers can produce and make a profit. I think we have an opportunity to use more affluent and to replenish the aquifer and lengthen the life of agriculture in this area.

Plus, I believe that as technology improves and as crops grow more efficiently (drip systems and more efficient water systems) it will extend the life of agriculture. There may not be as many acres planted ten years from now, but I believe agriculture will always have a place in the economy of Pinal County at some level. The soil and the climate are so favorable for production here that I believe the county will maintain agriculture moving forward.

Arizona Agriculture: Does what happened in Pinal County portend a

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ARIZONA RANCHER TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS ON WOLF PREDATIONS

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Last month, American farmers and ranchers recounted their experiences with wolf attacks on livestock to a U.S. House committee, highlighting the severe impact wolves have had on their family-run ranching operations since their reintroduction by the Fish and Wildlife Service and subsequent protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations conducted a hearing in early March titled “Understanding the Consequences of Experimental Populations Under the Endangered Species Act” to examine these issues.

Dalton Dobson, a fifth-generation cow-calf rancher and member leader of the Arizona Farm Bureau, spoke to the U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations about the challenges Arizona livestock producers face due to wolf predation. Dobson, who was just seven years old when the Mexican wolf was reintroduced in his region, told the committee that the direct and indirect costs of wolf attacks have been substantial. His family experimented with solar ear tags, bells, and flashing lights, and even reduced grazing time when wolves approach. He explained that wolf presence has restricted their access to grazing allotments and resulted in lighter cattle, forcing them to haul water to avoid wolf zones and use radio antennas for tracking. Despite these efforts, Dobson emphasized, “The costs remain overwhelming.”

Dobson’s testimony noted he estimates \$320,000 in indirect costs to his family’s ranching operation in 2024 due to wolf predation.

The Mexican wolf, a subspecies of the gray wolf, has been a flashpoint in the Southwest since its reintroduction in 1998. With about 257 wolves in the wild as of the 2024 USFWS count, ranchers continue to report how it devastates livestock.

Although well-intentioned, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been exploited by both the federal government and radical environmental organizations over the years. What began as a legislative effort to protect vulnerable species has, in some cases, morphed into a tool for advancing agendas that overlook the practical realities of ecosystems and the needs of local communities. This misuse has sparked growing concerns about the law’s implementation and its unintended consequences.

As far back as 2015, Arizona Farm Bureau’s leadership testified on these unintended consequences of reintroducing the wolf. “The FWS [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] has nearly laid the full weight of recovery for an international species on the ranchers, sportsmen and wildlife agencies of Arizona and New Mexico without justification. It’s those on the ground managing the land

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NATIONAL ISSUES ADVISORY COMMITTEES MEANS YOUR AG VOICE IS HEARD

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

The American Farm Bureau Federation’s (AFBF) National Issues Advisory Committees (IACs) are a cornerstone of its grassroots advocacy structure, designed to harness the expertise of farmers and ranchers across the United States to shape agricultural policy and address pressing challenges in the industry. These committees consist of Farm Bureau members recommended by the states and appointed by AFBF President Zippy Duvall, typically selected for their hands-on knowledge and direct involvement in specific agricultural areas. As of early 2025, there are 11 such committees, each focusing on a high-profile issue like agricultural labor, animal care, budget and economy, energy, environmental regulations, farm policy, federal lands, market structures, organic and direct marketing, technology, and food safety.

“American Farm Bureau is the Voice of Agriculture because through our IACs, our policy development process and our State and AFBF Boards of Directors, AFBF listens to and amplifies the voices of America’s farmers and ranchers,” explains Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts who was past chair and member of both the food, safety and labor IAC committees.

Arizona Farm Bureau, along with other Farm Bureau states, convenes their own state-level IACs mainly modeled after the national committees but state-wide focused. Arizona’s committees meet in May to preliminarily hash out specifics related to the issues. They are also examining what came out of the national IACs.

In the meantime, Arizona Farm Bureau has three members appointed to AFBF’s IACs on the national level that first met in February.

Arizona	Environmental Regulations and Water	Harold Maxwell
Arizona	Organic, Food Safety and Direct Marketing	Kami Weddle Van Horn
Arizona	Wildlife Damage	Ben Menges

The value of these national committees is keenly recognized by our volunteer leaders. “We’re stronger when we are together, and national Issues Advisory Committees make this apparent,” said southern Arizona rancher and Graham County Farm Bureau President Ben Menges and a member of the Wildlife Damage IAC. “By sitting down with others from across the nation, we can create a common voice on policy priorities and messaging to elected officials. I’m grateful for the opportunities I’ve had to be a part of the IAC process because I know the more voices we have saying the same message, the more likely we are to resolve agricultural issues.”

These national-level committees meet periodically—often in Washington, D.C. — to dive deep into their designated area. Members identify emerging challenges or opportunities within the issues committee they are assigned to, discuss potential solutions, and provide actionable recommendations. These deliberations result in advice to the AFBF board of directors on policy actions, suggestions for state-level Farm Bureau policies, and input to the AFBF Resolutions Committee.

Said Food Safety Technical Expert Kam Weddle Van Horn, “Being engaged in the Food Safety, Organic and Direct Marketing IAC has allowed me to share Arizona’s struggles and issues that are emerging and engage with other [Farm Bureau] members for solutions. The discussion in these committees is valuable because we engage with American Farm Bureau staff to express what we are seeing in our counties and states, and most of the time our colleagues in other states are experiencing the same pains. We had multiple policies that came out of our committee last year, that made it through the policy development process for adoption and these were issues that directly impacted Arizona farmers.”

Beyond meetings, committee members may testify at congressional hearings, engage with the media, and participate in conference calls or webinars to help craft testimonies and comments on federal regulations. This process ensures that the AFBF’s national advocacy reflects the real-world experiences of its members. Farm Bureau members always say, “This is grassroots policy in action by farm and ranch boots-on-the-ground.”

Added Van Horn, “Our conversations this year centered around the changes occurring in the USDA with the new administration, and the shift in customer focus on regenerative agriculture.”

THREE KEY AREAS OF IMPORTANCE OF THE IACS

The importance of the IACs lies in several key areas. **First**, they amplify the grassroots voice of agriculture. With close to 6 million members across 50 states and Puerto Rico, American Farm Bureau relies on these committees to channel the diverse perspectives of its 2,800 county Farm Bureaus into a unified national stance. For example, a wheat farmer from Montana and a cattle rancher from Texas might face different challenges under the same federal regulation; the committees bridge these gaps, ensuring policies consider regional nuances.

Second, they provide expertise that informs both policy and public

perception. American agriculture is complex, spanning labor shortages, environmental compliance, technological advances, and market volatility. Committee members—like a Texas farmer on the Agricultural Labor Committee addressing guestworker programs or a Montana representative on the Technology Committee exploring AI and rural broadband—bring practical insights that staff or lobbyists alone couldn’t replicate. This expertise helps the AFBF push for practical, farmer-driven solutions rather than top-down mandates.

Third, they strengthen the AFBF’s influence in Washington. By equipping members to testify before Congress or collaborate with regulators, the committees turn farmers into advocates who can directly shape legislation like the Farm Bill or influence debates on issues like the Endangered Species Act. This direct line from the field to the Capitol is critical in an era when agriculture competes with urban interests for political attention.

Finally, IACs are vital for adapting to a rapidly changing world. Issues like water, data privacy, or global trade—committees allow the AFBF to stay ahead, aligning policies with future needs rather than reacting after the fact. For instance, discussions on data centers’ energy demands or biotechnology’s role in farming show how these groups anticipate trends that could reshape rural America.

“There are three valuable outcomes from the National IAC Committees,” says Harold Maxwell, Yuma, Arizona ag consultant appointed to the Environmental Regulations and Water Committees. “First, it is an opportunity to tap the knowledge base of our members to tackle the tough issues that require some technical knowledge. The committee members bring different areas of expertise about the issues that fall under the respective committees. For instance, solutions that were developed for an air quality issue may be able to be used for water quality issues. Secondly, some states may be on the bleeding edge of an issue and be able to share what

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A LOCALLY-LED SOLUTION FOR GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT IN RURAL ARIZONA

By Daniel Harris, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

Water is life, and in Arizona’s rural communities, groundwater is especially vital to both livelihoods and the economy. SB 1520 addresses the urgent groundwater challenges facing areas like Gila Bend, Hualapai Valley, and Willcox by providing locally driven management solutions that prioritize both water conservation and the economic security of rural Arizona.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES



As SB 1520 works its way through the Arizona Legislature, farm and ranch leaders are committed to seeing a workable groundwater management bill that is as groundbreaking as Arizona’s 1980 Groundwater bill.

Groundwater basins across rural Arizona have experienced groundwater declines, raising concerns about economic stability and the long-term viability of agriculture. Traditional groundwater regulations, like Active Management Areas (AMAs) and Irrigation Non-expansion Areas (INAs), have not always been suitable for rural communities, which require greater flexibility and local involvement.

SB 1520 offers an innovative alternative by establishing Basin Management Areas (BMAs), giving rural communities the tools to manage groundwater sustainably while protecting existing water rights and economic stability.

HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

Once a BMA is established, either through community petitions or direct designation based on groundwater conditions, a local BMA council is formed to develop a groundwater management plan. These plans include measurable goals such as stabilizing groundwater declines, reducing aquifer depletion rates, increasing recharge, and promoting conservation programs.

The councils oversee management measures, including the potential for gradual, mandatory groundwater reductions based on hydrological findings. Critically, the law provides flexibility to adapt strategies as conditions change over time. After initial implementation, BMAs regularly evaluate groundwater conditions, ensuring ongoing decisions remain responsive to both economic and environmental needs.

Water conservation measures under SB 1520 are intentionally gradual, manageable, and fair. Reductions in water use are capped at no more than 1% annually, ensuring minimal disruption while still making meaningful progress toward groundwater sustainability. Additionally, “flexibility accounts” allow water users to balance water use efficiently across multiple years, enabling adaptability without undermining long-term conservation goals.

Alternative Legislative proposals as seen in SB1425 would impose groundwater restrictions without evidence or local consent, imposing mandatory groundwater reductions up to 40% over 40 years, regardless of local conditions and council input. Moreover, the bills top-down structure removes the flexibility essential for rural economies, potentially resulting in significant economic disruption, especially for agriculture, mining, and critical baseload energy production.

LOCAL CONTROL AND TRANSPARENCY

SB 1520 creates BMA councils comprised of local groundwater users, including agricultural, municipal, industrial, and residential representatives. These councils make decisions based on community needs, ensuring that management plans reflect local values and realities. Public meetings, transparent decision-making processes, and community participation in elections ensure decisions remain rooted in local input. Existing groundwater users receive secure, certificated water rights, based on historical use, ensuring that farmers and rural businesses aren’t unfairly penalized for past conservation efforts or prior capital investments.

ECONOMIC STABILITY & SCIENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT FOR RURAL ARIZONA

Rural economic health is central to SB 1520’s framework. BMAs are required to conduct thorough economic analyses, ensuring that any mandatory groundwater reductions do not unfairly burden local economies. By striking a balance between sustainable water use and economic viability, the legislation safeguards jobs, property values, and local tax revenues in rural communities.

SB 1520 mandates regular hydrological studies to closely monitor groundwater levels and conditions in each BMA. These studies provide the critical data necessary to adjust management strategies effectively. Management decisions are informed directly by scientific analysis, ensuring policy remains responsive and effective.

Conversely, Legislative proposals like SB1425 require no economic impact studies before imposing restrictive groundwater rules or management goals, potentially devastating rural economies by arbitrarily limiting groundwater access. The lack of consistent, science-based hydrological assessments also means decisions may be driven by political or special-interest considerations rather than genuine environmental necessity or local economic stability.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT AND FUTURE PROMISE

One significant immediate benefit of SB 1520 is the repeal and replacement of the Willcox AMA with a locally-managed BMA. This switch empowers Willcox residents and stakeholders to directly manage their groundwater resources in a manner tailored specifically to their needs.

SB 1520 recognizes that water management solutions are most effective when designed and implemented at the local level. It is a thoughtful, practical, and balanced approach tailored specifically to the unique needs of Arizona’s rural groundwater basins.

In short, SB 1520 gives rural Arizonans the tools to protect their future, one drop at a time.

Editor’s Note: As of this writing, SB 1520 passed out of the Senate with a final vote of 18 to 10 and now heads to the House. To stay informed, subscribe to Arizona Farm Bureau’s “While You Were Working” by selecting the QR code nearby.



DESERTS GROW VEGGIES

By Katie Aikins, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Agriculture Education

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

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

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

Arizona Agriculture: What inspired you to write this story?

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

The next event that really made me start writing was driving with my family one Saturday morning on our way to an early 8:00 a.m. soccer game. I



live near tons of agricultural fields and during this time of the year the fields were filled with beautiful heads of lettuce for miles and miles. As I was looking out my car window I said to my husband, “You know, no one has written a children’s book about agriculture here in Yuma,” to which he responded, “You should write one,” and that afternoon I began writing.

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

Cooley: I love this question because to many readers it seems very random, but there’s actually a great connection! When I was writing my story, I spoke to many leaders in the agriculture industry in Yuma to check the facts and to make sure the information I was writing about was accurate. I asked them, “Where exactly does all of the produce that we grow in Yuma actually go to?” As one could guess, it goes pretty much all throughout the United States, but there was a big presence of Yuma’s agriculture sent to Minnesota, and

I wanted to have my main character live in a place that was completely different from Yuma. In the winter, Yuma’s weather is perfect. It’s in the 70s most days and it’s the sunniest city in the world! Minnesota is the complete opposite in the wintertime so that was a big draw to me as well.

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

Cooley: I would honestly say the hardest part was finishing my manuscript. It’s easy to have an idea but then to turn that idea into an easy-to-understand children’s book was a challenge for me in the beginning. Once I had my first draft written though, I felt like everything flowed really nicely. I am obsessed with children’s books and as a former teacher I knew what chil-

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concerning future for the other counties and agriculture water? How can the other counties drive for water success? What actions need to be taken?

Supervisor Miller: What’s happening in Pinal County may be the way counties in AMAs are managed in the future. All fifteen counties have a different need for water management and concerns. It will be up to each county or AMA to first identify their challenges and then tailor their water policies to the best practices of their county’s needs.

Arizona Agriculture: You participate and attend the Colorado River Water Users Association meetings. The recent meetings, what are the key takeaways for you? And what is valuable for all our farmers and ranchers in Arizona to understand from these meetings.

Supervisor Miller: With the Colorado River Water Association, it is not a secret that the upper basin and lower basin are basically in a standoff. The lower basin has put forth proposals to the Bureau of Reclamation with very little response other than an acknowledgment of receiving the proposals.

The Feds will need to get involved in some capacity. Yuma is sitting in the best position because of their priority status with the State of Arizona, however there will be lots of discussion on the final outcome and how the Federal government will direct all seven basin states to manage the water on the Colorado. Hopefully we will continue to meet and eventually find common ground.

Arizona Agriculture: You serve on several water committees and chaired an ad-hoc committee that was called by Representative Cook to address the Pinal AMA water profile. What do you feel has met with success in all your water meeting dealings.

Supervisor Miller: A lot of work was done on the modeling. We, the ad-hoc committee, felt like the state modeling assumptions and outcomes were not accurate so the ad-hoc committee pulled in a private firm to investigate the modeling.

We found where there were inaccurate assumptions, and we were able to prove that we do have more water than the state indicated. The information from the new modeling does tell us that we are going to have to establish new methods and standards for obtaining Certificates of Assured Water (CAWs) and managing our aquifers going forward. From that, we certainly have a better understanding of our aquifer, which is really positive.

Arizona Agriculture: If we don’t get the water issue right, what’s at stake?

Supervisor Miller: Failure is not an option.

Arizona Agriculture: Assuming you remain hopeful in all this, why are you hopeful?

Supervisor Miller: I’m hopeful because there’s too much at stake. We have a lot of good people working on this with a lot of good ideas. I’m going to keep the glass half-full attitude and hopefully find the management of our water portfolio has a positive outcome for the growth of Pinal County. 🚜

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dren would want to see and read, so I knew what I wanted the story to look and sound like.

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

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

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

I waited for six months to get the first drafts of the illustrations, and it was like Christmas day for me when I saw them for the first time.

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

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

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

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

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



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FARM CREDIT

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU WELCOMES TWO NEW EMPLOYEES

By Staff Reports

Arizona Farm Bureau is delighted to welcome Hannah DalMolin and Blair Hartley to the team on behalf of Member Engagement and Operations. Both started last month and will be supporting two very important departments in our organization.

HANNAH DALMOLIN, OUTREACH MANAGER FOR SOUTHERN ARIZONA COUNTIES



Deeply connected to agriculture since childhood, Hannah DalMolin was born and raised in Globe, Arizona. Her family's cattle ranches provided her with firsthand experience of the challenges and rewards of farming and ranching, shaping her passion for the industry and her commitment to its growth and sustainability.

DalMolin holds a bachelor's degree in Agribusiness Economics and Management, with minors in Business Administration and Community Innovation. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Agricultural Education and is set to graduate in May. Her academic background, combined with her hands-on experience, has equipped her with a unique perspective on the agricultural industry and its future.

Previously active in 4-H and FFA, DalMolin raised livestock, discovering the essential role agriculture plays in sustaining our way of life. Her dedication to agriculture continued into high school, where she became involved with the Arizona Farm Bureau. This involvement extended into her college years at the University of Arizona, where she served as the Young Farmers and Ranchers Chair for both University of Arizona and Gila County.

As the new Outreach Manager for the Arizona Farm Bureau, Hannah is excited to use her knowledge, passion, and experience to support the agriculture industry and the hardworking individuals who drive it forward.

BLAIR HARTLEY, OPERATIONS MANAGER



Blair Hartley is a proud New Mexico State University graduate and Crimson Scholar. She has over a decade of experience in the Food, Beverage, and Hospitality Management industry across the southwest. Passionate about creating unforgettable guest experiences, she is always on the lookout for the next great meal and adventure—discovering the magic of food and culture from charming cafés to bustling city hotspots.

Growing up, Hartley actively participated in 4-H, an experience that instilled in her the values of community, leadership, and a deep connection to agriculture. This early involvement continues to inspire her commitment to service and her passion for uniting people through meaningful experiences. Her early involvement

with agricultural education partnered with growing up in rural New Mexico's Hatch Valley inspired a deep appreciation for Farm to Table cuisine. In college she turned her appreciation for agriculture and food into a hospitality major for the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. This program is where she could further investigate how to improve her community by bringing people together through good fresh, home-grown foods.

As a seasoned operations leader with expertise in event planning, financial management, and complex administrative tasks, Hartley has a proven track record in coordinating travel logistics and overseeing meeting arrangements. Not only does she excel in supporting various departments, but she also provides comprehensive executive, board, and member support, ensuring seamless operations and effective communication throughout the organization.

Hartley will be an asset in advancing the mission of the Arizona Farm Bureau as our new Operations Manager.

NATIONAL ISSUES ADVISORY COMMITTEES

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they have learned. This is the case with PFAS. The Michigan State Farm Bureau is on the bleeding edge and has been very helpful in getting policy developed that will benefit the rest of the states including Arizona. Finally, it helps speed up the policy development process. The IAC meets in February and August so that we can provide recommended policy on complex issues prior to the county and state Farm Bureau meetings."

The structure—drawing from diverse states and production types—aims to balance all farming and ranching interests. Ultimately, the National Issues Advisory Committees are the engine of the AFBF's claim to be the "Voice of Agriculture," turning member experience into national impact at a time when farming faces unprecedented scrutiny and change.

Editor's Note: Our state's IACs take place in May.

HAS YOUR FARM AND RANCH BUSINESS HIT THE CENTURY MARK YET?

By Staff Reports

We're looking for Arizona Farms and Ranches that have reached the 100-year mark or will by the end of this year! If your legacy business meets that big date requirement, we want to hear from you.

Arizona Farm Bureau has now celebrated **14 families** since the program started in 2021. The recognition occurs during its Annual Meeting in November earning those recognized the Century Farm and Ranch designation.

An ongoing program of the Arizona Farm Bureau (AZFB), The Century Farm and Ranch Program is committed to recognizing Arizona's farm and ranch families in business for a least 100 years. If your family's farm or ranch is eligible this year (2025), go to <https://www.azfb.org/News/Century-Farms-Ranches> to download and fill out the application listed online.

We're also looking for farm and ranch families that hit the 100-year mark some time ago and you just haven't paused long enough to fill out the form. The process is easy.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The application deadline is the first Monday in **July** and must be received by the Arizona Farm Bureau by that date (this is not a postmark deadline). Qualified applications received after July 1 will be considered for the 2025 Century Farm and Ranch Program, as the effort will be ongoing.

Because Arizona Farm Bureau and participating Farm Bureau counties



Last Year, the Grantham and Noon families were recognized as Century Ranch recipients.

are underwriting the cost of the program, those farm and ranch families must be current members of Arizona Farm Bureau.

IF SELECTED, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Once applications are received by the **July 1, 2025**, deadline and reviewed, AZFB will notify qualified applicants. In addition, a variety of recognitions will take place.

1. You'll receive a certificate from your county Farm Bureau leadership presented during their county annual meetings.
2. During Arizona Farm Bureau's Annual Meeting in November, you'll be recognized before your peers during an awards dinner.
3. Additionally, Arizona Farm Bureau will send you home with a sign recognizing your farm or ranch as a **Century Farm/Ranch**.

The history of Arizona's farms and ranches is rich, and the family's lengthy tenure in agriculture signifies a heritage of determination, innovation, and resiliency. In that spirit, AZFB will continue the Century Farm and Ranch Program to recognize and honor our Arizona family farms and ranches that have thrived for more than a century.

Editor's Note: Please return the completed application to **Arizona Farm Bureau Century Farm Program** to the attention of Julie Murphree at 325 South Higley Road, Gilbert, AZ 85296. Or email your application to juliemurphree@azfb.org.

ARIZONA'S AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS: ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS AND EMERGING TARIFF CHALLENGES

A VITAL EXPORT MARKET FACES UNCERTAINTY

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

According to the Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics, University of Arizona (U of A) Cooperative Extension, Arizona's agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in the state's economy, bolstered significantly by foreign demand for its diverse farm and ranch products. These exports span primary agricultural goods, agricultural input supplies, and processed food and fiber products. A just released study by the economic team of Claudia Montania, Dari Duvall and George Frisvold confirms Arizona agriculture's export-heavy sectors contribute significantly to Arizona's economy.

Key commodities driving this trade include grains (notably Durum wheat), vegetables and melons (such as lettuce, cauliflower, spinach, and celery), tree nuts (pistachios and pecans), fruits (dates), cotton, and alfalfa. While livestock exports—chiefly beef cattle—remain a smaller component, the state also exports agricultural inputs like pesticides, fertilizers, and farm machinery, alongside processed foods including dairy, meat, and other food products. Together, these industries form a robust export economy.

However, as of March 2025, Arizona agriculture faces new challenges.

RANCHER TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

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and the wildlife with the most intimate knowledge of the resources and again we have been ignored,” said Arizona Farm Bureau’s First Vice President at the time Stefanie Smallhouse, regarding the Mexican wolf reintroduction, this reflects her early critique, later amplified during her presidency.

In a 2018 testimony when Smallhouse was Arizona Farm Bureau President, she said, “The 20 species that we have listed for our property, there’s no data to substantiate that, it was just a general listing and that’s what happens a lot with the ESA. Critical habitat that has been identified just doesn’t exist on our ranch. We have four fish that are listed, and the critical habitat are waterways, and they don’t have any water.” These comments were part of her testimony before a House Natural Resources subcommittee in July 2018, the same committee Dobson testified before this last month.

One key provision of the ESA, section 10(i), was designed to provide exceptions to regulatory requirements for experimental populations, offering a flexible approach to species recovery. However, over time, previous administrations, often bending to pressure from radical environmental groups, have weaponized the 10(i) process. In doing so, they have sidelined crucial input from local stakeholders — those who live and work in the areas directly affected by these policies — undermining the balance the provision was meant to strike.

The negative impacts of experimental predator populations, such as gray wolves, Mexican wolves, and grizzly bears, serve as the clearest examples of these 10(i) abuses. While the reintroduction of these species may aim to restore ecological balance, poor management has led to significant challenges. Ecosystems have been disrupted, and local communities have faced threats to livestock, pets, and even human safety. These outcomes highlight a disconnect between policy decisions and their real-world effects.

Poor management of these species become devastating for ranchers. “I am not advocating for the complete removal of the wolf population; I am simply asking that the burdens that have been unfairly placed on the backs of ranchers in Arizona and New Mexico be met with fairness and proper compensation,” said Dobson at the end of his testimony last month.

To address the challenges of endangered species management, the



Rancher Dalton Dobson (far left) began his testimony by saying, “I was seven years old when the wolves were reintroduced into Arizona and New Mexico so have been dealing with this issue for my entire life.” Dalton spoke before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in March along with other American ranchers impacted by the wolf.

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) must do more than simply consult local stakeholders before introducing experimental populations—they should also actively manage these populations once established. This includes removing animals that pose specific risks to livestock, humans, and pets, ensuring that conservation efforts don’t come at the expense of those living alongside these species. Ranchers and others suggest effective management requires a practical, responsive approach grounded in the realities of the affected regions.

Considering the depredations of the wolf, southern Arizona rancher and Graham County Farm Bureau President Ben Menges said, “If the American people want the wolves, the American people need to pay for them.”

POLICY CHANGES BECOMES ANOTHER BLOW TO RANCHERS

Another blow to our ranchers dealing with the Mexican wolf is the change in policies that determine livestock depredations. In August 2023 the United States Department of Agriculture- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services adopted new evidentiary standards that guide the agency through the process of determining whether livestock were killed by a wolf or not. These new standards rely heavily on subcutaneous hemorrhaging as the defacto standard to declare a confirmed kill. Further exacerbating the issues with confirming livestock kills is the fact that once an investigator completes their investigation, they send the report to an office in Ft. Collins where the final determination is made.

This process in and of itself diminishes the expertise of the boots on the ground and has led to many instances where an investigator confirms a wolf kill only to be overturned by those in Ft. Collins. These new standards and the process itself have led to less confirmed kills since adoption. Compare the new standards to the old standards where all the evidence was considered when confirming a wolf kill and you can understand the frustrations with the program.

The new standards were adopted in a vacuum where no local input was considered and in fact different from the first set of standards where the Mexican Wolf Executive Committee was part of the process in adopting the old standards. This new set of standards was merely pushed through the agency with no due process.

Said Dalton in Testimony to Congress last month, “These new standards of evidence used by these agencies are so restrictive and only have one goal in mind, limit the number of depredations being reported.”

To provide relief to producers living and operating within the Mexican Wolf recovery range, Arizona Farm Bureau is again working with Congressman Stanton to sponsor the Wolf Act. We saw success last Congress in advancing the language and having it be incorporated in both the House and Senate Agriculture Committee’s Farm Bill. We again have Chairman GT Thompson’s commitment to include language again this year in a Farm Bill. The Wolf Act would increase Livestock Indemnity payments to producers from 75% to 100%. Language in the bill would also provide emergency relief to producers by establishing a “pay for presence” program, making funds available to producers and requiring that a formula be established to compensate producers who are forced to co-exist with the Mexican Wolf.

Ranchers and others on-the-ground, seeing the consequences also suggest a return to the ESA’s original intent, the FWS must shift their focus. Rather than prioritizing the demands of radical environmental groups with conflicting interests, they should elevate the voices of local stakeholders who experience the day-to-day consequences of these policies. By doing so, they can restore the ESA as a tool for balanced conservation that respects both nature and the people who depend on it.

“The ESA, despite the good intentions it was built on, has failed in recovering endangered wildlife. Instead, it has threatened our ability to make productive use of the land,” added former President Smallhouse.

The other witnesses last month during the hearing were Kent Clark, Manager, Double R Ranch, Loomis, WA, Robbie LeValley, Secretary, Public Lands Council, Hotchkiss, CO, Dr. Chris Servheen, Former United States Fish & Wildlife Service Bear Recovery Coordinator (retired), President & Board Chair of the Montana Wildlife Federation, Helena, MT.

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ARIZONA’S AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS continued from Page 6

Proposed tariffs on imported agricultural inputs, coupled with potential retaliatory tariffs on Arizona’s exports, threaten to disrupt this economic engine. The scope and scale of these taxes remain unclear, creating uncertainty for farmers, input suppliers, and food processors alike. While the study’s economic modeling does not fully capture the complex impacts of tariffs, it offers critical insights into which agricultural sectors rely most on export revenues, and which are most vulnerable to rising input costs — laying a foundation for future trade policy discussions.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

In 2022’s USDA Census of Agriculture, Arizona’s agricultural exports generated substantial economic benefits, **contributing \$1.85 billion in total output (sales)** to the state economy when accounting for multiplier effects evaluated and calculated by the U of A economic team — economic activity rippling through related industries. Breaking this down, the direct contributions included:

- **\$571.4 million** in sales from primary agriculture (on-farm production of crops and livestock),
- **\$111.6 million** from agricultural input suppliers, and
- **\$509.8 million** from food and fiber processing industries.

Beyond direct sales, these exports supported significant economic activity across the state, including:

- **7,475 jobs** and **\$373.2 million** in labor income (encompassing business owner income and employee wages),
- **\$679 million** in state GDP (value added), and
- **\$167 million** in tax revenues.

Arizona’s agricultural exports reach a concentrated set of global markets. China, Canada, and Mexico collectively accounted for 62% of these sales in 2022. Other regions, such as the Rest of Asia (28%), Europe (9%), Mexico (4%), and the Rest of the World (2%), also play notable roles. Specific commodities show even more specialized trade patterns:

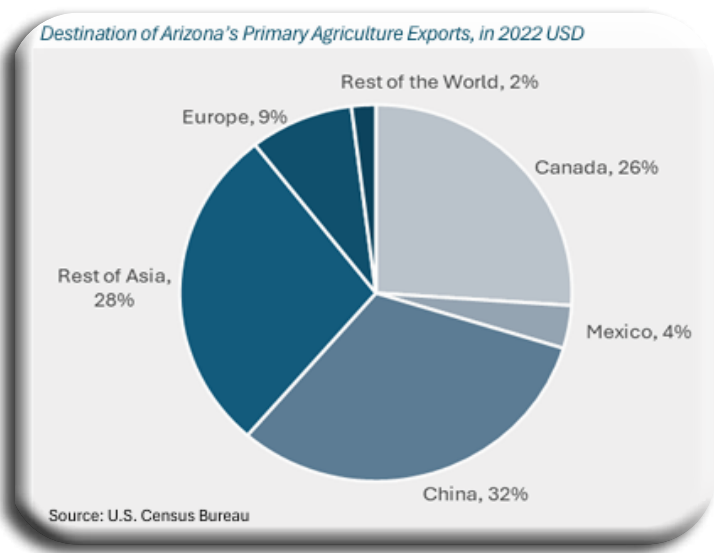
- **Vegetables and melons** (primarily lettuce) are exclusively exported to Canada and Mexico, making up 100% of this category’s export destinations.
- **Alfalfa** sees 97% of its exports directed to China and Saudi Arabia.
- While Mexico is a minor export market for Arizona’s own agricultural goods, imports from Mexico through Nogales—approaching a billion-dollar industry in 2020—further underscore the state’s role in cross-border agricultural trade.

EXPORT DEPENDENCE VARIES ACROSS SECTORS

The study reveals wide variation in how reliant Arizona’s agricultural industries are on export markets:

- **Cotton** stands out as the most export-dependent, with 88% of sales tied to foreign buyers, making it particularly susceptible to retaliatory tariffs or import restrictions.
- **Fruit** exports account for 39% of sales, while **other crops and hay** (including alfalfa) contribute 24%, and **vegetables and melons** make up 9%.
- Overall, exports represent 8% of total agricultural sales across primary agriculture, input suppliers, and food and fiber manufacturing.

Breaking down the export composition, primary agriculture contributes 48% of Arizona’s agricultural export value, food and fiber manufacturing 43%, and input suppliers 9%. This distribution highlights the interconnected roles



of on-farm production, processing, and supply chains in driving export success.

THE TARIFF THREAT: A BASELINE FOR FUTURE ANALYSIS

The looming prospect of tariffs—both on imported inputs and as retaliatory measures on Arizona exports—poses risks to this economic framework. Sectors like cotton, with its heavy reliance on foreign markets, could face disproportionate challenges if trade barriers escalate. Similarly, rising costs for inputs like fertilizers and pesticides could squeeze margins across the board, particularly for producers less dependent on exports but still reliant on global supply chains.

While the study’s economic models do not predict the full fallout of these tariffs, they establish a critical baseline. By identifying export-heavy sectors and those sensitive to input cost increases, the data equips policymakers and stakeholders with the tools to navigate an uncertain trade landscape. As Arizona agriculture braces for potential shifts in global commerce, its **\$1.85 billion export economy** stands as both a testament to its strength and a call for strategic resilience in the face of change.

Editor’s Note: To explain how the study was conducted, it used the IMPLAN input-output model to estimate the economic contribution of agricultural exports from Arizona. Modifications were made to IMPLAN’s industry production functions for primary agriculture industries in Arizona, as national averages do not accurately reflect local production practices and spending patterns. Value of state-level agricultural exports were estimated using data from the USDA Economic Research Service and USA Trade Online from the U.S. Department of Commerce.



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