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CONVERSATION WITH A RANCHER ABOUT OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES: BECKI ROSS

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Northern Arizona rancher Becki Ross is a partner in a diversified family agricultural business that currently farms and dairies in western Maricopa County and produces beef in Yavapai and Coconino counties. If anyone has been front-and-center on the issue of off-highway vehicles, it's Becki Ross as their ranching operation is situated in one of the most popular places for Arizona families to come "off-road."

Since the pandemic in 2020, there has been a dramatic increase in outdoor recreational activity in Coconino County and throughout the state. Arizonans have been using the outdoors to escape from the mundane activities of everyday life, especially when we were all sheltered in place. This has spurred the rise of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) activity and traffic.

Fortunately, legislation passed in 2022, HB2130, limits a landowner's liability for any injuries to educational or recreational users on the owner's land; additionally, these users are responsible for any damage they cause to the land. Later this year, a study committee created pursuant to another bill passed last year will convene for the first time. This committee will bring together representatives from government, agriculture (including Farm Bureau members like Becki and Coconino County Farm Bureau President Benny Aja), sportsmen, law enforcement, tourism, and OHV rental and manufacturing companies to discuss mutually beneficial solutions to the multitude of issues our state is facing because of the increased use of OHVs.

"As our state continues to grow, so will the impacts on public lands from recreation, travel, and climate change. Our charge is to provide effective management of these lands to ensure sustainability for future generations," said Sheriff Driscoll of Coconino County.

In the midst of all this are ranchers dealing with the day-to-day on lands they are raising their cattle on. Ross has plenty to share. She grew up in Gilbert where she met her husband, Dustin. After graduating from Gilbert High School, she attended NAU and graduated with a B.S. in Parks and Recreation Management with an emphasis in Forestry and a B.S. in Elementary Education.

Dustin and Becki raised their sons, Wyatt and Nate, on the ranch near Sedona, Arizona, while also farming in Gilbert and Paloma. Both boys have ambitions to participate in the family business soon.

Ross likes to say her official title is cook, chauffeur, bookkeeper, maintenance, feeder, spoiler of all horses and dogs, and a part-time cowboy. She paused long enough to answer my questions about what her ranch and farm family has faced.

Arizona Agriculture: At 30,000 feet, discuss the current situation with OHVs as it relates to ranching and the environment.

Ross: The number of OHVs has dramatically increased in the last twenty years. At that time, side-by-sides were relatively brand new, and almost all of them were used by



Becki Ross and her family have first-hand experience with how improper use of off-highway vehicles are tearing up our beautiful public lands.

hunters, who generally used them as a tool for their hobby. Now there are thousands of them being used by "weekend warriors" and the hobby is adventure driving. The machines have evolved dramatically as well. They are much bigger and much faster with incredible suspensions that allow fast travel over the roughest of roads.

According to data from the Arizona Department of Transportation, the number of registered OHVs in the state has more than doubled over the past two decades, going from just over 128,000 in 2002 to over 256,000 in 2022. This trend is likely due to several factors including the growing popularity of OHV sports and recreational activities, as well as the state's expansive and varied terrain, which is well-suited for off-road driving. An even larger number than DOTs, the Sedona Chamber of Commerce reports that the number of registered OHVs in Arizona exceeded 450,000 in 2021. While these numbers vary greatly, it does indicate the necessity of gathering accurate data to make educated management decisions for OHVs in our state.

In addition to the increase in OHV numbers, many people don't realize that there are laws out in the woods. They think that because there are no speed limit signs, no speed limits exist. Human nature seems to make people want to use these machines in a destructive manner, whether it's spinning donuts, or trying to climb a steep hill, or creating a "track." Arizona OHV operators are using Arizona ranches as their playgrounds. While most ranches are leased public lands, they are multi-use land. When these types of "adventure users" come onto ranches this activity of off-road driving is especially destructive to natural resources and roads and negatively impacts Arizona's ranching operations.

Arizona Agriculture: What are some long-term impacts or some of the challenges you've dealt with as a rancher?

Ross: The roads have drastically been degraded because of the high volume of highly capable OHVs and the lack of adequate maintenance of existing roads. Road accessibility is shrinking for us. Specifically, we have loading chutes that can no longer be accessed by semi-trucks. Many roads that we historically have traveled with our ranch trucks and gooseneck trailers are now impassible. We used to load a pallet of feed or salt in the back of the truck to deliver supplements to cows. Now we hand load feed tubs and salt in the bed of an OHV to do the same job but with multiple trips.

Additionally, the cows aren't comfortable being in places that are highly used for recreation. We estimate that about 25% of the ranch is not evenly grazed anymore. The cattle move away from recreational use near so-called "OHV trails." We are required by our allotment environmental assessment decision to utilize our pastures in a very specific way and must utilize less than 40% of the grass and brush. But as our cattle spend their days moving away from these "OHV trails" and are concentrated in a smaller area, we run the risk of being out of compliance with our agreement with the United States Forest Service

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HOW ARIZONA'S EGG RULE MIGHT HAVE IMPACTED EGG PRICES AND SUPPLY

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director



As of January 2023, all eggs purchased within the state of Arizona must come from cage-free egg producers.

ber) and 49.11% from one year ago. In fact, of all inflated grocery food items, eggs have increased the most.

In the midst of all this, eggs still remain one of the most economical, nutrient-dense animal proteins around (the point I was trying to get across on KTAR). Of course, Arizona Farm Bureau advocates Arizona families consume the entire variety of animal proteins available to us in the grocery store, but eggs serve a special role in the mix of a planned menu because they are so versatile, can be eaten every meal, and are one of the few foods that provide natural Vitamin D. All this becomes challenging for Arizona families when egg prices are through the proverbial roof.

A MULTI-FACTOR EXPLANATION

So why have eggs increased so much in relation to other food

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Two New Year incidents let me know Arizona Farm Bureau would be in for a media storm once I was back to work after the holidays: First, my niece sent an inquisitive text asking about egg shortages and prices the day before my return to work and secondly, a listener to KTAR sent me an email once I was back at work. The dismayed sender of the email said: "So, the gist of the article is why the price of eggs (and groceries) has increased so much. And yet, "to keep costs down," you pitch eggs at the very end of it. Rich, Julie!" Well, at least he was listening. In the case of my niece, her query sent me on a quest to find answers beyond strong inflation and Bird Flu. In the famous words of Paul Harvey, I give you, "the rest of the story."

The most recent U.S. Consumer Price Index as of this writing lists eggs at a current level of 336.06, up from 328.42 last month and up from 225.39 one year ago. This is a change of 2.33% from last month (December).



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ANOTHER WOTUS RULE TO CREATE MORE CONFUSION FOR AGRICULTURE

By Daniel Harris, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

With a new year and a Democratic administration comes yet another iteration of the rule regulating the Waters of The United States (WOTUS) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corp. of engineers. The new updated final rule gets rid of the Trump-era Navigable Waters Protection Rule, which the Farm Bureau argues provided a clear, defensible rule that appropriately balanced the objective, goals, and policies of the Clean Water Act.

The ruling further creates uncertainty as to what waters and features fall under the authority of the rule, as the federal government will conduct “case-by-case” determinations to assess whether a feature is federally regulated moving forward. Proponents of the final rule insist that the process of submitting an inquiry on your land is a straightforward process, but the reality is that it remains a difficult, time-consuming task that can potentially leave agricultural land in limbo for unacceptable periods of time.

While there are exclusions for certain agricultural features in the new rule, it is still leaving farmers and ranchers in uncertain waters moving forward. EPA’s messaging has also shifted away from using language which made it seem as though the final rule would come at no added cost or impact to the taxpayer. The EPA has instead opted to insist that the new rule will have “minimum impacts,” raising concerns over what taxpayer resources will be necessary to enforce it.

Shedding more light on this issue, Courtney Briggs, Senior Director of Government Affairs for the American Farm Bureau Federation, made an appearance on AFBF’s podcast Newsline and explained the disappointment from AFBF regarding this step back in WOTUS legislation, which now resembles the 2015 rule more than anticipated. “This rule does not provide the needed clarity and certainty that the regulated community has

long called for. This rule allows the federal government to expand its jurisdictional reach over private property. It is clear that the agencies have doubled down on their use of the troubling significant nexus test, which will require landowners to hire environmental consultants, attorneys and engineers to ensure that they are in compliance.”

AFBF has also stressed the importance of having a clear line of authority, as there are civil and criminal liabilities attached to Clean Water Act compliance.

As Briggs explained, “Since this rule relies on case-by-case determinations and ambiguously defined terms, it is incredibly difficult for a farmer to understand if they have a jurisdictional feature on their property.”

Moreover, Farm Bureau has consistently argued that regardless of the content, it is premature for EPA to release a final rule before the Supreme Court rules in Sackett v. EPA. That case will opine on the application of the Significant Nexus test. Depending on the timing of the decision and the implementation of the rule, we could see a conflict between the two, leading to even more uncertainty than already exists in the ever-expanding reach of the WOTUS rule.

This new rule will go into effect on March 20, 60 days after it was entered into the Federal Register. On January 18th, American Farm Bureau Federation announced that they along with seventeen other entities in the Agricultural community will be taking legal action to oppose this new rule in the district court in Texas.

This along with the effort to encourage the EPA to await the SCOTUS ruling in the Sackett case is just another display of our efforts to ensure that teams of lawyers are not a necessity to determine what exactly falls under the definition of Waters of the United States 🚜

ONCE AGAIN, ARIZONA FARM BUREAU AT THE TOP OF ITS GAME

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Beating out several states in its membership group size, Arizona Farm Bureau (Group 3) received the Pinnacle award from American Farm Bureau, the highest honor a state Farm Bureau can be awarded for program and membership achievement. The awards were given out to state Farm Bureaus at the organization’s 104th Convention, last month. The awards recognize excellence in the implementation of outstanding member programs and membership achievement in 2022.



Once again Arizona Farm Bureau wins the Pinnacle Award after meeting our membership goal and earning all four Awards of Excellence categories: Advocacy, Coalitions & Partnerships, Engagement & Outreach and Leadership & Development.

Along with Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana and North Carolina also earned the Pinnacle Award in their group sizes.

To earn the opportunity to compete for the Pinnacle, a state Farm Bureau must meet its membership goal and earn the Awards of Excellence that demonstrate outstanding achievements in four program areas: **Advocacy, Coalitions & Partnerships, Engagement & Outreach** and **Leadership & Business Development**. Arizona won in all four categories.

Going back in historical records, this is at least Arizona Farm Bureau’s seventh Pinnacle award.

YOUNG FARM & RANCHERS DISCUSSION MEET COMPETITION NETS ARIZONA THE SWEET 16

Graham County Vice President and Young Farmer and Rancher participant Matt Herrington also successfully made it to the Sweet 16 round of the Young Farmer and Rancher Discussion Meet Contest this year during the Convention in Puerto Rico. Herrington did a phenomenal job and once again represented Arizona as one of the elite states in this national contest.

AIKINS COMPLETES TWO TERMS ON THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FOUNDATION BOARD

Arizona Farm Bureau Education Director Katie Aikins completed her second 2-year term on American Farm Bureau’s Foundation board and was recognized during AFBF’s convention last month for her service.

“It was an honor serving on the Board of such an amazing foundation,” said Aikins. “The staff and people associated with AFBFA are so talented and committed to producing quality education to help connect people with their food. I look forward to continuing the relationships made through my time on the Board and working locally to expand ag education.”

Another highlight of Arizona Farm Bureau’s presence in Puerto Rico this year was seeing Yuma farmer and Farm Bureau member Jonathan Dinsmore recognized during one of the convention’s general assemblies up on the big screen for his outreach using social media.

For a small state, Arizona Farm Bureau continues to make a big presence at AFBF’s Annual Convention. 🚜



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OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES continued from Page 1

(USFS). Our workload has dramatically increased trying to get cows to utilize pastures evenly. We now spend many more days moving cattle, only for that work to be undone by OHVs and other visitors to the ranch.

For us specifically, we are mostly impacted by the OHV rental business. The first OHV rental business appeared in Sedona in 2010. Currently, there are about 300 units available to rent in Sedona and most are directed our way. It's like we have a bunch of folks in rental C orvettes on a racetrack on the ranch. We see mostly inexperienced operators, on vacation making the most of their four- or eight-hour rental. Unfortunately for us, many do not understand forest etiquette and they think they are out in the middle of nowhere and the roads are their OHV track. An OHV racing by, blowing dust on us is not only insulting but also dangerous whether we are on horseback, on foot, or in our vehicles.

As residents, my neighbors and I have many stories of very dangerous driving encounters with rental operators, and we are frustrated that this is happening near our homes and on the ranch roads that we travel every day. Both the USFS and Arizona Game and Fish struggle with the management of OHVs because of budgeting, large areas to patrol, and multijurisdictional issues. But if reckless driving of any kind was happening near neighborhoods or places of business, we would expect law enforcement response to be effective and quick to control the situation. We have not seen the same management in rural Arizona.

Arizona Agriculture: Have you experienced economic losses? If so, explain.

Ross: Yes. It is like we are being killed by a thousand tiny papercuts. We do have cattle hit by vehicles. The cows are being squeezed out of highly recreated areas resulting in uneven usage of our pastures. We handle and move cattle more to encourage them to use pastures evenly. More gates are left open, and more fences and cattleguards are crashed into, creating extra work.

This demand on the ranch manager does not allow for other ranch projects to be completed. Damage to our work and personal vehicles and trailers because of the dramatic decrease in road quality, repairs are more common. Our efficiency is decreasing as we make more trips in smaller vehicles to do the same job because of road quality.

Arizona Agriculture: I recall you saying the situation became out of control, especially during the pandemic and when families were forced to shelter in place. Has it improved at all?

Ross: I see some improvement, but not enough. Just like all northern Arizona, in the summer of 2022, we saw a slight decline in forest users. Is it because of lessened pandemic restrictions and people seeking other recreational opportunities in previously closed areas of the country or world? Or maybe high gas prices kept people closer to home this summer? I don't really know. One thing we've noticed is Arizona Game and Fish-focused OHV enforcement on holiday weekends has made a positive impact on behavior in some of the heavier-used areas around Flagstaff.

But OHV manufacturers are working against responsible riding. They are working against cattle producers and caretakers of the land and law enforcement. Most of the advertising that I see by Can-Am or Kawasaki or others have professional drivers doing doughnuts, splashing through water, speeding and driving cross country. The message they are sending does not align with the conservation of our natural resources or the responsible use of public land. If OHV operators have a need to do that type of destructive driving, they should do that on their own private property or the few OHV play areas in the state that have been designated for such activity.

Arizona Agriculture: Recent legislation is trying to address the situation. What makes you hopeful?

Ross: It's a fantastic start! State legislators are aware of the increasing problem and are interested in balanced solutions. But because this is such a complex problem a Study Committee on OHVs has been created to work together towards solutions and recommendations. The group will include land managers, law enforcement, elected officials, representatives from the agriculture industry, landowners, as well as OHV enthusiasts. It will be challenging to be a part of this group, but I am very much looking forward to participating on the Committee and working towards solutions.

Arizona Agriculture: What still needs to be done?

Ross: The state of Arizona needs to decide on how to manage public lands. As our population continues to grow, and OHV numbers continue to increase, this issue is only going to become a bigger problem. Do we want to manage our lands for natural resource health, watershed and food production? Cattle are amazing and utilize otherwise non-productive land and turn it into a high-quality food source. Ranchers' livelihood depends on a healthy range. As producers, we steward our resources, reduce fire risk, and make water available for cattle and wildlife. We go to great lengths to improve production on the ranch and care for ranch improvements. But recreation has value and is important to land managers. Do we want to go so far as to prioritize recreation over the health of the forest? A lot of the damage is a volume-created problem when it comes to recreation in the forest. We as cattle producers are far outnumbered even on our own ranches. Land managers are directed to manage multiple uses, but in many places, OHVs have turned the forest and deserts into single-use areas. OHVs have pushed campers, hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians away. Wildlife has been affected, which then reduces hunting opportunities. We are also being pushed out by recreation.

As a rancher, I appreciate how we use these machines to check and repair fences, check waters, etc., and if driven responsibly, they put less pressure on the roads. I also understand that when used in this manner, OHVs are good for hunters to get around as well. We don't want to lose access, but the explosion of irresponsibility is causing resource damage that will take years to correct.

Another important thing we need to do as a state is creating a revenue stream that is solely for enforcement and resource damage mitigation for OHVs. I believe this should be paid for exclusively by OHV users.

While we need to mitigate the existing resource damage by OHVs, the focus needs to be on prevention. It would be much better for the environment, law enforcement and funding if the damage didn't happen in the first place. But how do we get there? How do we get folks to stay on existing roads and drive responsibly? How do we get ahead of the bad behavior? Law enforcement, education, stiffer penalties, closures, signage, permit systems, and designated trails or play areas are all ideas that people both like and hate. Maybe we need a little more common sense, but how is that implemented? When we focus our attention on where we want to be, which for me is the prevention of damage to natural resources and improvements, the cycle and culture of environmental abuse will cease, and public lands and ranches will heal and thrive.

Arizona Agriculture: How have you worked with local authorities and other groups?

Ross: A little background... Our contiguous federal and state allotment is close enough to Sedona and Flagstaff to be highly affected by tourists. That's both a blessing and a curse. Our visitation level is higher than a lot of other ranches across the state. But most visitors are here to enjoy the beauty of our state. Often visitors don't understand how fragile our high deserts and forests are to their impact and locals are very concerned with this damage. Nearly all residents live here because of some aspect of the environment and are highly protective of it. Although both towns are dependent on tourist dollars, most residents still view these folks as visitors and are not entitled to treat our public lands as their personal Disneyland. Residents are also still weary from the misuse we saw from the pandemic influx and the natural resource damage is evident.

My family has gained much respect from our neighbors because of our longevity in the community. We have dealt with many local businesses for a half century, attending the same churches and schools. Many locals also are protective of the ranch and the cattle because we are their neighbors. People tell me that they love seeing the cattle and appreciate their benefits such as fire suppression. We are thankful that these residents are joining us in speaking out against public land abuse.

With a lot of that local public pressure, we have caught the attention of many city officials including Sedona Mayor Scott Jablow and all Sedona City Council members, Cottonwood Police Department, county level officials including Supervisors Donna Michaels, Harry O'Berg and Matt Ryan, state authorities like Senator Karen Fann, Senator Sine Kerr, Sheriff Driscoll, AZ Game and Fish officers, and federal officials including Congressional Representatives Eli Crane and Tom O'Halleran. OHV damage is of great concern to Keep Sedona Beautiful and they are

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MENTOR PROTÉGÉ CAMP CLASS 2 PROFILE, 2: EMILY YULGA AND NANCY CAYWOOD

By NRCS Soil Scientist Emily Yulga and Pinal County farmer Nancy Caywood

The CAMP mentor/protégé series continues with this second profile on NRCS Soil Scientist Emily Yulga and Pinal County farmer Nancy Caywood. They have already met more than once, and both have exchanged insights and appreciation for the experiences.

With the 2021 launch of the Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP) in Arizona, in partnership with Arizona Farm Bureau, The NRCS team has been front and center in enthusiastically driving this unique partnership. While several other states have the CAMP program, Arizona is unique in its partnership effort with Arizona Farm Bureau.

Arizona Farm Bureau and NRCS continue to shine a bright light on this exciting program and the experiences our mentors and protégé are going through. So much so that Class 2 began last October.

The Yulga Caywood partnership, along with all the mentor protégé partnerships, works to understand Arizona agriculture and conservation opportunities, joining forces to provide firsthand experience of the conservation practices and agricultural happenings in the northern Arizona area.

NANCY CAYWOOD, MENTOR

Talk about your first meeting: Emily attended a farm tour on our farm where she learned about cotton, alfalfa, drought and water conservation. The tour that day included many of my teaching friends and lunch was provided at the end of the program. She had a chance to mingle with some of the teachers and learn more about our community.

Share specifics about what you got out of it as the farmer/mentor: I always enjoy sharing "our story" and water is the first chapter! In the past, we took advantage of both the EQUIP Program and the PL-566 program through NRCS. The outcome of these programs is to better water conservation through land leveling and concrete-lined ditches. Emily could see the outcome firsthand done by the Casa Grande Field Office.

For the remaining time with the program, what do you also hope to help with? We have had our second meeting. Emily attended a West Pinal NRCD Board Meeting which helped her see firsthand how these boards work closely with the NRCS to provide conservation programs to agricultural producers and education to their communities.



During the tour of Caywood Farms, Emily Yulga learned about water management, cotton production and more during the tour with Nancy Caywood.

EMILY YULGA, PROTÉGÉ

What's been the biggest takeaway so far from your first gathering? Nancy's extensive knowledge of natural resources, southwest farming, and the history of her family's land has been my biggest takeaway so far. It's been great to discuss water, cotton farming, or the land use changes in Pinal County with Nancy. These conversations have portrayed to me how vast one's knowledge must be as an agricultural producer, and just how complex the job is. I've really enjoyed learning this perspective from Nancy.

Share specifics about one of your meetings. What did you learn? A hayride around the farm, a discussion of water shortages, a cotton growing presentation, and home-made lunch comprised our first meeting. It was a crash course in water issues facing Pinal County and much of the southwest, the nitty gritty of cotton growing, and a lot of discussion about the agricultural community and how the puzzle pieces fit together.

Why have you felt this program has been helpful? Growing up in the Midwest, and not on a farm or ranch, means I must take advantage of opportunities that will help me learn from the agricultural communities' perspective, especially after moving to the southwest. It's a learning curve, and Nancy and the CAMP program have helped clarify some points of confusion and brought to light challenges and triumphs unique to the area that I didn't know, I didn't know.

What more do you hope to learn in the coming months? I hope to learn more about the water issues across Arizona, farming techniques in the southwest, and how NRCS, conservation districts, and the Farm Bureau all work together to support farmers and ranchers.

What are you looking forward to in your other meetings/gatherings/learning and sharing sessions in the future? I look forward to great conversations with Nancy, and to learning from her and her peers. I'm excited to attend more NRCD and/or Farm Bureau meetings, tour Hoover Dam, and learn more about Arizona agriculture, soil, and water.

We are also planning time for Emily to ride with Eddie Enriquez who manages the Irrigation Management Service through the Casa Grande NRCS Field Office. Plans to go to Hoover Dam are underway as well as farm and ranch visits with local growers where Emily can ask questions and gain an understanding of their NRCS needs.

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU DELEGATES HELP AMERICAN FARM BUREAU ESTABLISH 2023 POLICIES

Staff Reports

The Arizona Farm Bureau Delegation was part of the farmer and rancher delegates to the American Farm Bureau Federation’s 104th Convention that recently adopted policies to guide the national organization’s work in 2023. Key topics ranged from expanding risk management programs and improving dairy pricing transparency to battling hunger.

Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse stood up to speak on behalf of the dairy industry out west and highlight some of the distinctions with our larger dairies.

Delegates were polled regarding their farms at the beginning of the voting session. The results show almost 99% (334 delegates) of those who cast votes operate family farms and almost 65% represent small- to mid-size farms as defined by USDA.

“Delegates demonstrated the strength of Farm Bureau by coming together to represent hard-working farm families from all 50 states and Puerto Rico,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “There’s a lot of work to do in 2023 as Congress drafts the next farm bill, and the policies set forth today will guide AFBF as we work to ensure farmers and ranchers can continue to meet the growing needs of families in America and around the world.”

Delegates to the American Farm Bureau business meeting voted to modernize the farm bill by expanding baseline funding, developing more flexible disaster relief programs and extending protection to more specialty crops.

They also voted to bring more transparency to the federal milk pricing system. Several changes to policy include support for more USDA audits of processing costs to ensure data remains accurate, and a Federal Milk Marketing Orders voting procedure that requires cooperatives to communicate more clearly with members regarding proposed changes. The results of an FMMO forum hosted by AFBF in October served as a guide-



Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse speaks out on behalf of the dairy industry out west.

post for policy changes. Recognizing growing food insecurity in the United States, delegates approved new policy to support access to nutrition programs including connecting farms directly with food banks, increasing the number of SNAP-approved food sales outlets, and other efforts to make produce available to families living in food deserts. On trade, delegates added a policy for USDA to continue working with the Mexican government to drop a proposed ban on imports of biotech corn. The new policy also encourages USDA to urge the Mexican government to accept established science on the safety of U.S. biotech products. Voting delegates also formalized Farm Bureau’s position opposing the 2022 Waters of the U.S. rule and a proposed Securities and Exchange Commission rule if it requires Scope 3 emissions reporting from farms.

BOARD ELECTIONS

Beyond policy changes, delegates also elected members to serve on the AFBF board of directors and national program committees. Fifteen state Farm Bureau presidents were re-elected to two-year terms to represent their regions on the board including Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse and California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson for the **Western Region**.

NATIONAL PROGRAM COMMITTEES

For the Women’s Leadership Committee Shawn Wood of Arizona (Western Region) was re-elected to another two-year term.

Editor’s Note: Registered attendees may view selected workshops and sessions on-demand on the convention [virtual platform](#) for the next 90 days.Planning for the American Farm Bureau’s 2024 Convention has already begun. Mark your calendar to meet us on January 19-24, 2024, in Salt Lake City, Utah. 📅

FOURTH QUARTER 2022 REGULATORY COMMENT REVIEW

By Ana Otto, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

With the close of 2022 Arizona Farm Bureau (AZFB) submitted a total of 40 comment letters responding to various state and federal issues, a slight increase over the number of comment letters submitted in 2021. As in the third quarter, we saw several comment letters responding to state-level issues. Below is a summary of the regulatory dockets AZFB responded to during the fourth quarter of 2022.

Environmental Protection Agency – Proposed Revisions to the Atrazine Interim Registration Review Decision Memorandum – AZFB’s comments highlighted the continued importance of atrazine as a herbicide option for certain Arizona crops. Our comments noted our concerns with the EPA’s Concentration Equivalent Level of Concern (CE-LOC) which resulted in the EPA proposing new label restrictions, maximum application rates, and “pick list” conservation practice requirements for certain areas where the CE-LOC is above a specified concentration level.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration – Arizona State Plan for Occupational Safety and Health Proposed Reconsideration and Revocation – AZFB comments addressed our support for the Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health’s continued administration of Arizona’s State Plan. We urged OSHA to work cooperatively with Arizona in their administration of the State Plan and to cease any further consideration or action to revoke the Arizona State Plan

Environmental Protection Agency – Dicamba Revised Human Health and Draft Ecological Risk Assessment – AZFB’s comments highlighted the importance of dicamba as a herbicide for a number of Arizona crops. Our comments highlighted the careful management of the product and that no reported incidents of off-site exposure occurred in Arizona in 2021 after new control measures were implemented in 2020.

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality – Proposed Surface Water Protection Rule – AZFB’s comments urged ADEQ to limit the protected waters list to those waters for which ADEQ has clear evidence demonstrating they meet criteria consistent with the 2008 *Rapanos* guidance. Additionally, our comments requested that ADEQ provide an explanation as to their process for removing and requesting removal of waters ultimately included on the list of protected non-WOTUS waters.

Farm Service Agency – Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection H-2A Pilot Program – AZFB’s comments incorporated the oral comments that AZFB President Stefanie Smallhouse provided during an FSA public meeting regarding the pilot program. President Smallhouse’s comments highlighted the need for skilled labor in agriculture and the shortcomings of the current H-2A program. She urged FSA to consider modifying the pilot program to incorporate allowances for year-round employment, compliance incentives for housing and transportation, and to reevaluate AWER requirements.

Environmental Protection Agency – Designation of Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA)

and Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOS) as CERCLA Hazardous Substances – AZFB’s comments supported those prepared by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Our comments noted that PFOA and PFOS are not chemicals used on farms, but may passively make their way onto farms. Consequently, classifying PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under CERCLA could result in significant negative impacts to farmers and ranchers. We urged EPA to not move forward with their rulemaking until the agency fully assesses the implications to the agricultural community.

U. S. Department of Agriculture – National Organic Program; Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards – AZFB’s comments supported those prepared by AFBF. Our comments explained our opposition to the proposed rule as many of the proposed changes were arbitrary to accepted poultry and livestock care methods. The current proposed rule would create a cumbersome regulatory structure with a greater focus on animal welfare rather than the production of organic poultry and livestock.

Arizona Department of Water Resources – Hualapai INA Designation – AZFB submitted a second comment letter to ADEQ urging the Department to not designate an irrigation non-expansion area (INA) in the Hualapai Basin. Our comment letter noted the Department’s use of flawed data in their INA evaluation and that their data does justify the creation of an INA. Additionally, the comment letter highlighted agriculture’s efficient use of water in the area and the economic importance of the industry to Mohave County.

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality – Proposed Revisions to Arizona’s Forest and Range Fire Management Regulatory Rules – AZFB’s comments shared our concern that ADEQ’s repeal of certain rules would leave the Agency with little information regarding the use of wildfires for the management of natural resources except what may be gathered under other areas of the rule in addressing wildfire. As a result, the proposed rulemaking would create a disparity of expectations and reporting between managed wildfire and prescribed burning. President Stefanie Smallhouse also provided oral comments during a public meeting held by ADEQ for this rulemaking.

Environmental Protection Agency – Proposed Revisions to the Proposed Interim Decision for Methomyl– AZFB’s comments highlighted the continued importance of methomyl as an insecticide option for certain Arizona crops. Geographic-specific mitigation measures did not impact Arizona producers and other proposed mitigation measures impacting all agricultural uses were found to be feasible for Arizona growers. Our comments urged EPA not to impose further mitigation measures which would inhibit continued use.

For more information about a specific comment letter, contact Ana Kennedy Otto at advocacy@azfb.org. 📧

TRENDS AND HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS US WITH OUTREACH

By Joel Carr, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Manager with contributions by Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Social media has become essential for organizations and businesses to connect with their audiences, and the Arizona Farm Bureau is no exception. The Arizona Farm Bureau can reach a wider audience and communicate more effectively with its members and the general public by utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Farm Bureau represents 60% of those organizations that rely on social media data and outreach daily to understand trends and improve their social media, according to Sproutsocial, a digital social media tracking service.

Just what are Sproutsocial and other social media experts saying about trends in 2023? Well, here is some of Sproutsocial’s list that the Arizona Farm Bureau can relate to.

1. **“Edutainment” content will rule:** Content is expected to be short-form educational today and this is right up Arizona Farm Bureau’s alley. And, not just for kids but adults. Arizona Farm Bureau’s Ag Education program is already doing this but more is expected by the public.
2. **Businesses will put more money behind video production:** Short-form video on all social media channels has already exploded, but even more money is being put behind it.
3. **BeReal will be a turning point for brands:** BeReal was the hottest new social media platform in 2022 and it’s growing. While Farm Bureau has not yet assessed the platform, we know the more real content is the more popular it becomes. Our Monday/Tuesday Rancher/Farmer posts on our channels get the most organic

- reach of just about anything we do. The takeaway? Be authentic with everything you do.
4. **How brands talk about sustainability will change:** Some organizations have “overclaimed” on the sustainability front. In farm and ranch county we haven’t taken enough of an opportunity to highlight our very authentic sustainability practices. So this will be a time to really highlight what we do to protect the environment on a daily basis and more.

For full disclosure, Arizona Farm Bureau uses Sproutsocial to help us track our social media data and assess our content and its popularity. It’s served as a key support for us to get this medium right.

In the meantime, Arizona Farm Bureau registers several benefits to its outreach thanks to social media.

Connecting with Large and Diverse Audiences

One of the main benefits of social media for the Arizona Farm Bureau is the ability to connect with a large and diverse audience. Social media platforms have a vast reach, and by having a presence on these platforms, the Arizona Farm Bureau can connect with people from all over the state and beyond. This allows the organization to share information about the latest agricultural developments and updates about the organization’s events and activities. As we result, we’ve connected with people and organizations we otherwise would be unable to do. These diverse audiences

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE GOVERNOR’S BUDGET PROPOSAL

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

On the first Friday of the Legislative Session, Governor Katie Hobbs presented her proposed budget framework to the public and to leadership in the House and Senate. What do Governor Hobbs’ outlined spending priorities tell us about the upcoming session? More than you might think.

But first, it is important to have a realistic understanding of what this proposal is – and is not. The Governor’s budget proposal is just that: a proposal, an opening salvo, a negotiating position that begins in earnest discussions among policymakers as to what the state’s next three years of spending priorities will be. Even in years where the Legislature and the Ninth Floor are controlled by the same party, the Governor’s budget is more a way for her to signal, both to the Legislature and to her base of electoral supporters, what she believes is important than it is an actual, realistic outline of what the budget will ultimately become.

In no place is this more evident in this year’s budget than in the Governor’s proposed education spending. Her proposal would invest heavily in education, above and beyond the additional \$1 billion Arizona dedicated to education in last year’s bipartisan budget. Governor Hobbs would invest almost \$200 million in teacher and staff retention and more than \$333 million in building funds to address deteriorating school infrastructure. And it would pay for these new investments by repealing one of the most celebrated legislative accomplishments of the last legislature: expanded eligibility for Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) to all Arizona students.

In other words, the Governor opened high. (And immediately, GOP leadership at the Legislature panned the proposal.) But, in all reality, she had to take that position: if Hobbs signs a budget that doesn’t eliminate universal ESAs, she’s going to have to prove



At the state capitol, this is just the beginning of a long six months of give-and-take that we’re about to witness when it comes to determining the State’s spending priorities.

to her base that the budget still has something she wanted. And likewise, if Speaker Toma refuses to sign a budget that eliminates the ESA program he championed last year, he will have to make compromises somewhere else to make that budget palatable for Governor Hobbs.

Other proposals in the Governor’s budget are less controversial, like adding an additional \$250 million to the state’s rainy-day fund and spending \$200 million on state employee retention, including salary increases. There are also significant investments in rural broadband and grant assistance to help rural communities access federal transportation grants.

On the natural resources side of things, the proposal would continue to invest in the expanded Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (WIFA) that the Farm Bureau championed last year, making the second of three \$333 million deposits into the Long-Term Water Augmentation Fund. There is also a proposed \$5 million in funding to the Department of Water Resources,

tagged for giving that department additional capacity to set up Active Management Areas in the state. Again, this is a way for the Governor to signal her priorities through spending, this priority being the expansion and modernization of groundwater regulatory provisions across the state – something that the Farm Bureau is monitoring with great concern.

At any rate, this is just the beginning of a long six months of give-and-take that we’re about to witness when it comes to determining the State’s spending priorities. Settle in and know that Arizona Farm Bureau can be your trusted resource for real-time updates, insights, and action alerts on the budget – and everything that happens in between. 🚜

SELL YOUR STUFF AND SUPPORT AG EDUCATION

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

Do you have old and outdated equipment around the farm? Maybe you upgraded and just haven’t had the time to sell that old piece of equipment. Here is your chance to clean up the yard and support Ag Education at the same time! The Arizona Farm Bureau has teamed up with Big Iron Auctions for a focus auction benefitting Arizona Farm Bureau’s Educational Farming Company.

How does it work? Contact Big Iron Auctions and let them know that you want to be a part of the focus auction. They will come out to your place, take pictures, and generate a detailed description of what you have to sell. Then, your item will be included in their online auction on **March 22nd**.

Why use Big Iron? They have a wide and diverse network of buyers which will help you get the best price for your item! You must have your item listed by **February 17th** to participate in the focus auction.

What do you do with the item once it is sold on March 22nd? The buyer is responsible for pick-up and removal. You can work directly with the buyer to coordinate the best

HAVE EQUIPMENT TO SELL?



REGISTER TO BID ON BIGIRON



pick-up date, but they make all the arrangements.

How am I helping Ag Education by participating? Big Iron Auctions will donate a portion of the proceeds from the focus auction to Arizona Farm Bureau’s Educational Farming Company to support ag education in Arizona.

Editor’s Note: For more information, contact Debbie Sallee, regional manager at 402.239.4791 or Danny McGaugh, district manager at 520.907.4325. The deadline to list equipment you want to sell is February 17th to make it for the March 22nd Focus Auction on behalf of Arizona Farm Bureau’s Educational Farming Company. No transportation requirements on the part of seller as Big Iron lists and sells from the equipment’s location. 🚜



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Finally, In addition, social media provides a great opportunity for the Arizona Farm Bureau to educate the public about the importance of agriculture and the role of farmers in our society. By sharing stories, pictures, and videos See **SOCIAL MEDIA** Page 8

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES continued from Page 4

working towards local solutions. Diablo Trust has created a working group that is addressing recreation issues on the Diablo Trust ranches and all-around northern Arizona. The USFS is participating in a newly formed working group; Greater Sedona Recreation Collaborative to identify and see implemented solutions to better mitigate, manage and maintain OHV recreation.

Arizona Agriculture: What tips would you give other ranchers in working with other groups and agencies?

Ross: Our neighbor, Andy Groseta gave me great advice about eight years ago to document everything with photos, dates and notes. We had a conversation when I first decided it was time to address the recreational issues we were dealing with on the ranch. Lots of trash, dumping, homelessness, campers overstaying in the forest, and general overuse impacts on natural resources and on ranch improvements. At that time, OHVs were not the primary problem for us but are now. Unfortunately, unlike recreational trends, land management agencies are not flexible or quick-moving, with a big ship, and small rudder. But ranchers are here for the long run. We have been here long before social media shared every hidden spot and “Instawrecked” many corners of our state. We will still be here, caring for the land and our cattle long after people go home, or move on to the next spot.

About five years ago, I took on the position of telling the story that I see daily on the ranch. If someone in a white van was camping on our water trough, using the Game and Fish “No Camping Within a ¼ mile of Water” as a brace for his tent, I snapped a picture. I shared the story with everyone I could. Every USFS, local, state or national official I connected with would get an email about the craziness I saw. 200 camps in the first couple miles on the ranch, I shared that data. I photographed the progression and spread of off-road damage. I have lots of before and after photos and would share them side by side. Another fantastic resource for documentation is Google Earth Pro, which has historical photos. I have used their archival information to share before and after aerial photos. Google Earth Pro is an excellent resource to prove that OHVs are widening roads, braiding roads and turning grass rangelands into dirt doughnut spots.

While I remember what the ranch looked like twenty or thirty years ago, the people in the USFS office may not understand the history or progression of damage. People making management decisions on the ranch want and need to know, and that is often very hard to understand what’s really going on from a USFS office. It’s our job to tell that story because there is no one else that understands it better than the people that live and work on the land.

The lesson I learned along the way is to not take these tough situations personally or place blame on land management agencies. But I take every opportunity to tell the story. To make the necessary change, we must provide documentation proving that there’s a problem and share it.

Arizona Agriculture: Is this the opportunity to have more “common ground” with environmental groups?

Ross: I have had the privilege of learning from environmental advocates at a local level and the same folks have been very willing to listen to me. I have been warmly welcomed by people and groups that I would have never expected to work with. We need to take the opportunity to connect with others that in the past may not see eye to eye with us. It’s our responsibility to show that we as producers are improving the health of our forests with regenerative grazing practices. Ranchers already have the tools and have been implementing range improvements for decades, but we need to share what we are doing.

Arizona Agriculture: Besides the obvious, why should more of us be concerned?

Ross: At a local level, we see a death loss of range grasses and trees alongside roads that are heavily used by speeding OHVs. The dust is choking range near the road. We also see rangeland denude of vegetation due to ex-

treme off-road driving and as a result, erosion which creates a less desirable runoff. I wish our stock tanks would catch slow-moving water, filtered by healthy rangeland. But we have tanks on the ranch that have been blown out or are filling with silt at a faster rate than in the past. While that may be expensive, at this level it is generally fixable.

On a statewide scale, for example, sediment is taking up water storage space at the bottom of Lake Pleasant and requires huge investments in infrastructure to remedy the issue. While we can’t change the drought and how it has affected our water systems, we can expect a change in bad behavior that is damaging to that system. Air and water quality at a state level is considered the highest concern by almost everyone. What is the effect this adventure activity is having on our watershed and the air we all breathe?

Arizona Agriculture: Are you hopeful?

Ross: I am hopeful because more people in agriculture, residents and legislators are talking about it. People are aware of the problem and damage. In previous years, I would try to share our story, and few understood the problem. I got a lot of blank stares. But as the resource damage becomes more widespread people are taking notice.

Unfortunately, we can all see the damage caused by OHVs in many areas across the state, not just tucked away on rural ranches. Look around Lake Pleasant, north of Peoria or along I-17 in the Black Canyon City area, or east of the valley, Box Canyon, Sycamore Creek, and around Florence. The damage is becoming so apparent that currently, just about everyone I talk to about OHV damage is aware of the problem, has a story of their own, or knows of ranches that have been impacted. Everyone has seen state or federal land that has been impacted by negligent OHV operators.

Arizona Agriculture: What’s Next?

Ross: I would love to ask readers to share their stories and photos with me. I am interested in learning about other farmers and ranchers experiencing OHV issues across the state. I want to bring this information to the Arizona OHV Study Committee that will be convening this year. It’s my responsibility to share not just my story, but others’ stories as well. State legislators are listening. It will be a much more powerful statement, if the information is coming from across the state, not just from the few people that I connect with. But this will only work if we are willing to take the time to collect stories, photos, and some data and share it with them. Please reach out to me!

Editor’s Note: If you are interested in sharing your own experiences with OHV incidents on your ranch, send an email with your story to outreach@azfb.org and our team will forward it to Becki Ross. 📧

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about the work of farmers, the organization can help to raise awareness about the challenges that farmers face and the importance of supporting local agriculture. You’ll see this a lot with our regular release of videos on our social media channels. And, we cover every Arizona agriculture topic imaginable.

Social media is a valuable tool for the Arizona Farm Bureau, providing many benefits such as expanding reach, engaging with our audiences, promoting events and activities, education and cost-effectiveness. It can help the organization to connect with its members and the general public and communicate more effectively about the importance of agriculture and the role of farmers in our society.

Be sure to follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest: 📺



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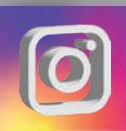
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