

## A CONVERSATION WITH STEFANIE SMALLHOUSE: ARIZONA AGRICULTURE AT A CROSSROADS

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

Stefanie Smallhouse completes her 7<sup>th</sup> year as the elected President of the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation this month. She and husband Andrew Smallhouse, own and operate a sixth-generation farm and ranch along the Lower San Pedro River in southeast Arizona. The ranch was established in 1884 and raises English cross cattle. The farm is used mainly to grow forage crops for their own cattle and in 2013 they added a saguaro cactus nursery operation to wholesale cactus to retail nurseries and others around the state.

With Stefanie’s education and background, she worked professionally as a wildlife biologist and resource consultant very early on in her career, and then later in executive administrative positions for the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts State Association, and the Arizona Water Protection Fund for the State of Arizona Dept. of Water Resources.

Stefanie is a member of many industry organizations, committees and boards, including an advisory board/council member for the Natural Resource Users Law and Policy Center at the University of Arizona, Ag West Farm Credit, U.S. Senators Kelly and Sinema, U.S. Congressman Ciscomani and a CARET delegate for the University of Arizona.

In her role as Arizona Farm Bureau President, she also served on the Executive Committee for the American Farm Bureau Federation, representing the Western Region of Farm Bureaus, and sat on the Board of Directors for Farm Bureau Financial Services Companies and American Ag Insurance Company.

During the November Annual Meeting in Tucson President Smallhouse steps down as Arizona Farm Bureau’s top volunteer leader and pivots to family and the Smallhouse farm and ranch businesses. Words cannot express the gratitude and appreciation we all feel for her dedicated, determined and thoughtful leadership that has led Arizona’s agriculture industry through some tough but also accomplished times in her nearly decade at the helm of Arizona’s largest agricultural volunteer organization. Moments shared with accomplished leaders are meant to be savored; one wants to continue chatting about what matters even as the conversation ends. One more captured conversation; we hang on to each word. This moment is this conversation.

**Arizona Agriculture: On Arizona water, where are we? And where should we be?**

**Smallhouse:** When you consider that our productivity is the highest it’s ever been, using the least number of resources that we ever have, the agriculture industry is not sitting on its hands. Our conservation record far outpaces many other uses in the state. Unfortunately, for the most part, the drought has been unrelenting, which means that some very difficult decisions will have to be made in certain areas of the state that are more impacted by the decades long decrease in precipitation. Specific basins in the state are seeing a steady decline in ground water levels, while at the same time we are just



Seen here during American Farm Bureau’s delegate session earlier this year, President Smallhouse says, “It will be very important as we move into the next year, that we stay the course and not lose ground on what we were able to accomplish.”

not getting the runoff that we need into the Colorado River Watershed to maintain system operations. Compounding these environmental challenges is the uncertainty surrounding Arizona’s water adjudication process, the ongoing restrictions because of Indian water settlements, and decreased water availability due to competing demands which impact system management. Arizona agriculture is definitely at a crossroads, and depending on which of these challenges you face, the next two to ten years will likely define our future for quite some time.

It is very possible that we will see the next generation of ground water management make it to the Governor’s desk next year. Arizona Farm Bureau has been working on these concepts for the last several years through our policy development process and convening specific working groups and committees to identify our greatest priorities. There was an immense amount of groundwork laid out in the last legislative session.

Even though this past year’s ground water discussions were quite turbulent, and we were unsuccessful in getting SB1221 (Basin Management Areas) across the finish line in the final hours of the legislative session, we did make a lot of progress in creating an environment for agriculture to have a meaningful seat at the table. We were also able to convey our message of how agriculture has been more efficient with our water use than ever in our history, emphasize the importance of local engagement in our rural communities, as well as introduce some new concepts for ground water management. It will be very important as we move into the next year, that we stay the course and not lose ground on what we were able to accomplish. Negotiations are a give and take process, and farmers have given about all there is to give and still see a future for themselves in these critical areas.

We have also been very involved in advocating for our members using Colorado River water. Although the Drought Contingency Plan resulted in several farmers in central Arizona losing a significant amount of water, we were able to mitigate some of those losses through various funding mechanisms that offset the costs for alternative infrastructure investments. We are now focused on the Post 2026 Colorado River Operations planning process with our involvement on the Arizona Reconsultation Committee. It is imperative that existing rights be respected and that we keep our eye on any new and “creative” attempts at bypassing those rights.

**Arizona Agriculture: And still on water, what are the next moves all stakeholders must make?**

**Smallhouse:** Although mother nature controls the supply side of the curve, the demand side will largely be determined by the election. However that turns out, will determine the dynamics of many of these water conversations. The same principles remain important regardless, and those are: transparency, flexibility, local engagement, and a focus on those areas most in need. We also need to remember that just as everyone has

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## FARMERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY COULD UNKNOWINGLY FACE FEDERAL FINES OR JAIL TIME

By Staff Reports


Time is running out for thousands of Arizona and American farmers who may face steep fines and possible jail time for failing to file their businesses with the federal government. Coming January 1, 2025, the deadline to file [Beneficial Ownership Information](#) (BOI) with the U.S. Department of Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) is required. New analysis in a [Market Intel](#) by American Farm Bureau Federation economists shows more than 230,000 farms are required to file, but government data indicates less than 11% of all eligible businesses nationwide have done so.

The Corporate Transparency Act of 2021 required businesses to register any “beneficial owner” of a company to combat money laundering. Many farms are structured as either a c-corporation, s-corporation or limited liability company (LLC), which are now required to be registered if they employ fewer than 20 employees or receive under \$5 million in cash receipts – which covers most farms.

“The use of LLCs is an important tool for many farms to keep personal and business assets separated, but small businesses often lack the staff to track and stay in compliance with changing rules and regulations,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “It’s clear that many farmers aren’t aware of the new filing requirement. Unclear guidance and lack of public outreach are now putting thousands of America’s farmers at risk of violating federal law.”

Businesses that fail to file, or do not update records when needed, could face criminal fines up to \$10,000 and additional civil penalties of up to \$591 per day. Failure to file could also lead to felony charges and up to two years in prison.

“The greater farm economy will also be impacted by CTA requirements,” AFBF economists write. “Many feed and supply stores, crop marketers like grain elevators and the greater rural business community are also likely required to file their BOI and subject to penalties if they do not comply. The regulatory burdens and potential enforcement crackdowns could have ripple effects throughout the entire food, fiber and fuel supply chains.”

Arizona farmers are encouraged to contact an accountant or attorney if they are unsure whether they are required to file their business’s BOI with FinCEN. 



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# NEW CLASS, NEW YEAR: NRCS MENTORING PROGRAM SECURES CLASS 4

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

The Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) mentor program now in its fourth year in partnership with the Arizona Farm Bureau has secured the fourth Class. A new slate of proteges (NRCS employees) and mentors (our farmers and ranchers) has been matched. The year ahead will be exciting.

Last month, in partnership with NRCS, Arizona Farm Bureau hosted Class 3 Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP) graduates during a luncheon event at Culinary Dropout in downtown Gilbert. In the meantime, at the same event, the partnership hosted a “kickoff” for the new class, Class 4. Like previous classes, Class 4 is comprised of 10 NRCS employees (proteges) and farm and rancher mentors. Class 4 now begins a 12-month engagement effort with their agriculture mentors to learn more about Arizona agriculture. The top priority is making that one core visit out to the farmer or ranchers place and learning about their agricultural operations.

Arizona Farm Bureau and The National Resource Conservation Service began a partnership in 2021 to engage in a worthwhile program that aids NRCS employees in understanding Arizona agriculture at the ground level. CAMP provides a mentoring structure between farmers and ranchers and the NRCS employees. While several other states have the NRCS CAMP program, Arizona is unique in that it partners with the Arizona Farm Bureau due to our extensive network of farm and ranch members our organization represents.

Arizona Farm Bureau and NRCS will continue to shine a bright light on this exciting program and the experiences our mentors and protégé are going through. Watch for protégé/mentor profiles in the coming month with Class 4 on the pages of Arizona Agriculture, Arizona’s leading farm and ranch publication.

NRCS’s Arizona producer-employee mentoring effort creates an organic partnership approach between the agricultural community and NRCS. This effort assists with the completion of the national NRCS’ goal of connecting NRCS employees to local producers for regionalized, hands-on knowledge of production agriculture and local natural resources in Arizona.

The core goals for this partnership effort are that participating NRCS employees (proteges) advance their professional expertise related to:

1. Production of agriculture in their local areas,
2. Local resource concerns, and
3. How NRCS and producers can address local resource concerns.

The outcomes already show a deeper **awareness of the types of challenges and decisions our farmers and ranchers face each day** and enhance their local community relationships and capacity to provide excellent customer service. It’s also fostered great relationships between mentor and protégé. 🚜

# THIRD QUARTER 2024 REGULATORY COMMENT REVIEW

By Ana Otto, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

As the third quarter comes to an end, there has been no slowdown in responding to regulatory proposals. In this quarter, you will see a couple of comment letters responding to state-level issues. Below is a summary of the regulatory dockets AZFB responded to during the third quarter of 2024.

**White House – President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology’s (PCAST) Request for Public Input on America’s Groundwater Challenges** - The White House and PCAST seek to better understand a number of factors related to groundwater use in the U.S. Arizona Farm Bureau’s comments emphasized that state governments have purview over groundwater regulations and its allocation. Our comments highlighted how stakeholders within the state, in the past and currently, have worked together to craft groundwater regulations that meet the needs of the state, its communities, and its citizens. Our comments urged the federal government not to spend any more time or federal resources on the subject matter of groundwater. Instead, state governments with groundwater challenges can learn from other state leaders, relevant state agencies, and water researchers.

**Environmental Protection Agency—Application for New Use; Dicamba; BASF Label**—Our comments highlighted the importance of dicamba for use in cotton and urged EPA to act quickly in approving a new application and to ensure label language is practicable and does not impede use of the product.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Proposed Interim Decision for Acephate** – AZFB’s comments noted the continued and important uses of acephate for certain crops grown in Arizona. While overall usage of the product may be low, the benefits of its use are high, and our letter noted practical mitigations for the EPA to consider in order to sustain growers’ access to the product where it is needed.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Application for New Use; Dicamba; Syngenta Label** - This comment letter was similar to the one prepared for the BASF label noted above and an earlier letter for Bayer’s product and reiterates the timely approval of a new application and practical label language.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Proposed Interim Decision for Dimethoate** – Our comments expressed support for EPA’s proposal to retain the use of the dimethoate in key Arizona crops (i.e., alfalfa and cotton) where the product is used. Our comments also urged EPA to retain the use of dimethoate for certain crops (i.e., corn, wheat, and broccoli and cauliflower seed) grown in Arizona, where the agency is proposing to cancel its use.

**United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service** – AZFB’s comments were aligned with and supported the comments developed by the American Farm Bureau Federation. The comments noted concerns with the rule’s vagueness of the rule that were not reflective of the unique market structures of the different livestock regulated under the Packers and Stockyards Act.

**Environmental Protection Agency—Proposed Interim Decision for Mancozeb**—AZFB’s comments expressed concerns with certain elements of the proposal that would limit the ability to continue to use the product effectively and efficiently.


**Environmental Protection Agency – Draft Insecticide Strategy** – Our comments noted the importance of insecticides as a tool to combat pests that can damage plants and spread diseases that result in significant crop and yield losses. EPA’s Draft Insecticide Strategy includes a number of mitigation practices that growers can select to obtain mitigation points that will be needed in order to use an insecticide. The comments we provided included survey results conducted by the Arizona Pest Management Center that provided insight as to which measures are applicable to Arizona agriculture and how growers may be challenged in finding sufficient mitigation practices to use insecticide that will require higher mitigation points. We also addressed the overall complexity of the strategy and the need for further details on how it will be enforced.

If you come across an issue that you feel is important that Arizona Farm Bureau engage in, please do not hesitate to reach out to staff to make sure it is also on our radar. For more information about a specific comment letter, contact Ana Kennedy Otto at [advocacy@azfb.org](mailto:advocacy@azfb.org). 🚜

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# ACTIVISTS PUSH FALSE CHOICES ON FOOD

By Tim Cooley, Arizona Cattle Feeders' Association President

An astute person once said, “Follow the money!” However, in this case it is, “find the activists.” If one reads the recent NPR article, Can Eating Less Beef and Dairy Help Save the Colorado River?, they are villainizing alfalfa production and asking you to divorce your thinking from the real facts and science regarding the use of water and food production. True food science demonstrates the opposite of the article’s assumptions, and we maintain that growing alfalfa to produce meat and dairy products is the way to water security and, in my opinion, the pathway to greater food security.

Try to imagine what it is going to take for our farmers and food producers to keep up with the caloric energy necessary to feed our planet’s growing population. A hint: better utilization of our water to produce the food calories or caloric energy every person needs to sustain themselves. When we use an uncertain formula to express our concern regarding water use and then marry it to a broad and ill-defined term like climate change – we ignore the hundreds of years of science, nutritional research, and practical nature of food production – in producing caloric energy to feed people!

First a few facts about alfalfa. Alfalfa is an important forage crop throughout the world. It is in the family of legume plants (nitrogen fixing) like peas and bean varieties. Its name is derived from Arabic, exactly the phrase “al-fac-facah” which means “Father of all foods” because it is rich in 15 crucial nutrients including 20% protein. It contains critical minerals like Vitamin K, Copper, Iron and Phosphorus. It’s also a major source of five key amino acids. All of this is why it is used throughout the world as one of the most important forage crops.

These activists are using the wrong measuring tool – climate gases - to support their argument. The proper tool to utilize when measuring water to food production efficiency is to utilize a caloric energy model – how much caloric energy does the food product bring to the table in relationship to its use of water? Do not get me wrong, this does not advocate to direct your eating to any one food product or for removing or reducing any food production system or foods because as demand for caloric energy

increases with population, we will need every single one of them. Nearby is a table of the caloric energy in some food products as it demonstrates the calories in every 100 grams of these food products:

I will let you, the reader, make your own determination of whether growing alfalfa to raise meat and dairy products is a beneficial use of our water. At least you might be honest. The purveyors of the false choice of reducing alfalfa production to save something – are not talking about the food we eat!

**Editor’s Note:** A strong supporter of Arizona youth, Cooley is a cattle feeder in Maricopa, Arizona. He is also a member of the Arizona Beef Council board and brings a strong passion for education.

Table 1. Caloric Energy of Foods per 100 Grams

Food Product	Caloric Energy per 100 Grams
Peanuts	540
Meat	287
Whole Milk	60
Carrots	41
Eggplant	25
Cauliflower	25
Green Beans	31
Spinach	23

\*Caloric Chart Database [www.calories.info](http://www.calories.info)

# THE RACIN’ FOR THE BACON DERBY DINNER RAISED THE BACON FOR AG EDUCATION!

By Katie Aikins, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Education

The 8th Annual Racin’ for the Bacon Derby Dinner presented by the Arizona Pork Council benefitting the Arizona Farm Bureau Educational Farming Company was a squeal of a time! Over 180 attendees gathered to enjoy local eats, local drinks, silent and live auctions, pig racing, derby hat contests, and more. This year’s generous attendees, sponsors, and donors helped raise more than \$32,000 to support the mission of the Foundation!

100 percent of the proceeds are utilized in our continuing efforts to educate Arizona’s youth and consumers with the opportunity to come back to the farm and learn

where their food comes from. The funds raised through this event will help us provide education to 3,200 classrooms and reach nearly 90,000 students with ag education through the Arizona Farm Bureau Agriculture in the Classroom Program!

**Editor’s Note:** The mission of the Arizona Farm Bureau Educational Farming Company is to educate the public of all ages about the importance of Arizona’s agriculture through educational programs that teach about the production of food, fiber, and natural resources highlighting Arizona agriculture’s diversity and dynamic.



Attendees were able to cheer on their favorite pig.



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an interest in water management, everyone has a role and responsibility to play in its conservation. Agriculture should not be the only stakeholder bearing the burden of the drought. While we as an industry cannot become complacent in these conversations, we also cannot be pugnacious. There are serious issues to confront, and our members are asking that we find solutions.

**Arizona Agriculture: Going forward, knowing that water and labor will remain top priorities, what do you see Arizona agriculture needing to give more priority to as it relates to moving the ball forward?**

**Smallhouse:** I think that water will continue to be front and center. Without water, there is no need for labor. Water is also more of a local issue, whether that be regionally as with the Colorado River, or in state, as with ground water. For better or worse, policy tends to move faster locally. Our work force challenges lie squarely at the feet of the federal government whether that be affordability, accessibility, or regulatory. Nationally we lost 140,000 farms in the last 5 years. Arizona was one of the highest ranked states for farm loss across the country. This has much to do with the fact that it is so difficult to find affordable help on farms and ranches if you can find it at all. Unfortunately, there are just not enough work horses in Congress right now to get the job done. The border needs to be secure before any further negotiations can take place regarding ag labor. Most of the agricultural workforce will need to come from foreign countries for quite some time into the future, if not permanently.

**Arizona Agriculture: Earlier in the year, I asked you the “futuristic” question about Arizona agriculture. Can I ask you to expand on this point in this conversation?**

**Smallhouse:** Arizona’s climate provides such an important growing region for the U.S. that I believe farms and ranches will always persist in this state. I do think they will look different in the future than what we see today. As in the past, we will adapt to our physical and economic operating environments. I think a certain set of smaller farms will persist if they focus on very special niche markets, and medium-sized farms will have to expand. It’s just really hard to make it in the middle. The cost of doing business, whether that be with inputs, labor, technology, or regulatory compliance, just continues to rise.

The reason Paul Harvey’s 1978 broadcast commentary about farmers resonates so well is because it’s timeless in the way he so eloquently captured the essence of our lives. There is something in each of us, that just will not give up. God made us that way. As individuals we will continue to confront the problems of each day, as an organization we will continue to confront the difficulties of our industry. To have staying power you must accept that challenge is inherent and perennial and know that you will make it through. So, it really doesn’t matter what farms and ranches will look like or how they will operate – what matters is that the people who stick with it, were made for it. They will find a way to meet any challenge head on - and that will never change.

**Arizona Agriculture: As you step away from your leadership role at the state level, what are your reflections of the last 7 years as Arizona Farm Bureau’s President?**

**Smallhouse:** It has been such a privilege to serve in this position and I don’t say that lightly. Rather than focus on specifics, I’ll just touch on a couple of general philosophies

that have served me well over the last 7 years.

Opportunities are everywhere. On so many occasions I have stopped and taken mental note of the members that I am representing and what might be at stake for them in a moment of advocacy. I’ve tried to treat every meeting, collaboration, presentation, or conversation as the most important opportunity. There is never a meeting which is unimportant and never a conversation that is a waste of time. Cynicism is sort of like a warm blanket in politics. You can wrap yourself up in it and separate yourself from the outcome of any situation. I have done my best to never fall into that trap.

Without some level of trust, nothing of consequence can ever get done. Ronald Reagan was wise to bring the Russian saying, “trust, but verify” into the American vernacular. You must have enough trust in people, the process and systems that you are willing to engage with all of them, but always do the hard work of knowing all the answers to your questions before you ask them.

**Arizona Agriculture: We’ve talked about this a lot, but what makes the Farm Bureau’s policy development process so successful beyond the obvious?**

**Smallhouse:** Rob Asghar hones in on a concept in one of his books that most everyone can be categorized in one of two ways. Either you operate as a compass or more like radar. Those who are more inclined to radar have more empathy

and instinct when it comes to reading the values and priorities of others. That empathy can be distracting and create lost time in reaching a goal, but it allows others to come along with you in your pursuit. Those who are more like a compass are more focused and better at staying the course on a single path forward. This is a more efficient way of reaching one’s goals, but you might lose folks along the way who feel you are not connecting with them. The best leaders are those who can tap into both the compass and the radar. I believe that Farm Bureau is a leader in agricultural advocacy because our policy development works like radar in its deliberative process, but once that policy is set, we function more like the compass as we all move in the same direction towards one goal. When we take the time to get the policy position just right, and then all move together – that is a powerful force that is respected and effective.

**Arizona Agriculture: Where are we breaking down as an industry in not moving the ball forward more effectively?**

**Smallhouse:** Ok – the tough love question. First, we must step out of our comfort zone. I know ranchers who would rather go head on with a rattle snake, than toe-to-toe with a reporter or a lawmaker. Whether it be testifying in a legislative hearing, writing an op-ed, or facing down a bunch of fourth graders with tough questions – there are too few of us in this industry stepping up in this way. Nothing is more powerful than a farmer or rancher sharing their story, but we still have too many folks who are assuming someone else will do it. We have amazing people working diligently to advocate for our industry – but there is volunteer fatigue out there. Advocating is sort of like a marathon relay, where if you want to win in the long run, you must have a steady stream of strong runners.

Secondly, we cannot advocate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on what life was like in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the challenges we face today are based largely on the fact that we were not looking far enough ahead. This means engaging with folks that we may not align with on every issue but can certainly collaborate with on very specific efforts. We must hold our elected officials to a higher standard and expect them to lead in the direction of solving problems, and not just opine about them.

And lastly, as an industry, we must stick together! We are all trying to solve the same problems, and if we splinter away to carve out little wins here and there, we ultimately lose overall.

**Arizona Agriculture: What’s been your most treasured experience about leading the Arizona Farm Bureau?**

**Smallhouse:** Wow, that is a really tough question. I have had countless memorable experiences, many of which were absolutely amazing and at least a few that I would rather forget, but probably won’t. I have been blessed to visit farms and ranches all over Arizona and the country. I have been seated with some of the greatest champions of our industry - as well as some of our biggest critics, attended the signing of the USMCA trade agreement on the Whitehouse lawn, and been on the phone with a U.S. President. Leading the Centennial for Arizona Farm Bureau was very special to me, as well as testifying before Congress on issues of great importance to our members. One of my favorite duties as Farm Bureau President is chairing our delegate session every year and listening to all the members make their case for or against a particular position.

But if something is truly treasured, then it will be missed. What I will miss the most is the daily interactions I have with amazing people. 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. 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. The people who work for the Farm Bureau are second to none and there is so much to learn from these professionals. Just by being involved in this organization, you are surrounded by the opportunity to learn from others and make lifelong connections. So, it’s the people that are the treasure in the Farm Bureau experience.

**Arizona Agriculture: What would you like to say to our farm and ranch members as you hand the gavel to the next president.**

**Smallhouse:** Don’t take your foot off the gas and remember to tell the Farm Bureau story! 🗣️

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU MAKES

MEMBERSHIP GOAL FOR THE YEAR

By Staff Report

**A**merican Farm Bureau (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall congratulates Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse for our state making membership goal this year in the Farm Bureau family. This occurred during the AFBF traveling Board of Directors meeting in October.

Across the United States, our state Farm Bureaus set membership goals each year. While not easy to obtain, the effort is well documented on the state and national level and ensures continued growth for our various Farm Bureaus.

Our thanks to our 30,000 members and our volunteer leadership for the work it takes to make Arizona Farm Bureau successful in advocacy, communication, and education. 🗣️



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# ADVOCATING FOR ARIZONA FARMERS: A MISSION TO CAPITOL HILL

By Chad Smith, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations



In late September, Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse and a dedicated team of advocates journeyed to Capitol Hill to champion the needs of Arizona's farmers and ranchers. The timing was less than ideal, coming on the heels of a major election, but the urgency of their message was clear: agriculture must remain a priority for congressional leaders.

## THE URGENT CALL FOR A NEW FARM BILL

With the expiration of the Farm Bill jeopardizing the livelihoods of countless farmers and ranchers, the delegation made it their mission to emphasize the necessity of passing a new farm bill before the year's end. Their discussions with congressional leaders revealed a mix of optimism and concern, but the message remained unwavering: action is needed now to protect agriculture during these uncertain economic times.

Additionally, the advocates highlighted the impending expiration of crucial provisions from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which could have significant repercussions for the agricultural sector if not addressed. The dual challenges of securing a new Farm Bill and extending critical tax provisions loom large as 2025 approaches, making it imperative for Congress to take decisive action.

## LABOR CHALLENGES: A CALL FOR REFORM

We began our fly-in by attending a Border and Immigration Roundtable, a bipartisan initiative hosted by Representatives Tom Suozzi (D-NY) and Morgan Luttrell (R-TX). This event gathered congressional leaders focused on fostering bipartisan support for border security and immigration reform. The roundtable discussed concepts from previously proposed legislation, aiming to address longstanding challenges related to border issues and immigration.

Labor issues, long a concern for the agricultural community, were also on the agenda. Although major reforms seem unlikely in the near term, the advocates sought to address pressing issues such as the adverse effect wage rate (AEWR) and the disaggregated job classification rule. By advocating for temporary relief on these fronts, they aim to lay the groundwork for broader labor reforms that would provide sustainable solutions for the agricultural workforce.

## STANDING AGAINST THE GREAT BEND OF THE GILA NATIONAL MONUMENT

The delegation also voiced their opposition to the proposed Great Bend of the Gila National Monument, reintroduced by Representative Grijalva. With concerns about timing and potential executive action, the advocates reminded lawmakers of the divided

support for this measure among Arizona's congressional members. Their goal is to prevent any unilateral decisions that could affect the agricultural community without broad consensus.

## ADVOCATING FOR PRODUCERS CO-EXISTING WITH THE MEXICAN WOLF

A crucial point of discussion involved the Mexican Wolf and its impact on ranchers. Advocates emphasized the Wolf Act's inclusion in the Farm Bill while also addressing new depredation evidentiary standards set by USDA APHIS. These new standards have led to an increase in "probable" livestock losses under the Livestock Indemnity Program.

Congressman Paul Gosar's commitment to hold a committee hearing on this issue was welcomed, signalling a potential path toward resolving conflicts between ranchers and wildlife conservation efforts.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND RECOGNIZING SUPPORT



The trip was not just about advocacy; it was also an opportunity to strengthen relationships within the congressional delegation. The team managed to meet with nearly all Arizona Congressional offices, missing only two, and hosted a fundraiser for Congressman Juan Ciscomani's re-election campaign. Supported by the Texas and Mississippi Farm Bureau, the event showcased unity within the agricultural community, culminating in the presentation of the Friend of Farm Bureau Award to Congressman Ciscomani for his unwavering support of farmers and ranchers.

Senator Sinema, a previous recipient of this prestigious award, was honored a second time for her contributions to Arizona's agricultural sector. Her departure from the Senate will be felt, but the recognition served as a fitting tribute to her efforts.

The group also had the opportunity to meet with House Agriculture and House Federal lands committee staff. Discussing key issues that fall within the purview of each respective committee. Our discussions proved that we have the support and relationships needed to advocate for policies that support agriculture and help bolster our industry.

## A LOOK AT USDA NASS

To round out their trip, the farm and ranch Farm Bureau leaders participated in a "mock lock-up" at USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). This unique experience provided valuable insights into the meticulous processes behind the numerous market reports released annually. Understanding the dedication and hard work that go into producing these reports reinforced the importance of survey participation among producers.

## THAT'S A WRAP!

The Arizona Farm Bureau's visit to Capitol Hill served as a powerful reminder of the ongoing advocacy essential for supporting the agricultural community. As challenges related to the Farm Bill, labor reform, taxes, and environmental policies loom large, the voices of Arizona's farmers and ranchers will continue to resonate in Congress. Their commitment to agriculture ensures that these critical issues remain at the forefront of legislative discussions, fostering sound policies around our most pressing concerns and promoting a sustainable future for the industry.

I want to extend my gratitude to those who took time away from their families and operations to carry this message to our nation's capital: Ben Menges, Benny Aja, Jordan John, John Boelts, and our steadfast leader, President Stefanie Smallhouse. It was time well spent, building relationships and advocating for Arizona agriculture. 🌾

## MENTOR PROTÉGÉ CAMP CLASS 3, PROFILE 6: IRIS FRANCISCO

By Staff Report

The CAMP mentor/protégé 2024 series concludes for Class 3 with the latest protégé profile from Iris Francisco, NRCS team member. The Fish/Francisco team met in person this year and focus on ranching.

The Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP) in Arizona, in partnership with the Arizona Farm Bureau, has now been at it for three years and now move into our fourth year. We recently celebrated the graduation and kickoff with classes 3 and 4 (see article in this issue). This program, unique in its regard, has a double dose of uniqueness as the Arizona NRCS team approached the Farm Bureau to partner with them in the effort.

Class 3 mentors and proteges worked to understand Arizona agriculture and conservation opportunities, joining forces to provide firsthand experience of the conservation practices and agricultural happenings.

Below are Iris Francisco's, Class 3, thoughts on the program. Her mentor, Dean Fish, helped her understand production agriculture in Arizona, specifically ranching.

**What's been the biggest takeaway from your first gathering? Subsequent ones if they occurred?** My first get together with Dean was great. We met at the Marana Stockyard and talked about the specifics that buyers look for in cattle when buying and selling. I had never been to the stockyard before this meeting. The biggest takeaway for me was the multiple jobs my mentor, Dean, has and the connections that are made at important places like stockyards.

**How do you see this helping a broader set of NRCS employees? What's key for you?** CAMP can be helpful for NRCS employees by experiencing the perspectives of our producers in their daily lives as ranchers and farmers. As NRCS employees we become familiar with a ranch or farm's resource concerns, yet our producers go through so much on the business side of ranching and/or farming. The key for me is to understand the perspective of our producers and their vision for the ranch or farm when they ask for assistance from NRCS.

**Why have you felt this program has been helpful?** It was helpful for me to meet with a rancher outside my field office service area. CAMP is especially helpful for employees like me who are fairly new to NRCS. Seeing the producer's perspective is very helpful.

What more do you hope to learn? I hope to keep in contact because there is more to learn. I appreciate CAMP and this mentor-protégé way of learning and sharing experiences. 🌾



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# ADWR MAKES THE CASE FOR MORE WATER REGULATION IN WILLCOX

By Daniel Harris, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

At the most recent public meeting hosted by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR), the focus was squarely on the hydrology of the Willcox Groundwater Basin and potential water management strategies. Although the meeting did not explicitly push for the establishment of an Active Management Area (AMA), it became clear to many attendees that such a regulatory measure is being considered. The data presented on groundwater depletion, land subsidence, and water level changes seemed to make the case for tighter water controls in the region, leaving our farmers and ranchers concerned.

## THE HYDROLOGICAL REALITY

ADWR's chief hydrologist, Ryan Mitchell, laid out the concerning details. Groundwater levels in the Willcox Basin have plummeted over the past several decades. According to ADWR data presented, some areas have seen water levels drop by more than 400 feet since the 1950s, while the land itself has subsided significantly—up to 11.5 feet in certain locations.

The meeting also reviewed the 2018 ADWR Groundwater Flow Model, which showed that over 5.7 million acre-feet of groundwater has been pumped from the aquifer since 1940. This model emphasized that if all groundwater pumping were to stop today, it would take more than 280 years for the aquifer to recover naturally. These numbers were presented in a stark manner to indicate that the basin is in a state of critical depletion and allude to the necessity to do something to help the situation.

## ADWR'S FOCUS: WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

While ADWR did not directly advocate for the creation of an AMA in the Willcox Basin, the meeting's presentation certainly implied that it could be one of the solutions on the table. The introduction of AMAs under Arizona's 1980 Groundwater Management Act allows for strict regulations, including water pumping limitations, mandatory conservation plans, and water use reporting requirements. The process for creating an AMA could either be initiated by local stakeholders or directly designated by the ADWR director based on evidence of severe groundwater depletion or land subsidence. Notably absent from the presentation was the fact that the people of Willcox voted against an AMA being implemented as recently as 2022. Which adds yet another layer to the increasingly complex tale of water management in the basin.

Given the data presented, many participants at the meeting felt the discussion was paving the way for a future AMA designation. ADWR representatives outlined the potential benefits of such regulation, including improved water management and protections against further depletion and subsidence. Repeatedly stated by ADWR Staff was that management solutions were not being actively pursued, and that the meeting was informational in nature.

## THE CASE AGAINST AN AMA

From the perspective of the agricultural community, the idea of an AMA poses significant concerns. Farmers and ranchers in the Willcox area, with a unified message from the rest of the state, have long advocated that water use is not synonymous with water waste. While the data on groundwater depletion is troubling, it is critical to understand that local agriculture depends on this water to feed not only Willcox and Arizona, but the nation. The narrative that agricultural water use is excessive and wasteful oversimplifies the complex challenges that farmers face.

Introducing an AMA could place unnecessary restrictions on water use, limiting flexibility and adding administrative burdens. Agriculture in the region already faces enough challenges—rising input costs, labor shortages, and unpredictable weather patterns. An AMA could exacerbate these issues by forcing farmers into rigid water-use regimes that do not account for the unique needs of crops, livestock, or the ever-changing economic environment.

Farmers in the Willcox Basin have made significant strides in water conservation, investing in technologies like installing pivots, drip irrigation and soil moisture sensors to maximize efficiency. These efforts demonstrate that the agricultural community is deeply committed to preserving water resources. A top-down regulatory approach, such as an AMA, could undermine these efforts by imposing one-size-fits-all solutions that do not reflect the realities of agricultural operations.

## ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Rather than jumping to the creation of an AMA, the agricultural community in Willcox is calling for more nuanced, collaborative approaches. Localized water management strategies could be more flexible and effective in managing water without the heavy-handed restrictions of an AMA.

These alternatives allow for continued agricultural production while encouraging conservation efforts tailored to the specific needs of the community.

## MOVING FORWARD

ADWR's presentation provided critical insight into the hydrological challenges facing the Willcox Basin, but the agricultural community must be part of any decision-making process regarding water management. While the idea of an AMA looms large, it is essential that policymakers recognize the significant role agriculture plays in the region and ensure that any regulations strike a balance between conservation and productivity.

Water use is not water waste, and Arizona's farmers are the first to understand the need for sustainable water management. But the solution must be one that keeps agricultural economies afloat, rather than drowning them in regulation. As discussions around water management in Willcox continue, collaboration, innovation, and flexibility should be the guiding principles—not blanket restrictions.

**Editor's Note:** As of this writing ADWR initiated proceedings to designate Willcox as an active management area.

# ARIZONA FARM BUREAU GAINS ANOTHER BOOT CAMP GRADUATE

By Staff Reports

Arizona Farm Bureau's Kelly Wilcox recently joined the ranks of veteran Boot Camp graduates after completing a nearly week-long communication and advocacy training program. Wilcox was one of 14 women to graduate. These 14 farm and ranch women leaders graduated from the fall session of Women's Communications Boot Camp hosted by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The agricultural leaders completed an intensive four-day course that featured hands-on sessions focused on public speaking, working with the media and messaging. Program graduates will use their training to strategically support Farm Bureau's priority issues. This includes participating in local media opportunities, sharing information with elected officials and joining social media campaigns that spotlight modern agriculture.

"The American Farm Bureau Women's Communication Boot Camp was a game-changer," said Arizona's Kelly Wilcox. "I learned how to effectively communicate our story, connect with others, and make a positive impact on the agricultural industry. It was an honor to be part of such an inspiring group of women."

"Communicating effectively about agriculture is more important than ever," said Isabella Chism, an Indiana row crop farmer and chair of the AFB Women's Leadership Committee. "Boot Camp graduates have honed their skills and are ready to use them to benefit their communities and Farm Bureau on local, state and national levels."



Besides Wilcox, the other Boot Camp graduates are Elizabeth Walker, Arkansas; Leah Groves, California; Jennifer Greene, Florida; Mindy Orschell, Indiana; Darcy Perehiny and Ashley Reese, New Jersey; Megan Dresbach, Ohio; Tonya Pennix and McKayla Robinette, North Carolina; Suzanne Shea, Pennsylvania; Holly Harper, Tennessee; Elizabeth Cooper, Virginia; and Sally Turpin, Wisconsin.

"Agricultural advocacy remains a cornerstone of Farm Bureau," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "We're proud to honor the farm and ranch leaders who completed this training and congratulate them for taking the next step in their leadership journey."

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> Boot Camp hosted by AFBF. The program has 313 graduates and is open to all women involved in Farm Bureau.

"This training was exactly what I needed to refine the skills that I use both on and off the farm to successfully share farmers' mental health needs," said McKayla Robinette, a North Carolina beef cattle farmer who also coordinates the Farm and Stress Assistance Network-North Carolina. "The training and peer support provided helped me grow in a number of different areas."

The American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee, in partnership with AFBF staff, hosts and provides training for Women's Communications Boot Camp biannually. Applications open in December for the 2025 spring session of Boot Camp.

# AMERICAN FARM BUREAU CONVENTION REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

By Staff Reports

The American Farm Bureau Federation recently announced the opening of general registration for the 2025 American Farm Bureau Convention. The convention will be held Jan. 24-29, 2025, in San Antonio, Texas.

"Step Up, Drive Forward" is the theme of the 106<sup>th</sup> consecutive American Farm Bureau Convention, a "can't miss" event that offers attendees unique insights on the policies and perspectives that will affect farms, ranches and agribusinesses in 2025 and beyond.

"Farmers and ranchers are always looking to the future, whether that's finding ways we can be more innovative and efficient or building up our local communities," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "The 2025 American Farm Bureau Convention will showcase that spirit across agriculture and the Farm Bureau family as we step up and drive forward together. I look forward to seeing you in January in San Antonio as we gather to kick off another year of feeding, clothing and fueling our great nation."

Duvall will give his annual address to Farm Bureau members during the convention's opening general session on Sunday morning, Jan. 26. Eric Boles, a global expert in talent development, change management and cultural transformation, will address attendees as closing general session keynote speaker on Monday, Jan. 27. Boles is founder and CEO of The Game Changers Inc., a leadership training and development company headquartered in Lakewood, Washington. He learned principles of peak performance, team dynamics and leadership from his experience as a wide receiver with the National Football League's Green Bay Packers and New York Jets.

A full lineup of engaging workshops will be available at convention. Workshops will be offered in four tracks – public policy, rural development, member engagement and consumer engagement. Topics will include the farm bill, hot topics in public policy,

the 2024 election, farmer mental health, farm transition planning and engaging the next generation of agriculturists.

A vibrant trade show with exhibitors showcasing cutting-edge innovations in agricultural technology, tools and services is also sure to capture the attention of attendees.

In addition, numerous optional farm- and ag-related day tours are available for attendees who wish to explore the Lone Star State. These include working farms and ranches, a beef cattle feedyard, a greenhouse, a turfgrass operation, vineyards, a cotton gin and the historic town of Luckenbach. Attendees can also sign up to explore a buggy barn, the Chisholm Trail Museum, the National Museum of the Pacific War and more. Details about additional tours will be posted when available.

The event website is <https://annualconvention.fb.org/>.





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