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A CONVERSATION ABOUT ARIZONA AGRICULTURE'S ECONOMY: GEORGE FRISVOLD

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Released November 19th, Arizona agriculture and agribusiness' overall economic contribution to the state is now \$30.9 billion, a number based primarily on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Census of Agriculture. This nearly \$31 billion represents an almost \$8 billion dollar increase over the previous \$23.3 billion number released back in 2017. Any new economic numbers in the agriculture industry in Arizona can only be calculated and released after the latest USDA Census of Agriculture, conducted every five years.

The Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension's economic team of Claudia Montaña, Dari Duval, George Frisvold, José Quintero first announced the numbers at Arizona Farm Bureau's Annual Meeting in Tucson last November. The team's primary data set was the Census of Agriculture but rolled in other economic data sets including Department of Labor numbers related to employment in the agriculture and agribusiness sectors.

Recognized along with colleagues Ashley Kerna Bickel and Dari Duval for the Extension's Economic Impact Assessment Team Award in the past, George Frisvold, Ph.D., leads what I personally call the "A-Team" in economic research. Their agricultural-based economic assessments on the local, state, and national levels have helped define and advance the true contributions of Arizona agriculture's now nearly \$31 billion industry. Dr. Frisvold and his current team approach their economic research with the expected caution, calmness, and curiosity required of one mining for nuggets of gold, but in their case information and knowledge.

Joining the faculty at the University of Arizona in 1997, Dr. Frisvold previously was a visiting scholar at the National Institute of Rural Development in Hyderabad, India, a lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, and Chief of the Resource and Environmental Policy Branch of USDA's Economic Research Service.

His research interests include domestic and international environmen-

tal policy, as well as the causes and consequences of technological change in agriculture. In 1995-96, Dr. Frisvold served as a Senior Economist for the President's Council of Economic Advisers with responsibility for agricultural, natural resources, and international trade issues.

He is currently the Bartley P. Cardon Chair of Agribusiness Economics and Policy and an associate editor for two journals: Pest Management Science and Water Economics and Policy. In 2020, Dr. Frisvold co-authored the National Academies of Science, Engineering, & Medicine report, Safeguarding the Bioeconomy: Finding Strategies for Understanding, Evaluating, and Protecting the Bioeconomy while Sustaining Innovation and Growth.

Despite the challenges facing Arizona and American agriculture including not having an updated farm bill, Arizona's economic numbers in the agriculture sector were welcome news. To Dr. Frisvold and others, they reflect a resiliency in a critical and "must-have" industry. As former Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse likes to say, "We don't farm in the desert despite it, but because of it." Those 300-plus days of sunshine and robust soils and talented farmers mean the efforts to make agriculture and agribusiness successful in Arizona pay off in healthy numbers despite challenges.

Arizona Agriculture: Based on the introduction of this article, what is the most important takeaway to this study that you'd like to share with our Arizona farmers and ranchers?

Dr. Frisvold: Despite several challenges, Arizona agriculture and agribusiness is still going strong. A number of stakeholders have emphasized that there's a lot of economic activity in terms of post-harvest packaging, warehousing, distribution and processing that need to be accounted for. We've listened to and included that in this latest economic report.

For a thorough assessment, all agriculture and agribusiness require data mining, and this economic report does that.

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"The entire Arizona agribusiness system provides unique things to the nation as a whole, not just to the state," explained Dr. Frisvold during Arizona Farm Bureau's Annual Meeting where the new \$31 billion economic number was first announced.

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU'S 2025 PRIORITY ISSUES

By Chad Smith, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations

In a marathon six-hour policy development session, members from across the state weighed in on new policies with the expertise that only those who live with these issues every day can bring. From tax policy to trade, labor reform to water management, our delegates left no stone unturned.

Based on these policy directives from the delegates, the Arizona Farm Bureau Board of Directors also approved a list of top policy priorities to guide our organization as we look for ways to embed our policy into legislation and regulation.

As always, this year's policy priorities are ambitious. But we're confident that throughout the year, we will find and create meaningful opportunities to act on each of them to the benefit of our members.

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU'S 2025 PRIORITY ISSUES INCLUDE:

Water Management

Farm Bureau will advocate for agriculture's critical role in Arizona's water discussions. As state leaders seek improvements in water management, we will ensure that both the value of water to agriculture and agriculture's contribution to the state are prioritized.

Tax Policy

Arizona Farm Bureau will fight to keep taxes low for agricultural businesses, advocating for favorable tax classifications and sales tax treatments that recognize agriculture's unique value. We will support sound tax policies, including those in the Tax Cuts & Jobs Act set to expire in 2026.

Transportation

We believe deregulating Arizona's transportation industry—excluding safety and licensing—is vital for agricultural success. The Farm Bureau will advocate for streamlined inspections and oppose unnecessary regulations, while also promoting infrastructure investments, especially in rural areas, to ensure efficient product distribution.

ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Trade

With over 95% of potential consumers outside the U.S., unburdened trade is essential. The Arizona Farm Bureau will seek new trade opportunities for Arizona's agricultural products, leveraging our strong agricultural market ties.

Labor Reform

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YUMA FARMER JOHN BOELTS STEPS UP AS ARIZONA FARM BUREAU PRESIDENT

By Staff Reports

During the 103 Annual Meeting of the Arizona Farm Bureau, Yuma farmer John Boelts stepped up as Arizona Farm Bureau President as Stefanie Smallhouse stepped down. President Boelts will finish out Smallhouse's last year of her current 2-year term with the option of running for election in November of 2025.

Boelts, and his wife Alicia, farm 3,000 acres of fresh vegetables and melons, durum wheat, cotton, forage crops and seed crops along with their partners in Yuma. John has served two terms as Yuma County Farm Bureau President, four years as Arizona Farm Bureau 2nd Vice President and the last seven years serving as 1st Vice President.

President Smallhouse stepped down to pivot to family and their farm and ranch businesses going forward. Her seven years as president led the organization through some challenging times including the ongoing water issues in Arizona and also brought focused direction and policy successes to the organization.

"My memory is filled with so many stories from our members across the state and I will have a lasting connection to them regardless of whether our paths cross again," said President Smallhouse. "My peers from other states, who share similar experiences to my own and have advised me or



sharpened my skills along the way, will always be treasured. John is ideal to step into the Arizona Farm Bureau presidency role and I'm excited for how he will carry the organization forward."

During an interview with the Arizona Republic's Clara Migoya, Boelts expressed his appreciation of the organization's volunteer leaders and the future. "We have a deep bench at the Arizona Farm Bureau, a lot of great volunteer leaders from across the state. So, I'm very excited to have the opportunity to continue working with all of them to get some of these important changes to public policy and improve the opportunities for agriculture in our great state."

John and Alicia have three children, John, Matthew and Daisy.

Also in leadership, Pinal County Farm Bureau President and Farmer Richie Kennedy stepped into the First Vice Presidency position and Yavapai County Farm Bureau President and Agribusiness woman Sharla Mortimer become Second Vice President.

President Boelts' executive committee will include Graham County Farm Bureau President and Rancher Ben Menges and Cochise County Farm Bureau President and Agribusinessman Stephen Klump. This committee includes the First and Second Vice Presidents. 🌾

ARM IN ARM WITH GREAT ADVOCATES

By John Boelts, Arizona Farm Bureau President



Newly Appointed Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts Arm in Arm with Great Advocates

A company of famous travelers on a rural yellow brick road once worried about lions and tigers and bears so much so that they would exclaim, "Oh my!" in terror of what they thought lay before them. It is easy to be fearful of the future, and maybe even more so because of what we think the future may hold. However, as Farm Bureau members we have the privilege of traveling in a company of amazing fellow member leaders, out-

standing professional staff and an insurance and financial services company second to none on our side as we travel through life and navigate our personal and professional decision-making.

On November 19, I had the privilege of assuming the presidency of the Arizona Farm Bureau. I take over leadership of our grassroots organization at a time when many topics are at the forefront for agriculture and consumers. Under the excellent leadership of my predecessor, Stefanie Smallhouse, our organization and members have been navigating and meeting challenging times regarding water, air quality, labor shortages, trade deficits, record increases in inflation and volatile markets for our products, head on. In spite of these challenges we face, our Arizona Farm Bureau family and organization are poised to continue to fight on behalf of our members, and that is exactly what we will do.

Some examples of the seamless transition of power in our organization has been our continuing efforts on new groundwater management legislation, the 2026 Colorado River reauthorization efforts, labor reform and the addition of Mexican Gray Wolf predation compensation in the upcoming Farm Bill for ranchers.

A few years ago, Stefanie appointed me to the American Farm Bureau Labor Committee, which I have chaired these last couple of years. Through these efforts, we have been restructuring our American Farm Bureau (AFBF) labor policies and have recently completed an update with the help of all the Farm Bureau state staffs from across the country, in an effort to be ready when Congress takes action on this most important legislation for agriculture. On water issues from the Willcox Basin to Mohave County, and from Navajo to Yuma, we have been working diligently to focus on water needs and position our organization to carry the torch for current and future needs on behalf of Arizona agriculture.

Additionally, a year ago Stefanie asked me to take over the coveted position she had held participating on the Arizona Reconsultation Committee (ARC). That committee advises Governor Hobbs and her Department of Water

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Julie Murphree, Editor

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AGRICULTURE’S ECONOMY: GEORGE FRISVOLD *continued from Page 1*

Arizona Agriculture: I recall last year you’d mentioned our \$23.3 billion number was a bit “long in the tooth.” In other words, it had been some time since the last study. But explain to our readers why this is the case, especially because of the USDA Census of Agriculture.

Dr. Frisvold: The USDA Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years. The most recent survey year was 2022. Our new results are based on that year. Previous surveys were conducted for 2017 and 2012. Our last economic impact contribution relied heavily on the 2012 Census, so it’s just over 10 years old, so yes, it’s “long in the tooth.”

We like to base analysis off the Census of Agriculture because it is the most detailed survey of U.S. agriculture. We also rely on other annual survey data from other USDA surveys, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Labor. Each data source provides some unique information about Arizona, but each one also leaves things out.

It’s good to look at all these different sources together with the Census to get a more complete picture of what is going on. We also like to compare numbers across different data sources to check for consistency. The Census of Agriculture picks things up, especially at the county level that no other survey does. Because agricultural production and prices are so volatile, you don’t want to do this kind of study every year because the number would bounce up and down year-to-year. Ten years is too long between studies, but I think every five years is about right. So hopefully we’ll get a new number out as soon as possible after the 2027 Census of Agriculture.

Arizona Agriculture: On the big number at nearly \$31 billion, you told me that’s not really the number you pay attention to. Why and what do you extrapolate from the data that really excites you?

Dr. Frisvold: To be honest, economists don’t pay too much attention to that top-level total sales contribution number. Sales is a number that is easiest for most people to understand. Economists would focus more on value added (equivalent to GDP), which is a smaller net, number. I find that the parts that go into that \$31 billion number are more meaningful.

Yuma is the center of U.S. winter vegetable production. Nogales is a center of border food trade. There’s a giant beef and dairy complex in the center of the state that serves the Phoenix metro area, the 10th largest metro area in the country. Up north there is public lands ranching and tribal agriculture that feeds into that Central Arizona beef complex. Plus, there is even a small but growing winery sector. The diversity and national importance of Arizona agriculture is really difficult to capture in any single number.

There’s been a lot written recently about water used to produce alfalfa, but also people’s desire for local food. The vast bulk of feed and forage production in Central Arizona is supporting beef and dairy products going to the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas. Alfalfa is the local food of your local food.

Arizona Agriculture: What was your combination of datasets used to compile these numbers and why is this grouping so important to understanding the economic impact of Agriculture in our state?

Dr. Frisvold: I mentioned the USDA, Commerce, and Labor data we use already. In addition, we use the data and software from the IMPLAN model to measure multiplier effects. IMPLAN is a proprietary input-output model economists use to estimate how spending in some sectors of the economy affects spending in other sectors.

For example, agricultural producers buy inputs, agricultural input producers in turn need inputs that they buy from other industries. Those industries require inputs, and so on. So agricultural production sets off a chain reaction of demand and spending that we would not have in Arizona if not for agriculture.

A lot of this spending is outside of agriculture. Farmers, ranchers, and their employees also spend their profits and salaries on consumer goods and services. Spending on these consumer goods and services are mostly non-agricultural, but the spending wouldn’t happen if not for agriculture. These multiplier effects mean that Arizona agriculture generates incomes and supports jobs in industries far beyond agriculture. The direct effects of agriculture are things anyone can estimate just looking at federal statistics.

The IMPLAN model, by estimating these multiplier effects is the “secret sauce” that captures the full contribution of agriculture to Arizona’s economy. Now IMPLAN’s basic framework is based on much of the data we also use, but their coverage at the county level can be spotty. Also, their base model assumes national averages of costs of production, output per worker, etc. Relying on national averages for agricultural production can really bias results.

Arizona production tends to have higher costs and higher yields than the national average. So, we have to take the data and model variables from IMPLAN and re-adjust them to accurately reflect Arizona agriculture. The detailed Census of Agriculture data is really vital to get estimates that accurately reflect Arizona production conditions.

Arizona Agriculture: We’ve had some big hits lately in agriculture with water cuts especially, why is this data so significant despite our challenges in agriculture?

Dr. Frisvold: The data show that producers are innovating and diver-

sifying into higher value production to get more value per drop of water. Despite these cuts, Central Arizona is still a national hub of agricultural production. Cuts have been sharper since 2022, so we’re monitoring things on the ground at the county level to see how and how well growers are adapting.

Arizona Agriculture: Okay, now I’m asking you to be the philosopher, perhaps a pontificator, not the economist. Why is Arizona agriculture so significant as an economic driver in this state? What should we as agriculturists be discussing besides the big number?

Dr. Frisvold: The entire Arizona agribusiness system provides unique things to the nation as a whole, not just to the state. Arizona agriculture is extremely productive, especially relative to other parts of the Colorado Basin. So as disputes over Colorado River water use continue (and they are sure to continue) it is important to keep in mind what agriculture does for consumers not just in Phoenix and Tucson, but what it contributes to food production nationally and regionally.

Arizona Agriculture: Are there any stories behind some of these numbers that’s important for us to hear about?

Dr. Frisvold: We estimated the agribusiness system directly and indirectly supported more than 126,000 full- and part-time jobs, employing more than 160,000 unique workers. This estimate of unique workers is likely an underestimate. Different federal agencies and surveys have estimates of people employed in agriculture. Each source is incomplete, and numbers are not consistent across sources. More people are working in agriculture than the “official numbers” (and there are multiple “official numbers”) suggest. We try to account for this, but we’re still conservative. Also, seasonal peaks in employment will be much higher than estimates averaged over a year.

Arizona Agriculture: What was most surprising and why?

Dr. Frisvold: Going in, we already knew that the big three agricultural counties – Maricopa, Pinal, and Yuma – were agricultural powerhouses, ranking in the top 1% of all U.S. counties in a number of agricultural sales indicators.

What surprised me was the strength of Arizona’s other counties. Cochise County is in the top 10% of all U.S. counties in total crop sales and top 8% in vegetable sales. Graham County is in the top 10% in cotton and cottonseed sales. Apache, Coconino, Mohave, Navajo, and Yavapai are in the top third of all U.S. counties in vegetable production.

In terms of vegetable production in the state, these counties are swamped by Yuma, whose sales are greater than 99.9% of all other U.S. counties. Sales in these Northern Arizona counties are small relative to Yuma, but they are significant relative to other U.S. counties. So, there are interesting shifts in Northern Arizona toward higher value vegetable production. A lot of this is happening on Tribal farms. It’s something I want to explore further.

Arizona Agriculture: How do we use these numbers for the future?

Dr. Frisvold: I can say a little about how the old number was used. Members of Congress use it when writing to the Executive Branch about trade disputes and policies. It’s used in comments to EPA about implications of pesticide regulations. At the University of Arizona, researchers use the number when applying for competitive federal grants to highlight potential benefits of research. State agencies use during policy debates over allocation of Colorado River waters. Now these groups can cite a more up-to-date number instead of one a decade old. With state-level policies, such as groundwater regulation, I think it focuses attention on the value of agriculture and the costs of taking water away from agriculture.

Arizona Agriculture: These numbers, certainly the USDA Census of Agriculture numbers, are a historical moment in time. In fact, the numbers were captured in 2022 and here we are at the beginning of 2025. Help us understand the significance despite the historical timeframe of the numbers.

Dr. Frisvold: With this type of analysis, we are always looking in the rear-view mirror. USDA conducted the Census of Agriculture in 2022, but didn’t release the data until mid-February of 2024. So, for our Regional Economic Analysis (REAP) team, it was “all hands-on deck” to get the analysis complete by last November.

People get frustrated with the lags in the data. Anyone can look at prices on their smartphones and have a number for today. For sales and production, though, there are lags of a year or more. Also, several agencies update their numbers repeatedly. So, we must wait until the “dust has settled” before conducting analyses.

The numbers show that as of 2022, Arizona agriculture and agribusiness is going strong. We’re the national epicenter of winter vegetable production. We’re a hub of U.S.- Mexico agricultural trade. We have a large dairy, beef, and feed complex that provides local food to the 10th largest metro area in the country. We have a small but growing wine industry in the state and growing vegetable production in Northern Arizona. So, there’s a promising combination of traditional strengths and diversification and innovation. Going forward, Arizona is going to face challenges with water availability, labor availability and global trade disputes. But I think the overall numbers signal, so far so good. 🍷

ARM IN ARM WITH GREAT ADVOCATES *continued from Page 2*

Resources on Colorado River water needs. This is a key post that President Smallhouse fought hard to have and is one of only a handful of seats held by representatives of agriculture’s interest on the ARC. Holding this position has been key for Arizona agriculture and our efforts to maintain our use of Colorado River water at current levels. And lastly, on our most recent trip to Washington D.C. in September, Stefanie and I, along with members of our Arizona Farm Bureau (AZFB) delegation to Congress strongly advocated to Chairman GT Thompson of the House Ag Committee that our efforts to add livestock predation compensation to ranchers for Mexican Gray Wolf livestock kills be continued in whatever new form the next Farm Bill takes in the current or future Congresses. These are just a handful of the public policy efforts underway that our AZFB leadership and members will continue to be working on until we find success for our members.

The 16th president of our country famously said, “The easiest way to

predict the future is to create it.” It’s hard to think about the future and not think about the many challenges we face in all directions, but my ask to each of you as members of the Farm Bureau is that we all thank God for our many blessings, and not be paralyzed by our concerns of what challenges we face, but rather focus on the future of what our farms and ranches can be as we work together.

As the grassroots organization that Farm Bureau is, I am excited at the opportunity to look forward with a positive vision of what Arizona agriculture can be for us as ranchers and farmers, as well as the bounty that we can produce for consumers across our country and around the world. This is a rural “yellow brick road” we can certainly travel together and with confidence even when we don’t know what’s around the bend.

Our future is truly bright. 🍷

2025 PRIORITY ISSUES

continued from Page 1

Farm Bureau will advocate for effective labor reforms tailored to agriculture’s needs.

Farm Policy

We will push for policies that empower farmers and ranchers to produce safe, affordable food amidst market uncertainties and natural disasters.

Land Use & Environmental Regulation

Farm Bureau supports farmers and ranchers as stewards of natural resources, advocating for accessible land and water without excessive regulatory burdens.

SHORT-TERM GOALS

Over the next year, Arizona Farm Bureau will focus on embedding our policy priorities into legislation and regulation.

Agriculture’s Access to Water

- Colorado River: Engage in post-2026 discussions, support irrigation districts, and advocate against transferring agricultural entitlements to municipalities.
- Rural Groundwater: Collaborate with rural water users to find proactive solutions based on the Rural Groundwater Working Group report.
- Management Areas: Promote user-friendly regulations for Active Management Areas (AMAs) and Irrigation Non-Expansion Areas (INAs).

Affordable and Reliable Power

- Arizona Farm Bureau will advocate to ensure rural communities and agriculture have robust access to affordable and reliable electricity, including preference hydropower.

Arizona Department of Agriculture

- Advocate for adequate staffing and financial resources.
- Expand livestock producers’ access to local processing facilities.
- Collaborate on committee for Bovine Trichomoniasis to develop sound policy that will address the industry’s growing concerns.



The work the Arizona Farm Bureau delegate body conducts during the Annual Meetings translates into the key priority issues the Board of Directors votes on after the main meeting. Like previous ones, this year’s work covered a wide range of issues.

- Work with the Arizona Department of Ag and producers to ensure high quality cotton seed.

Off-highway Vehicles (OHV)

- Work with industry and stakeholders to address the challenges faced with OHV use in Arizona.

Farm Bill Advocacy

- Advocate for passage of a new modernized 5-year Farm Bill.
- Prioritize risk management tools like crop insurance and expand coverage for specialty crops that are supported by industry needs, market data, and economic modeling.
- Ensure USDA has adequate resources for technical assistance and funding that are reflective of current conditions.
- Advocate for disaster assistance programs that recognize regional differences.
- Support the Wolf Act and further develop and advance a pay-for-presence program.

State and Federal Lands

- Protect agricultural leases on state land and monitor renewable energy development.
- Communicate with federal agencies about grazing needs for resource management and food security.
- Develop strategies for optimizing wildfire response and improving recovery programs.
- Address recreational damage from OHV use.

Agricultural Labor

- The Farm Bureau will focus on addressing issues like the Adverse Effect Wage Rate and disaggregated job classifications while continuing to pursue broad labor reform.

It’s our policy development process that allows Government Relations staff to say, with complete confidence, that our policy represents the will of the entire Arizona agricultural industry. Thank you to each of our members for participating in this essential task! 🚜

Editor’s Note: For more information, go to www.azfb.org/public-policy.



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NEW CRISIS HELPLINE OPENS FOR ARIZONA’S AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY COMMUNITIES

The AgriStress Helpline, a collaborative effort by AgriSafe Network and Arizona state partners, offers specialized crisis support for the agricultural community.

By Staff Reports

A crisis helpline dedicated to serving Arizona’s agricultural and forestry communities is now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The AgriStress Helpline is free and confidential and can be reached by calling or texting 833-897-AGRI (2474). Phone call interpretation is available in 160 languages, and text message services are available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

“Arizona’s farmers and ranchers face many stressors, many beyond their control, yet they tend to keep it to themselves and fight through their challenges alone. It doesn’t have to be this way,” said Paul Brierley, director of the Arizona Department of Agriculture. “I am very excited for the launch of the the AgriStress Helpline, which will provide needed resources and outreach to our rural and agricultural communities.”

AgriSafe Network, a non-profit organization, launched the helpline in Arizona in October 2024 with help from partners across the state including the University of [Arizona Cooperative Extension](#), Arizona Department of Agriculture, Arizona Farm Bureau, Arizona Department of Health Services, and Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

“Our statewide community needs assessment highlighted mental well-being as a key community priority, which is why we started the Agriculture and Rural Mental Health Collaborative with our partners in 2023. Together, we identified the need for tailored supports to meet the unique needs of Arizona’s agriculture community. The AgriStress Helpline is an essential resource dedicated to addressing these needs,” said Michele Walsh, associate director for family, consumer and health sciences for the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension.

“AHCCCS and the state’s crisis continuum proudly collaborate with the AgriStress Helpline, providing specialized support to Arizona’s agricultural community,” said Andrew Medina, crisis and justice systems administrator for AHCCCS, the state’s Medicaid agency.

“This support is crucial due to the unique challenges faced by farmers, ranchers and agricultural workers, including isolation, financial stress, and physical demands.”

OVERCOMING THE STIGMA

The American Farm Bureau Federation identified financial difficulties,

business challenges, and the fear of losing one’s farm as [significant factors affecting farmers’ mental health](#). Additionally, barriers like cost, social stigma, and embarrassment often prevent farmers from seeking mental health support. Based on analyses using data from ADHS Bureau of Vital Statistics, UA researchers found that Arizona producers have 2.5 times the risk of suicide compared to non-producers.

“We are grateful that this resource will now be available to all Arizonans and appreciate the hard work of our team of collaborators that have made it possible. Farming and ranching can be a stressful occupation and has its unique challenges,” said Phil Bashaw, chief executive officer of Arizona Farm Bureau. “Sadly, that is why we are seeing suicide rates for farmers at rates that are two to five times higher than the national average. That is why it is so important to expand access to mental health resources for our agriculture producers and encourage anyone who is struggling to reach out for help.”

The AgriStress Helpline is unique because it is completely dedicated to serving Arizona’s agriculture and forestry communities. Both the AgriStress Helpline and 988 offer high quality suicide crisis services – but AgriStress’ credentialed specialists are trained in cultural competencies in agricultural mental health and affecting factors, including production and financial issues, injuries, market fluctuations and family dynamics. The service extends beyond farmers, farm workers, ranchers, fishermen, and foresters to include their families.

“The Agri-Stress Helpline directly supports Arizona’s Suicide Prevention Action Plan by offering crisis resources tailored to the agriculture industry, an at-risk profession. This specialized line reinforces our commitment to occupation-based crisis support statewide through our Suicide Prevention Action Plan,” said Joshua Stegemeyer, the ADHS Suicide Program Manager.

All AgriStress Helpline calls are answered within 30 seconds or less. Intervention occurs for people at imminent risk, and others are offered resources tailored to the agriculture community. All callers are offered a 24-hour follow-up call, also through the AgriStress Helpline. 📞

Editor’s Note: For more information about the AgriStress Helpline, visit agrisafe.org/agristress-helpline

OVERREACHING DEPARTMENT OF LABOR RULE HALTED NATIONWIDE

By Staff Reports

A Arizona Farm Bureau, American Farm Bureau (AFBF) and other industry coalition members achieved a crucial win at the end of last November that will help farmers across the country. The agriculture organizations were granted a preliminary injunction by the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi barring the Department of Labor (DOL) from enforcing its Worker Protection Rule extending unionization rights to H-2A visa holders.

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall commented on the litigation and the district court’s nationwide injunction barring DOL’s rule. “Farmers appreciate the dedicated men and women who choose to work on their farms, and they take seriously the responsibility of ensuring a safe workplace,” Duvall said. “Farm Bureau agrees that workers should be treated fairly and respectfully. We also believe fairness to farmers is important and the DOL rule was overly broad to the point of being unlawful.”

And in Arizona, Yuma farmer John Boelts explains how important this injunction is to agriculture. “I was thankful to be a party to this legislation as a plaintiff in the Mississippi case, along with the other plaintiffs. There are several agricultural employers who would’ve suffered under this new rule, and the court got it right this time, thankfully. Farmers and ranchers value their employees supporting them with the upmost respect. The Department of Labor was way out of line, and I appreciate the Farm Bureau

and other organizations stepping up to help us all as plaintiffs to stop implementation of portions of this rule. Ultimately, I hope the entire rule is struck down.”

AFBF President Duvall also said, “We appreciate that the court recognized the overreach of the rule. We urge the DOL to go back to the drawing board and engage with H-2A employers to better understand the impact more regulations will have on the men and women who work to ensure America’s families have food on the table.”

Two other courts previously blocked the rule in several states and for certain groups, but AFBF’s lawsuit was the first to stop key aspects of the rule for all farmers nationwide.

Boelts who is also serving as Arizona Farm Bureau President added, “We stand at a crossroads in the United States. Will we produce the food and fiber Americans and others around the world need every day, or will we be forced to import our food and fiber? It is very sad to me that that is where we potentially are. Under these types of rules, administrations are basically telling farmers and ranchers, as well as U.S. consumers, that we will import our food and fiber because the rules and regulations will force us out of business. We stand in opposition to that idea and look forward to every opportunity to improve public policy and cultivate more growth and prosperity for agricultural and consumers.” 🚜

THE BEST IN ARIZONA AGRICULTURE CELEBRATED AT THE 103RD ANNUAL MEETING

Staff Reports

A Arizona hosts some of America’s top farmers and ranchers. This is evident every exciting opening night of Arizona Farm Bureau’s Awards Banquet.

The Arizona Farm Bureau annually recognizes Arizona’s farmers, ranchers and dairy farmers for their achievements. The following awards were given during the Service to Agriculture Awards Banquet during the 103rd Arizona Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Tucson.

AG COMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR: NICK CILETTI



A seven-time Emmy award-winning journalist, Nick Ciletti joined ABC15 in July 2014. He can be viewed every weekday anchoring ABC15 mornings from 4:30 a.m. to 7 a.m. Nick graduated from the University of Miami’s School of Communication, majoring in Broadcast Journalism. He holds a certificate in U.S. Immigration Law from American University and completed his master’s studies in Law from the University of Southern

California’s Gould School of Law.

As an anchor, Nick has helped walk viewers through some of Arizona’s most historic and impactful moments, from the 2020 election, a statewide teacher strike, and the passing of Senator John McCain.

As the impact of the drought came into acute focus, Nick took a keen interest in the influence the drought would have on our agriculture pro-

ducers. He interviewed several farmers to better understand the impact of drought and DCP Negotiations for Colorado river water resources. Nick spent a lot of time with Pinal County farmer Nancy Caywood learning about the drought impacts to agriculture, and particularly Pinal County.

As the drought in Arizona continued, Nick stated, “Farming has never been an easy job. Add in the water concerns and issues with inflation, and for some farmers, the challenges are becoming insurmountable.” These thought-provoking words brought Nick Ciletti to Pinal County so he could bring awareness to viewers on issues and challenges farmers face. His keen commitment to telling our story also earned him the Ag Communicator of the Year recognition.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD: MILO ANDRUS



Milo Andrus grew up on a small cattle and sheep operation in Idaho where every pasture had access to water. In fact, the Andrus family never had to worry about water. But then Milo and his wife, Hayley, moved to Arizona and spent the first few months of their new life hauling water to the cows.

They quickly learned

hauling water was not sustainable, nor practical. As soon as it rained that first year, Milo began planning out how to improve the situation to get out of the water-truck hauling business.

As a result, he began endless work restoring and improving the water capacity and in turn restoring the area's rangeland. He put the first solar well on the property with a small pipeline, and never looked back.

In the 11 years Milo has been ranching in Arizona he has put in more than 22 miles of pipeline, drilled 8 new solar wells, and converted 8 additional wells to solar.

With this accomplishment his focus turned to juniper removal on the thousands of acres where this invasive species had taken over and sucking up the area's precious water resources. In the last three years Milo has been converting a flood irrigated farm of 250 acres into a pivot sprinkler system.

Milo's partnerships with NRCS, Arizona Department of Game and Fish, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the University of Arizona showcase his commitment to environmental stewardship and collaborative partnering to get things done.

Today, a marked increase in the variety of grass and shrub species across the Andrus Ranch rangelands is clearly evident. The increase in wildlife grass and browse species has noticeably increased. Practical, but transformative environmental efforts are still doable in our modern era despite challenging red tape. The Andrus family has clearly proven this.

LIFETIME SERVICE TO AGRICULTURE: DENNIS BOOTH



An Oklahoma State University graduate, Dennis Booth began his career in agriculture equipment in 1977 with International Harvester Credit Corporation in California as a credit collector for trucks, agriculture equipment, and more. By 1980, he was an Agricultural Sales Representative with Caldwell Equipment in Yuma, Arizona. The job that landed him in the great state of Ar-

izona.

A year later, Connie Caldwell was looking for a General Manager for his Yuma store. A baptism by fire, Dennis applied and was hired.

During all of this, Dennis had an inkling to buy the dealership. Caldwell and International Harvester Company both agreed to help Dennis with the purchase, and in 1986, he started Booth Machinery and began his lifelong service to Arizona's agriculture community.

Booth Machinery was born in a tough economic period: farmers and their suppliers were going out of business at an alarming rate due to high

interest rates and an extremely difficult farm economy. Dennis's approach was, "the customer is first at all costs." Using rentals and leasing, creative financing, selling what the customer needed, and assuring that customer service after the sale was second to none, Booth Machinery survived these turbulent times.

Part of Booth Machinery's growth was due to a fundamental change in the Yuma Agricultural economy. Yuma had always been in cotton and alfalfa, but that changed in the early 1980s when produce started coming to Yuma from the Imperial Valley. Dennis was one of the first to see this change and positioned his company to participate in this new and exciting market.

His service to agriculture is evident. A graduate of Project CENTRL, Class 7, Dennis served on numerous boards, including the Yuma County Farm Bureau Board, the Yuma Salvation Army Advisory Board, and the Arizona Western College District Governing Board (elected Chairman in 2012). He is a past chairman of the El Toro Foundation, the Caballeros of Yuma, and the Yuma County Republican Party. He also served as treasurer of the Arizona Republican Party. Dennis has also volunteered his time with the Arizona Western College Foundation, Hospice of Yuma, and the Crossroads Mission. In 2013, Dennis and wife, Anne, were honored as Yuma County's citizens of the year. It's not uncommon for these groups and others to meet at Booth Machinery where he built a large meeting facility connected with the dealership and generously opened it to the community.

And, although Booth Machinery was sold in 2013 to Everwatch and later to Sonsray Machinery, the Booth family members are still employed and working with the agricultural community under Sonsray.

Dennis Booth and Booth Machinery represent what's best about agriculture: Perseverance and a forward-thinking spirit to survive and ultimately thrive regardless of economic conditions. Dennis has been an integral part of the Yuma agricultural community and ultimately helped contribute to the county's agricultural growth and development. Dennis recognizes that the success of his business is due to the support of the community and his priority towards treating customers with integrity.

LIFETIME SERVICE TO FARM BUREAU: SHERRY SAYLOR



An Arizona Farm Bureau member, along with her husband, Rick, since 1974, Sherry Saylor wears many hats – educator, agricultural advocate, farmer's wife and mother to two children and four grandchildren. Beginning with her leadership role as Arizona Farm Bureau's Women's Leadership Chair, she has been an inspiration to those she served with on the various agricultural boards over the years.

Sherry was born and raised in South Carolina. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and education from Westmont College and in 1996 she was awarded a master's in counseling. She would meet her future husband, Rick, who was working for Dupont in South Carolina selling agricultural products. Within eight months of their marriage, Rick's family bought a farm in Buckeye, and that would bring Sherry and Rick back to Arizona. They are the third generation of Saylor's farming in the state. R&S Farms grew diversified row crops: cotton, barley, wheat and alfalfa.

Reflecting on her specific service to Farm Bureau, one of her more memorable experiences was learning about global agriculture in the 1990s when she went with the American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee to Ukraine. She interacted with students from three different schools, observed the transitioning of that country from collective farms to a "more competitive open market system" and got to share with her counterparts in the Ukraine about American farming. As Sherry said, "We were able to go over there and help on a certain level; at least give guidance on how to think about a free-market system and understand the concept of private property."

Through chairing American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee starting in 2014 and the collaborative effort of the ten women leaders on the national committee their goal was to "engage women by offering opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills, empowering them as strong effective leaders in agriculture." This resulted in Communication Boot Camp. Since 2020, the camp has trained more than 200 women. The attendee's learning is centered on advocacy, agricultural literacy and leadership development. The big takeaway: Women learn to tell their agricultural story.

Not lacking on her commitments to serve the Farm Bureau family, Sherry has also served as a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Board of Directors and the American Farm Bureau's Foundation Board. Saylor currently serves as chair of Arizona Farm Bureau's AgPAC.

Sherry likes to say that Farm Bureau gave her "community, organization and opportunity" as she began her new career with her husband

in farming. She has been using what she learned early on with the Farm Bureau to help her advocate for the industry she married into. With her long and enduring elementary school counseling career, she has brought the agricultural community into Buckeye schools. Sherry will always be a strong advocate for agriculture in her community, state and nationally.

FARMER OF THE YEAR AWARD: STEVE SOSSAMAN



Steve Sossaman has built his commitment to agriculture innovation and advancement upon the strategy of, "Say yes to opportunities!"

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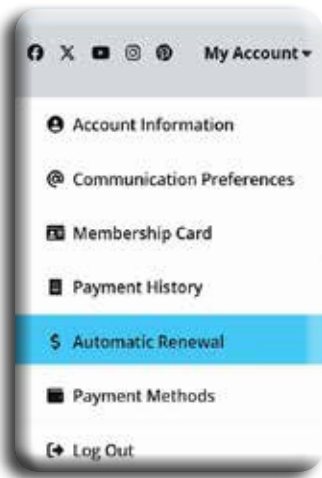
NOW YOU CAN AUTOMATICALLY RENEW YOUR FARM BUREAU MEMBERSHIP

Staff Reports

On behalf of the Arizona Farm Bureau, we'd like to thank you for your membership. Our members are the lifeblood of our organization. Your continued support is extremely important to us and is very much appreciated.

Great news! We've made it easier than ever for you to renew your membership. Farm Bureau now offers automatic renewal for the convenience of our members.

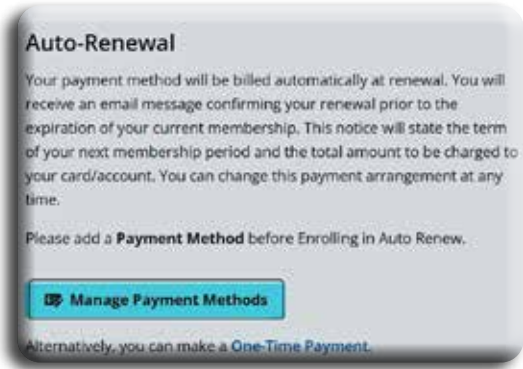
Farm Bureau's Automatic Renewal program allows you to enjoy uninterrupted access to our exclusive discounts, programs and services while avoiding the hassle of manually renewing each year. Plus – there's no risk to enrolling. Farm Bureau will always notify you about your upcoming renewal – 30 days in advance. And, you can cancel automatic renewal at any time.



How to sign up? It's easy. First, make sure that you are logged into your membership account. When you select the dropdown called "My Account" select the "Automatic Renewal" tab and make sure to click the button that says "Manage Payment Methods" and continue with the prompts. Don't let your membership lapse. Take advantage of our new Automatic Renewal program today.

Thank you again for your membership. We're so glad you are part of our Farm Bureau family.

Editor's Note: If you have questions or want help setting up your automatic renewal, contact Katie at 480.635.3605.



THE BEST IN ARIZONA AGRICULTURE *continued from Page 7*

with Jasper and Nancy Sossaman, originally from Oklahoma, who came to Arizona looking for a better life in 1914. Shortly thereafter, tragedy hit in 1918 when Jasper passed away, leaving Nancy and three sons to manage by themselves. Luckily, homesteads became available in Queen Creek, and the family obtained not one, but two! Gradually, they extended the farm to 1,000 acres and grew cotton, watermelon, potatoes, Durham wheat, castor beans, corn and sugar beets.

One of the three sons, also named Jasper, married Faith Mather and continued farming. Their only child, Jamie, whom many in the audience know as a former Arizona legislator, inherited the farm in 1962.

Today, Steve, wife Chris, and son-in-law, Travis, now manage the farm including their innovative marketing of heritage grains through Grain R&D.

Always innovators, the Sossamans were some of the first in the area to utilize laser leveling of fields in the 1970s to increase water efficiency. Since then, they have implemented drip irrigation and minimum tillage to preserve field integrity.

These days they mainly farm alfalfa rotated with wheat and barley. The varieties they use are ancient grains, meaning they have never been hybridized. Steve has partnered with Hayden Flour Mills and others to grow these ancient grains for value-added products here in Arizona and across the United States. You can find their products on the shelves of major retailers.

Steve has embraced the future of agriculture in Arizona and continues to adapt to the ever-changing industry as can be seen with his partnership with others. This presents him as a leader for the agriculture industry in Arizona as we continue adapting into the future.

AGRIBUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD: VANESSA ROER

Vanessa Roer has a passion for agritourism and educating the public through immersive and interactive wildlife displays. Vanessa brought this passion to Apache County when she established the R Lazy J Wildlife Ranch. The R Lazy J Wildlife Ranch encompassed 65 acres and focused on breeding and exhibiting wildlife while educating the public about rare and endangered animals from all over the world.

While the hands-on experiences were amazing enough, what earned Vanessa the Agribusiness Person of the Year Award is her passion for improving access to good food and health for her community.

Vanessa realized one of the biggest challenges for her

community was access to high quality, fresh and local food. Partnering with her youngest son, Levi Stoffel, Roer started a 5-acre market garden which produced produce and protein food banks in the area that served more than 400 families in the county. Her efforts brought attention to food insecurity in Apache county.

Vanessa's earnest community engagement in Apache County and her zest for like and educating the public earned her the title of Arizona Farm Bureau's Agribusiness Person of the Year.

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