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## A CONVERSATION WITH A SCIENTIST ON WATER QUALITY AND FOOD SAFETY: CHANNAH ROCK

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

In the world of agriculture, food safety and water quality are paramount concerns for farmers, state and federal agencies, irrigation districts, and ultimately consumers. Addressing these challenges requires dedicated researchers who understand the importance of practical implementation. Meet Dr. Channah Rock, a passionate scientist and self-proclaimed “boots-on-the-ground” researcher. With her extensive career, she has made significant strides in translating research into tangible solutions for growers. Beyond her scientific pursuits, she finds great fulfillment in mentoring and inspiring young minds to explore the sciences and apply their knowledge where it matters most. Join us on this enlightening journey as we delve into her impactful work and its profound implications for the agricultural community.

Channah Rock, Ph.D., is an Endowed Professor in Extension Fresh Produce Safety at the University of Arizona in the Department of Environmental Science and with Arizona Cooperative Extension. She is involved in several projects relating to microbial evaluation of water quality and environment for the protection of public health. If you’ve heard the terms “outbreak” or “E. coli” associated with fresh produce, she was involved, playing a vital role in assisting stakeholders and regulatory agencies in unraveling the mysteries surrounding these incidents. Simply put, she provides farmers and industry with the knowledge, skills, tools, and awareness to make informed decisions about their production practices including their water resources, to protect public health.

Based at the Maricopa Agricultural Center in Maricopa, Arizona, Dr. Rock hosts a Statewide Water Quality and Food Safety Research and Extension Program.

We’ve run into each other over the years, and I’ve always been keen to ask her more about her work and her projects. I’m also especially proud of her since she earned her master’s degree and Ph.D. at Arizona State University. Remember, I’m always the one that says, “This Sundevil (me), loves her wildcats.” But occasionally, I can’t help but put a plug in for my own alma mater. And, in the words of Dr. Rock, “One gave me the degree, the other pays the bills.”

**Arizona Agriculture: What’s your front and center project(s) that our farm and ranch members should be interested in?**

**Rock:** While we have been working on providing the industry with an improved understanding of agricultural water treatment for several years, our current projects have a strong emphasis on harvest practices and their impact on food safety.

Recently, the FDA has announced a “sampling assignment” focused on swabbing of harvest machines to identify potential food safety risks including the presence of *Listeria* sp., *Salmonella*, and pathogenic *E. coli*. We’re working on providing data that can

improve cleaning and sanitation practices while highlighting the importance of harvest foremen and workers in ensuring a safe food supply.

**Arizona Agriculture: As a microbiologist and water quality expert who studies pathogens and organisms like E. coli, you often speak about issues of water quality and public health. What are we getting right in Arizona agriculture and where do we need to improve?**

**Rock:** I often tell folks that those of us in Cooperative Extension have the best jobs in the world. We are fortunate that we get to work with stakeholders that are as passionate about growing safe and sustainable crops as we are about research!

The local produce industry here in Arizona is very forward-thinking and supports not only funding research that can improve their production practices but also the implementation of that research. It is very easy for me to talk to food safety professionals in the industry about our research findings related to effective agricultural water treatment, or best management practices around compost, or crop product management.

Where we can improve is linking what we teach to food safety professionals to an overall risk assessment for a farm or ranch. We often tend to compartmentalize each aspect of crop production, e.g., water treatment, soil amendments, animal intrusion, and more. The more that we can do to understand how changes in one area will impact food safety in another area, the safer our produce will be.

**Arizona Agriculture: On another front, you recently presented genome sequencing for the fresh produce industry. What does this mean and what does it have the potential for as we move forward in this industry?**

Advancements in whole genome sequencing allow us to trace organisms from sick patients back to their source in the food supply or

environment. We are currently working with funding from the Center for Produce Safety to validate “field-ready” methods that enable the rapid identification of potential links between organisms found in agricultural water sources/production fields and those found in animals or the general population.

By shortening the time it takes to make these linkages, these technologies provide quicker decision-making capabilities to protect public health. Part of the adoption of new technologies is getting our stakeholders comfortable with those advancements. As part of the project, we are not only validating the tools, but also teaching growers and other food safety professionals through a series of workshops about those tools, how to use them, and what to do with the data to improve their use.

**Arizona Agriculture: Your newest research project began this year where you’ll study microbiological risk assessment in** See **WATER QUALITY AND FOOD SAFETY** Page 4



A self-proclaimed “boots-on-the-ground” researcher, Dr. Channah Rock is passionate about supporting farmers’ efforts to ensure a safe and healthy food supply.

## SCOTUS, AGRICULTURE AND A CALL TO REMAIN VIGILANT AND NIMBLE

By Philip Bashaw, Arizona Farm Bureau CEO

The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has shaped countless aspects of public policy and debate throughout the history of the United States. The importance of this branch of government cannot be overstated in terms of its impact.

For several months the agriculture industry has been anxiously awaiting Supreme Court Rulings on several key cases that will have a long-term impact on agriculture production and drive policy decisions for years to come. The decisions in these cases will also certainly drive strategy decisions for Arizona Farm Bureau as an organization.

The waiting is over and now that we have those opinions in hand, I have some observations and predictions to share.

### CLARITY ON STATES’ RIGHTS VS. INTER-STATE COMMERCE STILL ALLUDES US

In the NPPC vs Ross case, the National Pork Producers’ Council challenged the constitutionality of Proposition 12 in California. Essentially, they argued that the law violates a doctrine known as the dormant commerce clause. The dormant commerce clause is the idea that the Constitution’s delegation of power over interstate commerce to Congress precludes states from passing laws that discriminate against that commerce. In particular, the lawsuit challenges the ability of states like California to require out-of-state busi-



nesses to operate in a particular way to sell their products in California.

This case is particularly important because this type of regulatory framework continues to proliferate across states. This tactic is favored by animal activist groups as a policy win in one state, like California, can have a reverberating effect across multiple states where products sold in those states are produced. A similar law in Massachusetts may wind up impacting the pork supply across all of New England.

The Supreme Court’s decision, in this case, was interesting in that the Justices were deeply splintered on the ruling and did not break along ideological lines. This decision opens the door for more states that attempt to regulate the actions of another state by

See **SCOTUS, AGRICULTURE** Page 6



## in this issue...

### FARM BILL, LABOR AND REGULATIONS - PAGE 2

♦ Addressing Serious Issues

### AG IN THE CLASSROOM - PAGE 6

♦ Celebrating 15 years!

### AN ENGINEER'S PERSPECTIVE - PAGE 7

♦ On our Essential Alfalfa

## FARM BILL, LABOR & ROLLING BACK REGULATIONS

By Chad Smith, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations

It has been a busy time with onboarding over the last few weeks, and I certainly look forward to getting out and meeting our members across Arizona. The Government Relations team has been busy on all fronts from the longest state legislature in history, to regulations and rule making, as well as ongoing discussions on some hot topics, and, of course, the continued effort to roll back some of the Trump administrations regulations, specifically related to the Endangered Species Act.

### THE 2023 FARM BILL

President Smallhouse hosted a Farm Bill discussion with Representative Ciscomani and members back in June where our priorities were laid out. The items identified that will guide our advocacy in developing the next Farm Bill include:

- Protecting current Farm Bill program spending through a unified Farm Bill that includes nutrition and farm programs working together.
- Highlighting risk management tools, including a federal crop insurance and commodity program, as top funding priorities.
- Maintaining funds for working-land conservation programs that maintain environmental and climate benefits.
- Providing USDA with resources for sufficient staffing capacity and technical assistance.

We also discussed the WOLF Act, sponsored by Rep. Stanton which several of our congressional leaders submitted as a priority for the upcoming Farm Bill.



The Farm Bill discussion continues as the House and Senate Ag Committee leaders remain optimistic. The challenge will be with funding after last month's fight over suspending the debt limit. According to the Congressional Budget Office under existing programs, the Farm Bill is expected to cost \$1.5 trillion over 10 years, with \$1.2 trillion of that for nutrition programs. Congress will certainly be debating whether to increase or decrease that amount in the coming weeks.

### THE LABOR FRONT

On the labor front, house members have once again introduced the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. While we recognize and welcome h-2A reform, we also need to ensure that it meets all agriculture's needs. If you recall in years past, we have worked diligently to position ourselves where we could support the legislation with amendments. Our efforts will once again be focused on reform that meets the need of all our farmers and ranchers across the U.S. This also comes on the heels of Chairman GT Thompson and ranking member David Scott organizing a bipartisan Agricultural Labor Working Group.

### ON REGULATIONS

One final note is the current administration's effort to continue to roll back some of the Trump administration's rules. There are three proposed regulations amending the endangered species act, all of which Farm Bureau worked hard to advocate for. Those changes include consideration of economic impacts in listing decisions, changes to how federal agencies consult with Fish and Wildlife Services and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and lastly, the rules that ultimately give the same protections to both threatened and endangered species. The comment period is open until August 21, 2023.

## SECOND QUARTER 2023 COMMENT REVIEW

By Ana Otto, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

The number of regulatory comments that AZFB responded to has continued at a steady pace into the second quarter of 2023. Below is a summary of the regulatory dockets that AZFB engaged in during this second quarter of the year, as well as several submissions made in early July.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) – Enhancement of Survival and Incidental Take Permits** – Although FWS noted their proposal was an effort to clarify and simplify the enhancement of survival and incidental take permits, there were several concerns with the proposal. AZFB's comments supported the comments prepared by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), which noted that FWS did not identify nor provide how the agency would make it easier and less costly for individual landowners to participate in conservation agreements or plans and how additional clarifications are needed regarding proposed conservation benefit agreements and incidental take permits revisions are finalized.

**USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) – Use of Identification Ear Tags as Official Identification in Cattle and Bison** – APHIS's proposal included retaining the ear tag exemption for animals under 18 months of age, as well as for cattle over 18 months of age that are sexually intact and eventually will be harvested. AZFB's comments supported the comments prepared by AFBF, which supported retaining this exemption but noted various concerns and areas for clarification, including that the proposal would create a government-imposed mandate for electronically identifying cattle and bison, asking for clarification as to how brands play into the proposed rule, how the cost of the program would be covered, and how data would be protected.

**Food and Drug Administration – Labeling of Plant-Based Milk Alternatives and Voluntary Nutrient Statements** – AZFB's comments supported those prepared by AFBF, which called on the FDA to vigorously enforce food standards regarding the labeling of dairy substitute products and prohibit the misleading labeling of nut-and plant-based or other common dairy terms. The comments also noted how FDA should enforce labeling of imitation milk beverages and urged FDA to amend their draft guidance to prohibit the use of "milk" or other dairy terms on non-dairy substitutes.

**USDA Forest Service – Eagle Creek Range NEPA** – The Clifton Range District of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests is proposing to authorize ongoing grazing livestock grazing on several allotments and provided three alternatives in its Environmental Assessment. AZFB's comments opposed Alternative 1, the no grazing option, and urged the FS to consider only those alternatives that included grazing in the management plan.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Draft Human Health and/or Ecological Risk Assessment for Peroxy Compounds** – AZFB provided comments to EPA to highlight the important role proxy compounds play as a fungicide, agricultural water treatment, and sanitizer/cleaning agent for irrigation equipment. EPA's risk assessment noted the potential for lowering application rates and restricting application methods. AZFB noted that certain reductions and restrictions may negatively impact users in Arizona; however, more specific information is needed from EPA to determine the extent of those impacts.

**Bureau of Land Management – White Hills Solar, Mineral Park Solar, and Leo Solar Variance Applications** – AZFB's comments urged BLM to disapprove several variance applications which would allow for the siting of a solar installation on grazing allotments in Mohave


See **SECOND QUARTER 2023** Page 7

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# WATER QUALITY AND FOOD SAFETY continued from Page 1



Dr. Rock says, “The local produce industry here in Arizona is very forward-thinking and supports not only funding research that can improve their production practices but also the implementation of that research.”

have already been deposited on plant tissue, resulting from factors like animal intrusion, contaminated crop products, or rouge dust from adjacent land. Ultimately, we will provide the industry and regulatory community with risk reduction metrics to tell us the added benefit of water treatment beyond the reduction of bacteria in the water alone.

**Arizona Agriculture: Through your social media outreach you are out and about in the fields, with the farmers, and engaged with the labor teams. I get a hunch you love what you do and are fully engaged with the ag sector. Why? What inspires you?**

**Rock:** I am truly passionate about what I do. The agricultural community inspires me every day. Working closely with stakeholders and witnessing their dedication to safe and sustainable crop production is a privilege. By being in the field, interacting with growers, and experiencing their commitment firsthand, I gain a deep understanding of their needs. Their respect for the land, and each other, and their determination to provide safe and nutritious products for their families and the wider community is truly inspiring.

**Arizona Agriculture: From your perspective as a scientist, what makes Arizona agriculture so special?**

**Rock:** While the love for agriculture is common among farmers worldwide, what sets Arizona agriculture apart is its strong sense of community. Yuma holds a special place in my heart. Despite being competitors in the marketplace, growers and food safety professionals come together to support the best interests of their industry and consumers. They readily assist each other, share information, and collectively work towards raising the standards for all. Inclusive education, information sharing, and collaborative learning are integral to the Arizona and Yuma agricultural community.

**Arizona Agriculture: I get a vibe that while you like science in general and whether in the lab or presenting, you love being out in the field. Talk about this.**

**Rock:** You’re absolutely right. I love the field! Watching the sunrise over a field of lettuce or standing at the ditch bank in the desert is an incredible experience. The field-work drives my dedication to my research and Cooperative Extension role. Transforming

**preharvest ag water treatment systems for leafy greens. Talk about it.**

**Rock:** One of our newest projects, also funded by the Center for Produce Safety, focuses on quantifying the risk reduction impacts of agricultural water treatment on leafy greens. While we have a good understanding of the impact of water treatment on pathogens and indicator organisms in water, we lack the data on the benefits of agricultural water treatment for organisms already present on the plant’s surface.

Through this research, we aim to quantify the impact of water treatment on pathogens that

hard work in the field into valuable data that benefits the agriculture industry is immensely gratifying.

When I can bring a grower to one of my field trials, explain our research, and witness their excitement about new findings that can enhance their practices, I know I am fulfilling my purpose. Fortunately for me, building a team of equally passionate students and staff who share in this work adds to the joy.

**Arizona Agriculture: What’s been the most exciting discovery, experience, and even advances for you in your field of research in Arizona?**

**Rock:** Some of the most significant findings that we have made in recent years are related to an improved understanding of the variability in agricultural water treatment effectiveness across a production field.

While that may not sound earth-shattering, it has impacted both local (AZ LGMA) and federal (FDA FSMA) food safety regulations. Because of our research alongside industry, growers and food safety managers now have a better understanding of how to collect water samples, when to collect water samples, how to interpret their water quality data, and how ultimately to improve their water treatment effectiveness. This has helped to establish science-based standards for water quality and food safety in agriculture supporting new Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and trained more than 1,000 growers or food safety professionals since 2018.

Additionally, we established a first-of-its-kind risk assessment for food-borne illness due to pathogenic microorganisms for the leafy green industry, stimulating regulatory dialogue. Finally, we developed a tool adopted and used nationally as part of mandated grower training, now translated into Spanish, the Ag Water app, and Online Calculator (agwater.arizona.edu), helping to protect and secure Arizona’s 70,000 acres of leafy greens, \$800 million per year in farm income, in addition to fresh produce from across the nation and the world.

**Arizona Agriculture: What’s the big hurdle in your research field? What seems insurmountable but possible that has the potential to keep you up at night?**

**Rock:** One of the biggest challenges we face in fresh produce safety is the fact that the industry grows their products in an open environment where not everything can be controlled. Pathogens are part of the natural environment.

For example, pathogens can be found in every surface water source if you look hard enough. The challenge lies in prioritizing efforts to best protect public health and ensure safe food production with limited resources. Growers face difficult decisions about their production practices, and while food safety standards are increasing, consumers are often unwilling to pay higher prices for improved food safety practices. Scaling research to support industry advancements while understanding the potential limitations is a significant challenge.

**Arizona Agriculture: At 30,000 feet, what makes Arizona produce production so important and so special?**

**Rock:** The continued success of Arizona produce production is due to the strong commitment of the community. The dedication of industry, academia, and government to adopt new practices, innovate tools, and guide implementation ensures that Arizona remains a vital part of the nation’s food supply.

**Arizona Agriculture: Despite water, food safety, and cost management challenges, do you remain hopeful about agriculture in Arizona and why?**

**Rock:** Absolutely! Arizona agriculture plays a critical role in the nation’s food supply and will continue to do so. While the industry may evolve over the next 20 years, the commitment of stakeholders to adopt new practices, support research, and ensure public health protection gives me confidence in the continued success of agriculture in Arizona.

**Arizona Agriculture: What have I not asked that I need to?**

**Rock:** These were great questions, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss my research and passion for agriculture in Arizona! 🚜

## CHAD SMITH BECOMES FARM BUREAU DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



Arizona Farm Bureau is pleased to announce Chad Smith as the new Government Relations Director. He has over 14 years of experience serving the agriculture industry.

Smith had recently joined Nationwide as a Sponsor Relations Account Executive in April 2022. Prior to joining Nationwide, he served as the CEO and Secretary/Treasurer for the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau (NMFLB) and the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau Foundation.

Chad began his career with NMFLB in 2010 as Regional Director and soon took over as Director of Government Affairs, like Arizona Farm Bureau’s Government Relations position.

In 2014, he was promoted to CEO. Prior to joining NMFLB, Chad worked for Marriott, Hyatt and ended his hotel management career with Heritage Hotels & Resorts.

Smith received his bachelor’s degree in Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management from New Mexico State University and has an MBA from Colorado State University.

Smith is passionate about serving the agriculture industry and is devoted to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our family farms. He and his wife, Corrina, have two daughters, ages 9 and 11. Chad enjoys camping with his family, hunting, fishing, and mountain biking. 🏕️

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# MENTOR PROTÉGÉ CAMP CLASS 2, PROFILE 6: CLINT GLADDEN AND QADREE WILLIS

By NRCS Master Planner Qadree Willis and Maricopa County farmer Clint Gladden

The CAMP mentor/protégé series continues with this sixth profile for Class 2 with NRCS Master Planner, Soil Conservation Qadree Willis and Maricopa County farmer Clint Gladden. They have already met, and both have exchanged insights and appreciation for the experiences.

With the 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.

The Gladden Willis 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.

**From the Mentor, Clint Gladden:**

**Talk about your first meeting.** Qadrees’ passion for what he does and eagerness to learn about what we are doing really stood out in our first meeting. Good conversation and good questions about some of our daily practices.

**Share specifics about what you got out of it as the farmer mentor.** Qadree shared with me an incentivized conservation program that we might already be eligible for with the conservation efforts we currently have in place. Also establishing a connection with our local office and contact point for any future projects.

**For the remaining time with the program, what do you also hope to help with?** I’d like to be of help in any way possible for a better understanding of the challenges we meet daily on the farm.

**Talk a bit about the Hoover Dam trip.** The Hoover Dam trip was incredible. Com-



Mentor Clint Gladden (left) and Protégé Qadree Willis (right) met at the dairy some time ago for their first meeting to discuss the Gladden dairy and crop environment and more. Both also participated in the Hoover Dam tour a few months back.



pletely blown away by the feat of constructing such a masterpiece in the 1930s. Humbling to stand at the base and look up to the top. Awesome experience getting to see behind the scenes of generating power and water deliveries to Arizona, California, and Nevada.

**From the Protégé, Qadree Willis:**

**What’s been the biggest takeaway from your first gathering?** The biggest takeaway from my first gathering with Clint is how busy the farmers are throughout the year here in Arizona. I never exactly understood the precise calculations that go into cultivating here in the valley. It is a very intricate dance between the crop rotation cycles, the seasons, and the water allowances (when and how much) throughout the year that is really quite admirable!

**Why have you felt the program has been helpful?** I feel that this program is helpful in getting newer employees to understand what the producers go through on their end and how sometimes NRCS programs may be the last thing on a farmer’s mind. It also helps with networking and developing a solid rapport with clients and outside entities.

**Share your Hoover Dam Experiences.** The Hoover Dam tour was absolutely wonderful. It is one thing to work directly with the farmers here in the valley that are feeling the sting of water cuts to the state, but it is another to be able to physically put eyes on the reservoir and understand the severity of how necessary water cuts are at this point in time. The Hoover Dam and Lake Meade are in danger and the tour helped to solidify those thoughts in my mind.

**What more do you hope to learn?** If there had to be anything that I wish I could learn more about through the Arizona CAMP class, it would be how these relationships that the Arizona CAMP classes are assisting to create are going throughout the country like a national meeting of sorts.

## DEVAN HUNT JOINS THE FARM BUREAU TEAM AS DIRECTOR OF GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT



Arizona Farm Bureau is excited to announce Devan Hunt as Director of Grassroots Engagement who will oversee and facilitate field management and leadership development and training.

Devan’s goal will be to help raise The Voice of Agriculture™, working side by side with the field management team, farm and ranch Farm Bureau leaders at the county and state level through grassroots collaboration, leadership training, membership engagement, and policy and personnel development.

Devan holds a master’s degree in mental health

counseling, with a background in advocating for victims’ rights, driving policy creation, curriculum design, program implementation, and personnel training via therapy, coaching, and professional development.

“I believe in the power of the individual in self-determination, and in the goodness that radiates from the culture of farming, country, and agriculture,” said Hunt. “I’m excited about getting to work on a fully enabled training and development program for our Farm Bureau leaders.”

Devan grew up moving hand lines on a small alfalfa and quarter horse parcel in Western Idaho. She is a well-intentioned plant killer, grateful for farmers who know better than she does. She and her daughter love to mountain bike, paddleboard, and snowboard.



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SCOTUS, AGRICULTURE *continued from Page 1*

mandating their own preferences to get access to consumers in their state. While it has started with agriculture products, it is sure to move to other regulatory actions.

In response, the American Farm Bureau, in addition to other national ag groups, is rallying around the Ending Agriculture Trade Suppression (EATS) Act. The act would prohibit state and local governments from interfering with the production or manufacture of agricultural products in other states. Closer to home, AZFB is working on efforts to reform our ballot initiative process to ensure ballot initiatives are simple, understandable, and only cover one subject (Prop 129 in 2022). In 2024, we are leading the charge, along with several other groups, to ensure all legislative districts are given a voice when ballot initiative petitions are being circulated.

Turns out the EPA really can go too far....who knew??

In a rare case of unity, the Supreme Court Justices unanimously agreed that the EPA went too far in enforcing the Clean Water Act, albeit for different reasons. In Sackett vs. EPA, the Sackett family challenged EPA's authority to enforce provisions of the Clean Water Act in the development of their private land. The Sackett Family began excavation on a parcel of private property in Idaho with plans to build a home on the lot. The EPA claimed that they had a protected wetland on their property and ordered them to cease all activities and remove the gravel they had brought in for the project. Keep in mind that this "protected wetland" had no physical connection to any body of water and was completely contained on their own private land.

The Supreme Court ruled 9-0 that the EPA had overstepped its authority in enforcing the Clean Water Act. The Court held the Clean Water Act extends only to wetlands

that have a continuous surface connection with "waters" of the United States — i.e., with a relatively permanent body of water connected to traditional interstate navigable waters.

In the aftermath of the decision, the Army Corps of Engineers has halted all Jurisdictional Determinations (AJDs) delaying important projects that may or may not now require permitting until they can confer with EPA. We are now awaiting a ministerial change to the WOTUS rule that will express the agencies' interpretation of Sackett which is set to be released on September 1. This interpretation will no doubt be the subject of an additional legal challenge.

Sackett was a huge win in the battle to rein in the overreach of the EPA through the Clean Water Act and a clear admonishment of regulatory agencies for taking their authority too far. While the legal battles may not be over, this is certainly a huge win for the agriculture community.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Congressional gridlock and more aggressive agency actions will increase the importance of these Supreme Court Decisions moving forward. In the years to come, American agriculture will need to remain vigilant and remain active in engaging with our partners in litigation as we have in these two cases.

Lastly, farm bureaus and our grassroots members across the nation will need to stay nimble and find ways to adjust our strategy when the paradigm shifts and we are called to action. 🚜

AG IN THE CLASSROOM CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

By Staff Reports

As the 2023-2024 School Year officially begins, the Arizona Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom (AZFB AITC) program is excited to be back in the classrooms educating youth about agriculture, food, and the folks that produce it. This year will mark the 15<sup>th</sup> year that AZFB AITC has been providing standards-based curriculum and programs to Arizona Schools.

"I can't believe it has been 15 years! I guess time really does fly when you are having fun," says Education Director Katie Aikins.

Over the past 15 years, the program has engaged over 1.3 million students and adults through classroom presentations and community events, had over 135,000+ video views on our educational videos, lent out Commodity Curriculum Kits to over 2,000 classrooms, and added 2 full-time Ag in the Classroom Managers. We can't wait to see what the next 15 years bring!

If you are a teacher and would like to bring agriculture into your classroom or know a teacher who would, visit [www.azfbaitc.org](http://www.azfbaitc.org) or reach out to [aitc@azfb.org](mailto:aitc@azfb.org). 📺



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## SECOND QUARTER 2023

continued from Page 2

County. The proposed solar project would take valuable agricultural land out of production, as well as negatively impact allotments with significant ranch infrastructure.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Draft Occupational and Residential Risk Assessment for Dimethyl Tetrachloroterephthalate (DCPA)** – AZFB provided comments to EPA highlighting the important role DCPA plays as a herbicide in the production of certain crops in Arizona, including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and other Cole crops, as well as onions. AZFB’s comments urge EPA to carefully consider the benefits of DCPA as it moves forward with this registration review.

**Arizona Department of Agriculture (AZDA) – Environmental and Plant Services Division proposed rulemaking to modify administrative rules under Title 3, Chapter 3, Articles 1 through 5 and 7 through 10** – AZFB provided comments to AZDA noting support for rule modifications, in particular those which modify current rules to comply with federal requirements that must be in place for AZDA to maintain primacy over federal programs related to pesticides and worker protection standards.

**Bureau of Land Management – Conservation and Landscape Health** – BLM’s proposal included new regulations, including applying land health standards to all BLM lands, elevating “conservation” to a “use” under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLMPA), and prioritizing the designation and protection of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). AZFB’s comments strongly opposed BLM’s proposal to



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define conservation as use and stated our serious concerns with proposed conservation leases. The comments also noted concerns with BLM’s process in developing the proposed rule, as well as their determination that the rule qualified as a categorical exclusion and is not a major rule. Additionally, AZFB joined a coalition letter with 57 other organizations that explained in greater detail issues and concerns with BLM’s proposed rule.

For more information about a specific comment letter, contact Ana Kennedy Otto at [advocacy@azfb.org](mailto:advocacy@azfb.org).

## AN ENGINEER’S PERSPECTIVE ON OUR ESSENTIAL ARIZONA ALFALFA AND WATER

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Last February, Rosie on the House and Arizona Farm Bureau hosted agriculture consultant and Arizona Farm Bureau member Nicholas Kenny. His insights into Arizona agriculture’s ongoing innovations over the decades and his understanding of alfalfa and water use were tremendous. But we had other questions for him and even in the hours’ time we stole from him, we were unable to get to all our questions.

So, we followed up with Nicholas Kenny and he was gracious enough to respond. This article is part of an ongoing effort to talk about the importance of alfalfa in our local food supply chain. Additionally, this article and future ones will highlight our efforts to conserve and preserve our precious resource, water.

**Arizona Agriculture: Knowing this will help farmers and ranchers talk about the alfalfa and water issue, what’s important for us to explain to Arizonans about our use of water for agriculture?**

**Kenny:** Arizona families need to be educated on the fact that agricultural water use is directly related to the food that is consumed in the process of most peoples’ everyday living. To meet the caloric and nutritional demand of an urbanized populace, farmers convert water and other inputs into food and fiber that supports life. In post-subsistence agriculture, a small number of professionals produce the food for the entirety of the population who are otherwise engaged in their useful endeavors.

This is the type of agricultural economy we have in Arizona, where approximately 2% of the population produces 100% of the food and fiber. Simplistically, the legitimate accounting of the water utilized in the process of raising the agricultural products lies with the 100%, not just the 2%.

**Arizona Agriculture: Many are concerned about exporting our hay to other coun-**

**tries.**

**Kenny:** Alfalfa hay has been exported from the Southern Arizona and Southern California deserts on a regular basis since the early 1970s. Agriculture economies have almost always been subject to the free market fundamentals of supply and demand, produce where it is most feasible and deliver to where it is most valuable. Arizona is an excellent place to grow alfalfa because of our favorable climate that allows for up to 8 to 10 harvests of premium quality alfalfa per year (compared to 3 to 4 in other areas).

Trade routes were established to move food and fiber from the Americas around the world over 500 years ago. We have exported food under a free-market economy while simultaneously being the most prosperous people ever. I much prefer that we can be exporters of American food than rely on imported food.

Of course, the acute discussion point is whether we should be utilizing the limited water resource in the desert to produce alfalfa for consumption across the ocean. The concern is that there will be detrimental impacts on the actual residents of Arizona. I agree that this concern is legitimate.

I’ll share a few points to frame this discussion.

1. It is estimated that only 20% of Arizona alfalfa is sold for export; the majority is grown for local consumption.
2. The demand for alfalfa in the multiple foreign economies is higher than in America, enough to pay to have it shipped thousands of miles across an ocean.
3. Only a small amount of the water used in producing alfalfa is exported. Most water is recycled as part of the water cycle.

4. Food security is a very strong deterrent for violence and helping people to prosper where they live is a humane venture.

**Arizona Agriculture: Talk about the Saudi farm. What should we understand?**

**Kenny:** Foreign ownership of farmland is potentially a challenge across America. Agriculture is one of America’s greatest assets and has always been a resource for the well-being of Americans. Many other nations around the world do not have the resources necessary to feed their citizens. Thus, these countries have taken steps to better secure food for their citizens by purchasing agriculture assets in prime American production regions. This trend has increased as historically impoverished countries become more affluent, having adequate money from their local resources (oil, manufacturing and more), but still do not have the land, climate, water, or labor resources to meet their nutritional needs.

In Arizona, we are primarily talking about Middle Eastern and Asian entities, legally purchasing or leasing land to produce alfalfa for transport back to the Middle East and Asia to support a growing dependence on dairy calories



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# AN ENGINEERS PERSPECTIVE continued from Page 7

including milk, butter, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, etc.

In recent history, wars would have been waged to secure these calories for a developing culture. In our time, it is a mostly peaceful trade of dollars for resources. Whether this is good public policy for the long-standing well-being of Arizona is certainly debatable. It is currently a legal practice for a foreign entity to own Arizona farmland.

My observation on this topic is that foreign entities have such a heavy cost in the production and transport of alfalfa hay that they do not have room to make production errors. Thus, these entities employ excellent farming practices and make very efficient use of the inputs, including water. These entities also employ many local workers and support local communities by purchasing equipment, supplies, vehicles, fertilizers, etc. from local providers, the same providers who would be used if anyone else were farming these acres.

This brings me to my last point on this topic. The foreign-owned farms in question are not new farms. They have typically been operated for decades. At some junction, the previous owner(s) of these properties found it in their best interest to sell these properties.

**Arizona Agriculture: Water continues to be a challenge. Talk about the issues in Arizona and share any predictions you may have.**

**Kenny:** Water has always been a challenge in the desert, every desert. There are biblical stories that detail cycles of feasts and famine, the stories of drought cycles in the desert. Our Arizona deserts follow the same patterns, long duration of drought years and short periods of wet years. We have done an excellent job of subduing these cycles by building dams, reservoirs, and canals and this infrastructure has allowed the West to develop in a way unimagined 100 years ago.

However, water is still a natural challenge. It is not subject to popular opinion, political platforms, or ambitious development. In average and wet years, there is plenty of water in Arizona. However, subsequent years of drought have always proven difficult. We are currently 20 years into a drought period and water storage in much of the West has declined to its limits. Some entities have had the foresight to store water in times of abundance and I expect these communities to see themselves through the current drought and survive to the next wet period without much grief.

An ongoing issue in Arizona is urban overdevelopment. We have seen the trend of retiring productive farmland and replacing it with homes and multi-family residences. These homes require a long-term water assurance based on direct consumption. What is not considered is the much greater indirect water requirement which is the water associated with feeding and clothing the residents for a life-time. In this modern iteration, this will have to be accomplished after eliminating the farmland that was necessary to feed and clothe the smaller number of residents of the previous generation.

## HAVE YOU MARKED THE DATE FOR YOUR COUNTY FARM BUREAU ANNUAL MEETING?

By Staff Reports

### INFLUENCE POLICY, ELECT LEADERS, AND HAVE A GREAT TIME

One of the highlights of the Farm Bureau year is your County Annual Meeting. Members can spend time with fellow farmers and ranchers from their area, hear from a speaker or two, and work on solutions for the issues affecting agriculture. In addition, members get to elect leaders for their county Farm Bureau as well as who will represent them as delegates at the state annual convention in November.

Our 14 active Farm Bureau counties will all gather in person this year. Invites will be coming out soon.

Once a suggested solution is approved by your fellow members as official Farm Bureau policy at the County Annual Meeting, you are no longer a single voice in the field. You now have the power of the Farm Bureau behind you, and that is a formidable force for getting things done.

John Boelts is 1<sup>st</sup> vice-president of the Arizona Farm Bureau and chair of the Policy Development Committee. “Farm Bureau is the Voice of Agriculture because we speak for our members. I encourage all Ag members to have their voices heard by attending their county’s Annual meeting,” says Boelts.

County Annual Meeting information is available online at [www.azfb.org](http://www.azfb.org) in the Calendar of Events under the Events tab. Be sure to log in with your username and password as the information is only available to current members.



I predict there will be a time in the not-to-distant future when communities will be abandoned for lack of water, and we will regret that we have permanently traded prime farmland for apartments, condos, and tract homes.

**Arizona Agriculture: We’re hearing the term “New Water” a lot. In other words, new sources of water including pumping excess water from the Midwest to the thirsty west. What’s your take on this?**

**Kenny:** This topic is unbelievably nuanced and of peak interest to me. It is an engineer’s dream topic. I’ll summarize the take home points on this.

As more people have moved into the Southwest, more water has been required. Consider that Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, and Las Vegas have a combined population of 25 million residents in 2023 compared to 13 million in 1980. It is a resource balance challenge. At some point, there was significantly less demand for the water resource than what nature provided. That is not the case now. If we are to sustain the current demand on water, additional or “new” water will need to be brought into the region.

One approach is to transfer fresh water from more abundant regions into the Southwest. The primary targets are from the Mississippi River watershed and from the Columbia River Watershed. Ideally, water is only taken during times of excess, like flood situations, and the associated ecosystems are not detrimentally impacted. Of course, the folks who currently reside in these areas have a say as whether this is a good idea.

Another source of “new” water is through desalination of ocean water. Ongoing consideration is given to desalinating water from the Gulf of California and piping it into Southern Arizona, across Sonora, Mexico. Another approach is to desalinate Pacific Ocean water along the coast of California for use in California cities to reduce their reliance upon the Colorado River. The reduced use of the river water would allow for the supply to be more available across the entire path of the Colorado River.

Wise water projects in the past have gotten us to this point, it is time for modern projects based on the current and future population.

Like I stated earlier, this challenge is an engineer’s dream, not a dreamer’s dream. These projects will require political will and force like we have never seen before, an immense amount of dedicated energy development and consumption, huge efforts to frame and minimize the negative impacts on the ecosystem, and an enormous amount of money.

**Editor’s Note:** Watch for more discussions and articles on Arizona’s essential alfalfa and our efforts to protect Arizona Farm Bureau’s water policy.

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