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A CONVERSATION ABOUT CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN AG: GEORGE FRISVOLD

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Strategic Communications

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

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

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

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

We connected with Dr. Frisvold again for an update to our economic activity in agriculture and also asked about some important trade issues. His insights always help us understand the broader landscape of what's going on in farm and ranch land.

Arizona Agriculture: Dr. Frisvold, could you start by giving us a snapshot of Arizona's agricultural sector based on your 2024 Economic report and anything that's changed?

Frisvold: Our 2024 report was based on numbers from the 2022 Census of Agriculture, USDA's most recent. Then Arizona agriculture and agribusiness contributed \$30.9 billion in sales to the state economy. This included \$3 billion crop sales, \$2.2 billion in livestock sales, \$672 million in labor contracting and other agricultural support services, \$1 billion in agricultural inputs \$10.9 billion



The University of Arizona's
George Frisvold

in food and fiber processing, and \$2.3 billion in agribusiness distribution and marketing. On top of that were \$10.7 billion multiplier effects that come from demands agriculture stimulates in non-agricultural industries through input purchases or farm income and wage spending.

Looking at 2024 numbers, on-farm crop and livestock sales are about the same, with crop sales a bit lower and animal product sales a bit higher. There was a big jump in cattle and calves sales, from \$0.86 billion in 2022 to \$1.5 billion in 2024. Alfalfa and other hay sales fell from \$424 million in 2024 to \$208 million in 2024. Lower prices along with lower acreage and production all contributed to this drop. Sales of almost every major crop were down, but the increase in cattle and calves sales was so enormous that it balanced things out overall.

Arizona Agriculture: Agriculture contributes \$30.9 billion to Arizona's economy, including direct and indirect impacts. How do you often explain the importance of agriculture to our state to the non-economist, the average person?

Frisvold: The significance of the \$30.9 billion depends on what you compare it to. It's a gross output (sales) figure. Gross output for Arizona is approaching \$1 trillion. So compared to that, it doesn't look that significant. Agriculture is obviously important. We all have to eat. But when you divide anything by

the size of the Phoenix economy it looks small. I prefer to look at how agriculture contributes more locally. It remains a large share of Yuma's overall economy. For Pinal County, milk manufacturing is among the largest manufacturing sectors in the county, with good wages. Fresh produce shipments are the single private sector employer in Santa Cruz County. Ranchers still manage the bulk of the state's lands.

That output value is a measure of spending, and spending isn't necessarily a good thing – it can be a cost. Americans are fortunate in that agriculture is so productive that we spend a lower share of our incomes on food than anywhere else. We don't have to spend a lot on food. That's good. In contrast, we spend way more on health care than other countries, but many of our health indicators (infant and maternal mortality, life expectancy) are no better (or worse) than other countries that spend far less.

I also prefer to talk about the number of jobs that agriculture supports. In Arizona, that's more than 126,000 jobs. Elected officials are interested in jobs. Those 126,000 jobs affect households which often have two or more voters. So, officials can't ignore how policies affect agricultural households.

SEE CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS PAGE 5

ARIZONA DELEGATES HELP AMERICAN FARM BUREAU ESTABLISH 2026 POLICIES

By Staff Reports

Last month, Arizona Farm Bureau delegates joined farmer and rancher delegates from across the country to the American Farm Bureau Federation's 107th Convention adopting policies to guide the organization's work in 2026. Key topics ranged from labor to animal health to risk management.

Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts was joined by First Vice President Shawn Wood on the delegate floor to decide and vote on 2026 policy. Arizona Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Chair Sonia Gasho and Maricopa County Farm Bureau leader Amber Owens alternated with Gasho serving the first half of the session and Amber serving on the delegate floor the second half.

For the fourth year, delegates were polled during the voting session regarding

their farms. The results show almost 99% of those who cast votes operate family farms and more than two-thirds represent small- to mid-size farms as defined by USDA. The discussion highlighted the fact that farmers across the spectrum and across the country are struggling.

"America's farmers and ranchers are facing unprecedented challenges in agriculture, including high supply costs, trade imbalances, and low commodity



Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts and First Vice President Shawn Wood (far right) represented Arizona during the American Farm Bureau Delegate session.

prices. Our members gave us clear guidance on how we should address those challenges in the coming year," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Farm Bureau's strength was on display, as our grassroots set the policy for this organization. We look forward to taking their stories to leaders in Washington, as we work to ensure farmers and ranchers can continue to fill pantries for families across the country."

Delegates adopted policy to improve la- SEE AFBF ESTABLISH 2026 POLICIES PAGE 6



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NEW PROPOSED WOTUS RULE: WHAT IT MEANS FOR ARIZONA AGRICULTURE

By Chad Smith, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations

The Arizona Farm Bureau Federation (AZFB) recently submitted formal comments on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed rule updating the definition of "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS). Because water is the lifeblood of agriculture in Arizona, this rulemaking is of critical importance to farmers and ranchers across our desert state.

For years, the WOTUS definition has been marked by confusion and regulatory instability. Shifting interpretations and repeated rule changes created uncertainty about when federal Clean Water Act requirements applied, leaving farmers and ranchers vulnerable to potential fines or enforcement actions for routine, everyday agricultural activities. This regulatory back and forth made it difficult for landowners to plan, invest, or maintain infrastructure with confidence.

In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Sackett v. EPA provided much needed clarity. The Court rejected the expansive "significant nexus" test, which had dramatically broadened federal jurisdiction, and directed agencies to apply a more straightforward standard. Under Sackett, federal authority is limited to relatively permanent waters and wetlands that have a continuous surface connection to regulated waters.

WHAT ARIZONA FARM BUREAU'S LETTER EXPRESSED

In its letter to the EPA, AZFB expressed appreciation for the proposed rule's alignment with the framework established by the Supreme Court's Sackett decision. AZFB noted that adoption of the Sackett standard appropriately narrows federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act, shifts the burden of proof from landowners back to the federal government, and preserves states' authority to regulate waters beyond the federal baseline. It also emphasized the importance of excluding isolated ponds, disconnected wetlands, and most ditches from federal oversight for Arizona producers.

The letter further highlighted the proposal's categorical exclusions for prior converted cropland, groundwater, and many ditches, describing these provisions as an important step toward greater regulatory certainty. These exclusions reflect the realities of agricultural landscapes and help ensure that farmers and ranchers are not subject to federal permitting requirements for features long understood

to fall outside Clean Water Act jurisdiction.

At the same time, concerns were raised about the treatment of certain ditches, particularly those constructed in tributaries, those that relocate tributaries, or those excavated in wetlands. While acknowledging that EPA appropriately places the burden on the agency to demonstrate jurisdiction, **our letter urged EPA to provide additional clarity**. Without clear and consistent guidance, producers could face delays, uncertainty, or potential enforcement risks when maintaining or improving ditches they reasonably believe are excluded.

Additionally, the letter noted that, as a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), it supports AFBF's detailed technical submission addressing areas where the EPA requested additional input. These issues include the definition of Traditional Navigable Waters, when jurisdictional determinations should be elevated to agency headquarters, the treatment of lakes and ponds within the tributaries category, and the consistent application of the "relatively permanent" standard. These clarifications are essential to ensuring the rule functions as intended in real-world agricultural applications.

Farmers and ranchers have long called for a WOTUS framework that is clear, predictable, and consistent with the law. AZFB urged EPA to consider not only the concerns raised by AZFB, but also the broader recommendations submitted by AFBF. Incorporating these adjustments will help establish a durable, legally sound rule that aligns with Supreme Court precedent, respects Congressional intent, and reinforces cooperative federalism.

For Arizona agriculture, water policy must balance environmental protection with the practical realities of farming and ranching in an arid state. A clear and workable WOTUS definition is a critical step toward achieving that balance. While this new rule may not be perfect, as with any rule or regulation, our optimism is that this is the best clarifying rule we are going to get surrounding WOTUS. In what has been a complicated and complex game of regulatory and legal ping-pong, we are anxious for a final rule that provides certainty for our members and the broader agriculture community. 🚜

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU MEMBERS MAKE PRESENCE KNOWN AT THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU CONVENTION

By Staff Reports

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) 107th Annual Convention in Anaheim, California last month featured Young Farmer & Rancher competitions, awards presentations, engaging workshops, and inspiring keynotes under the theme "Imagine. Grow. Lead."

A delegation of approximately 40 Arizona Farm Bureau members attended the multi-day event (January 9-14), actively participating in discussions, workshops, and networking to represent Arizona agriculture on the national stage.

On a Monday, programming kicked off with the Final Four round of the prestigious Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet, a competitive event that simulates a committee meeting, testing participants' abilities to exchange ideas, discuss key agricultural topics, and build consensus. Earlier in the competition, Arizona Farm Bureau's Young Farmer & Rancher Alex Dobson advanced impressively through the preliminary rounds to reach the Sweet Sixteen, a strong showing among talented young leaders from across the country.

Workshops throughout several days covered critical topics including the outlook for the ag economy, mental health in agriculture, farm labor challenges, and more.



Communicate, Collaborate and Influence Consumer Engagement Workshop featured Arizona Member and social media influencer, Jon Dinsmore.

One workshop featured Yuma farmer Jonathan Dinsmore as the keynote. Hearing it straight and clear from the **#greenscreenfarmer** telling his story and inspiring other farmers how to SEE AZFB MAKES PRESENCE KNOWN AT AFBF PAGE 7

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AGRICULTURAL GROUPS SOUND ALARM ABOUT FARMERS' FUTURE

By Staff Reports

Agriculture groups sound an alarm about the economic crisis in rural America in a letter sent last month to Congress. 56 organizations representing a cross-section of agriculture signed the letter, sending a strong message to Congress.

The letter describes an existential threat looming over many farms, stating, "America's farmers, ranchers, and growers are facing extreme economic pressures that threaten the long-term viability of the U.S. agriculture sector. An alarming number of farmers are financially underwater, farm bankruptcies continue to climb, and many farmers may have difficulty securing financing to grow their next crop."

Arizona farmers are feeling the pinch. Nancy Caywood, a cotton farmer in Pinal County whose family has farmed since 1930, said in a recent interview, "You're trying to hang on to your family legacy and you're trying so hard just to make ends meet. It's going to catch up one of these days."

Caywood also noted: "What hurts us more than anything are the prices. The price of cotton is very, very low. Market prices have been hurting everybody."

Farm losses are the result of a multitude of challenges over several years of downturns that have led to devastating farm losses. The letter goes on to say, "For the last three to four years the reality of record-high input costs and rapidly declining and historically low crop and specialty crop prices have culminated in many



Pinal County farmer Nancy Caywood confirms the tough times in farm and ranch country.

U.S. farmers experiencing negative margins and losses approaching one hundred billion dollars nationwide... These trends aren't just statistics; they represent an economic crisis in rural America."

The letter, organized by the American Farm Bureau Federation, acknowledges—and expresses appreciation for—the significant investments over the past year in farm programs, a bridge assistance program, and other aid to support farmers. It also notes that losses for commodity crops and specialty crops remain deep and the gap needs to be closed, saying, "In addition to continuing to pursue federal policies to increase long-term domestic demand for U.S. agricultural commodities, we urge Congress to provide immediate economic support to fill in the gap of remaining losses for both field and specialty crop farmers."

Farmers appreciate that members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have acknowledged the deep losses on family farms and the need for additional aid. The letter emphasizes the urgency of the economic crisis as farmers question whether they can afford to plant another crop. Stabilizing the farm economy benefits all Americans by ensuring our food supply remains strong and secure.

These ag groups, American Farm Bureau and Arizona Farm Bureau will continue to work with the U.S. Congress to make positive change and respond to the market conditions currently facing farmers and ranchers in America today. 🚜

ARIZONA'S GROUNDWATER LANDSCAPE: KEY REGULATORY UPDATES IMPACTING AGRICULTURE IN 2026

By Daniel Harris, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager



Arizona Farm Bureau is dedicated to representing our members and advancing the policies they set forth through our grassroots process, ensuring that agriculture's voice is heard in discussions about water access, conservation, and sustainable management statewide.

on new irrigation, while INAs restrict the expansion of irrigated acreage. Developments in late 2025 and early 2026 include the designation of the Ranegras Plain Basin as an AMA, ongoing implementation in the Willcox AMA with the appointment of its Groundwater Users Advisory Council, a settlement agreement with Riverview Dairy and Attorney General Kris Mayes, and a court ruling vacating the Hualapai Valley INA designation.

RANEGRAS PLAIN BASIN BECOMES ARIZONA'S EIGHTH ACTIVE MANAGEMENT AREA

The designation of the Ranegras Plain Groundwater Basin as Arizona's eighth AMA unfolded through a structured process beginning in October 2025. The Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) held an informational public meeting on October 15, 2025, to share hydrologic and regulatory details about the basin in La Paz and Yuma counties. A technical memorandum followed on October 24, 2025, outlining groundwater conditions, and the Director initiated designation procedures on October 27, 2025. Notices appeared in local newspapers on November 5 and 12, 2025, leading to a public hearing on December 18, 2025, in Brenda. During the hearing, ADWR presented data on water levels, water budget (the amount of water input and output within the basin), and subsidence, receiving 15 oral comments and 417 written ones. On January 9, 2026, ADWR Director Tom Buschitzke issued the Findings, Decision, and Order, citing criteria under A.R.S. § 45-412(A): the need for active management to preserve supplies for future needs and subsidence endangering storage capacity. The AMA prohibits irrigating new acres, mandates metering and reporting for non-exempt wells by March 31, 2026, and requires grandfathered rights applications by April 8, 2026.

PROGRESS IN THE WILLCOX AMA: STRUCTURE, DEADLINES, AND ADVISORY COUNCIL FORMATION

The Willcox Groundwater Basin's designation as an AMA, effective January 8, 2025, following a December 19, 2024, order, has progressed with key structural

elements taking shape. The AMA now enforces no new irrigated acres and requires metering and annual reports for non-exempt wells, with the first due March 31, 2026. Grandfathered rights certificates must be applied for by April 8, 2026, and the first management plan is set for adoption by January 2027, with conservation requirements effective January 2029. On December 8, 2025, Governor Katie Hobbs appointed the five-member Willcox AMA Groundwater Users Advisory Council (GUAC): Caleb Blaschke, Ed Curry, Doug Dunlap, Mark Spencer, and Ted Haas. Established under A.R.S. § 45-451, the GUAC represents users knowledgeable in water development, use, and conservation, providing recommendations to ADWR on tailoring the management plan to protect the basin's supplies.

THE RIVERVIEW SETTLEMENT

In connection with the Willcox AMA designation, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes announced on January 8, 2026, a settlement agreement with Riverview Dairy regarding groundwater usage in Cochise County's Sulphur Springs Valley. Executed December 31, 2025, the 20-year agreement requires Riverview to fallow or transition 2,000 acres of irrigated farmland in phases: 650 acres by the fourth anniversary, another 650 by the eighth, and 700 by the twelfth. The agreement creates two \$5.5 million funds totaling \$11 million. The Riverview Funding Commitment (RFC), managed by Riverview, supports residents within 1.6 miles of its irrigation wells with well replacements, tank systems, or community water connections. The Sulphur Springs Water Fund (SSWF), administered by a third-party organization, aids those outside 1.6 miles with similar measures. Contributions phase in \$3.5 million to each fund by December 31, 2026, and \$2 million by December 31, 2027. Applications for both funds open April 8, 2026, prioritizing present well failures, with the settlement projected to conserve over 100,000 acre-feet by 2040.

COURT VACATES HUALAPAI VALLEY INA DESIGNATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE REGULATIONS

A judicial ruling has added a layer of procedural scrutiny to groundwater designations, as seen in the case of the Hualapai Valley Groundwater Basin in Mohave County. On January 9, 2026, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Scott A. Blaney vacated ADWR's December 19, 2022, Final Order designating the basin as an INA. The court found that the designation constitutes rulemaking under the Arizona Administrative Procedure Act (A.R.S. § 41-1001 et seq.), as it is an agency statement of general applicability implementing law and policy with future effect on all landowners.

The ruling states that ADWR did not follow APA requirements, including public participation, transparency, and review by the Governor's Regulatory Review Council, and INA designations lack an express exemption under A.R.S. § 41-1005. The ruling noted concerns about evidence sufficiency but focused on the procedural violation, instructing ADWR to comply with the APA for any future designation attempt.

These recent developments are changing Arizona's groundwater landscape, particularly in rural agricultural basins, and the Arizona Farm Bureau is dedicated to representing our members and advancing the policies they set forth through our grassroots process, ensuring that agriculture's voice is heard in discussions about water access, conservation, and sustainable management statewide. 🚜

ARIZONA FARM BUREAU MEMBERSHIP OFFERS PRACTICAL BENEFITS

By Staff Reports

Farming and ranching in Arizona require resilience, planning, and a willingness to adapt. Producers face rising input costs, labor challenges, water concerns, and increasing regulatory pressure, all while working to provide food, fiber, and fuel for a growing population. In an environment where every dollar and every decision matters, Arizona Farm Bureau membership offers tangible value that extends well beyond advocacy alone.

Arizona Farm Bureau maintains one of the most comprehensive member benefit programs available to agricultural producers in the state. These benefits are designed to support both the business and personal sides of farm and ranch life, helping members manage costs, reduce risk, and maintain long term stability.

OUR INSURANCE PROGRAMS

Insurance programs remain one of the most utilized benefits. Members have access to coverage options for auto, home, farm, ranch, and life insurance through partners that understand the realities of rural living. Unlike one-size-fits-all policies, these programs are built with agriculture in mind, addressing unique risks such as equipment use, multiple vehicles, livestock exposure, and property spread across large geographic areas.

DISCOUNTS ON A WIDE RANGE OF EVERYDAY EXPENSES

In addition to insurance, Arizona Farm Bureau membership provides discounts on a wide range of everyday expenses. Members can save on vehicle purchases and maintenance, rental cars, hotels, travel services, cell phone plans, workwear, and other essentials. For families and operations managing multiple vehicles or employees, these savings can quickly exceed the cost of an annual membership.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

Health and wellness services are another important component of the member benefits program. Arizona Farm Bureau works to connect members with hearing health services, wellness resources, and programs that help farm and ranch families stay healthy and productive. In rural Arizona, where access to health services can be limited, these offerings help bridge gaps and provide peace of mind.

TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Technology and communication tools are also part of the benefits lineup. Discounted cell phone plans and services help keep operations connected, whether coordinating crews, monitoring deliveries, or staying in touch with family members across long distances. SEE PRACTICAL BENEFITS FOR FARM AND RANCH FAMILIES PAGE 6

CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS *continued from Page 1*

Arizona Agriculture: Arizona is known for high-value crops. In what ways do these commodities position Arizona as a unique player in the national agricultural landscape?

Frisvold: The Yuma area is a national hub of winter vegetable production. From Thanksgiving to Easter virtually all of U.S. leafy greens production comes from Yuma as well as the Imperial and Coachella Valleys in California, with Yuma making up the lion's share of that. Yuma provides winter vegetables not only across the entire U.S., but to Canada as well. There isn't another reliable US source for these winter vegetable supplies.

Arizona Agriculture: What about our traditional crops like cotton and alfalfa, smaller margins but still significant?

Frisvold: Cotton acreage production is down from its historic highs, although Arizona counties still have among the highest yields nationally. I'd characterize Arizona cotton as smaller, but more efficient and environmentally friendly. From the mid-1990s to 2023, Arizona cotton growers reduced pesticide applications from 9 per acre to just 0.58 per acre, placing Arizona at the lowest levels among all U.S. cotton-producing states and less than one-fifth of the U.S. national average of 3.2 applications. Water efficiency has also improved significantly. In 1984, Arizona cotton growers applied 4.9 acre-feet (AF) of water per acre, yielding 242 pounds of cotton lint per AF. By 2023, water use had decreased to 4.2 AF per acre, while yields increased to 299 pounds per AF – a 32% increase in cotton produced per unit of water applied.

Alfalfa acreage took off in the state after the 1996 Farm Bill allowed for greater planting flexibility and population growth increased demand for dairy products in the Tucson and Phoenix metro areas. Recent high prices spurred production onward. We've seen a bit of a reversal recently as prices have softened and as stricter cutbacks in Arizona's Colorado River allocations have hit Central Arizona. With Arizona's metro areas continuing to grow, demand for dairy products and alfalfa to feed our dairy cows will be strong. But the state is going to have difficulties adjusting to more Colorado River cutbacks.

Arizona Agriculture: Beyond farm gate revenue, how does Arizona agriculture support rural communities and urban growth? For instance, what role does it play in food security, tourism, and even tech innovation hubs in the state?

Frisvold: There's been a lot of interest of late in "local foods." In Arizona, we're fortunate that our winter vegetables, beef, and dairy products are produced in-state. In 2022, there were 751 farms with \$20 million in direct sales to consumers through farm stands, roadside stands or stores, u-pick, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), and online marketplaces. Another 373 farms had \$244 million in sales directly to retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regionally branded products.

Arizona Agriculture: With recent developments like the Ag-to-Urban initiative allowing farmland conversion for housing to conserve water, how might this reshape agriculture's long-term economic footprint in Arizona? Do you see it as a net positive or a potential loss for the sector?

Frisvold: Historically, water in the West has shifted from agricultural to urban, commercial, and industrial uses. That's going to continue. I think voluntary arrangements where all parties involved can benefit mutually are better than imposing restrictions. Land and water are valuable assets. Farm households will have to navigate how to use them and whether to sell them to others. Agriculture will remain strong along the Colorado River mainstem. In Central Arizona there are opportunities for expanding and partnering with Tribal agriculture as urban development continues in Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties.

Arizona Agriculture: Agricultural exports are a big driver for Arizona, contributing significantly to the state's \$9 billion in goods exports to Mexico alone. Can you highlight specific success stories where Arizona ag products have boosted local economies through international sales?

Frisvold: Agricultural exports and imports together contribute more than \$3 billion in sales, supporting 12,000 Arizona jobs annually. In 2022, China accounted for 32% of Arizona agricultural exports, followed by Canada at 26%. Our exports to Mexico are modest, just 4%. Imports of fresh produce from Mexico are a powerful economic engine in Santa Cruz County. People often focus on imports "taking jobs" but importation from Mexico is an important source of jobs in Southern Arizona.

Arizona Agriculture: Arizona's trade with Mexico is massive—\$11.6 billion in imports and \$9 billion in exports last year, much of it agricultural. How has the USMCA influenced this cross-border flow, particularly for perishable goods like produce? What needs to be fixed to ensure more exports.

Frisvold: The integration of North American markets (US, Canada, and Mexico) was already well under way when NAFTA was approved in 1993. USMCA, after a lot of uncertainty, ended up being about 99% the same as NAFTA or what had already been agreed to. A value of NAFTA/USMCA was providing policy certainty. Businesses could make investments in supply chains with some assurance that tariff and other trade policies would be stable. With the federal government imposing tariffs on Canada and Mexico, that feeling of policy certainty is gone for now. Shippers don't know how much they'll be taxed. Things have settled down a bit. At one point, tariff rates were changing every week if not over the course of a single day. USMCA comes up for review in July. It may then be subject to review annually for a while. The past trade barriers have been taken down, so the question is what will be the level of new trade barriers and tax increases.

China is our major export market. The U.S. is going to have to diversify as the trade war continues, because we've lost markets there in cotton and soybeans. We've also imposed tariffs on textile producing countries. One strategy to adapt to could be to strengthen cotton-textile supply chains with Mexico.

Arizona Agriculture: Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts said we crossed the Rubicon when roughly three years ago we started importing more food than we export. Is this a fixable challenge? What do you see we should do?

Frisvold: The trade data shows that prices exporters to the U.S. are getting have not fallen and that virtually all the costs of the tariffs are being borne by U.S. households and businesses. So far, U.S. agri-input suppliers have held off on raising prices to farmers significantly. Since the April "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, fertilizer price have gone up at annual inflation rate of 13%, with potash prices rising 42%. But prices haven't risen much for farm machinery or agricultural chemicals. Diesel prices are up, but gas prices are down. In 2026, we'll see if ag-input importers continue to eat the cost of the tariffs or whether they start to pass them on to U.S. farmers.

In terms of what to recommend, I'd say stop taxing production inputs. It just

hurts U.S. competitiveness.

Other countries are increasingly referring to the U.S. as an "unreliable" supplier and looking to other countries for their imports. After the first trade war with China, U.S. cotton exports to China plummeted. China began to rely more on Brazil for cotton, investing billions in infrastructure and logistics in Brazil. Brazil is now China's chief supplier of cotton, not the U.S. To respond, U.S. cotton producers will have to diversify, looking to Southeast Asian, and South Asian markets as well as to Mexico, and elsewhere in Latin America.

Arizona Agriculture: Tariffs and retaliatory measures have been a concern since early 2025, potentially taxing imported inputs for Arizona farmers. Based on your research, what vulnerabilities do this create for Arizona's ag sector, and what policy recommendations would you offer to mitigate them?

Frisvold: This past year, U.S. businesses have had to decide how much of the tariff-induced cost increases to pass on to their buyers. Arizona farm input suppliers and food and fiber manufacturers are vulnerable to cost increases because they operate on relatively small profit margins. There is still a lot of uncertainty about what current tariffs or new tariffs will do to their costs. We've estimated a 5% increase in non-labor input costs would lower business owner income by 63% for farm input suppliers, and 69% for food and fiber manufacturers. An 8% increase would erase all business owner income for these businesses. So far, farm input companies have eaten the cost of the tariffs, getting lower returns. There are limits to how long they can continue doing this.

Arizona cotton producers are especially vulnerable to retaliatory tariffs. U.S. Department of Commerce data suggests 88% of Arizona cotton is exported. This is likely an underestimated percentage as some Arizona cotton shipped to California may get re-bundled with California cotton and then exported.

Arizona Agriculture: Water productivity is a core area of your expertise, and Arizona faces unique irrigation challenges in the Colorado River Basin. How do trade policies intersect with water management to affect the economic viability of Arizona agriculture?

Frisvold: There have been calls to restrict agricultural exports to manage water use. I think this is misguided and wouldn't work anyway. For example, if you said Arizona cannot export alfalfa to foreign countries, California would just export more, and we would sell more alfalfa to California. If you have proper groundwater management institutions in place, then where the crops go doesn't matter. If you don't have proper groundwater management institutions, aquifers will get depleted no matter where crops are sent.

Arizona Agriculture: Looking ahead to 2030, what emerging trends—like climate adaptation tech, biotech crops, or sustainable practices—do you believe will enhance Arizona agriculture's economic resilience and trade competitiveness?

Frisvold: USDA and other federal agencies went from emphasizing climate adaptation tech and sustainable practices to de-emphasizing them. I've been part of federal projects where we were required to stop work in those areas to keep our funding from being pulled. This is unfortunate because it hits research on drought adaptation. Applications of AI, precision agriculture and second-generation mechanization (robotics, harvest weed seed control, drones) right now are more promising and have a clearer path forward. In Arizona, over the next 20 years, I think we'll see more mechanization to substitute for agricultural chemicals and labor.

Arizona Agriculture: As North American agriculture officials emphasize stronger alliances for food security, how can Arizona leverage its proximity to Mexico and Canada to lead in regional trade innovation?

Frisvold: First, stop raising taxes on farm inputs. Second, there are opportunities to work with Mexico to strengthen a north-south integrated textile supply chain. Mexico could grow as a hub of textile and apparel manufacturing, while the U.S. cotton industry can diversify away from dependence on China. Third, agricultural industry leaders can continue to emphasize how much U.S. agriculture benefits from trade and open markets.

Arizona Agriculture: Finally, for aspiring ag economists or policymakers in the audience, what advice would you give on navigating the interplay between global trade, local resources, and Arizona's economy?

Frisvold: You're "interplay between global trade, local resources, and Arizona's economy" hits the nail on the head. Arizona's agriculture is shaped by global markets, so you need to understand how these work. Keep up on reading. Of course, the Arizona Farm Bureau newsletters and podcasts are great. There are great market outlook materials put out by USDA's Economic Research Service (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/>) and the USDA Office of the Chief Economist (<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-chief-economist>). The Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) puts out a policy journal, *Choices* (<https://www.aaea.org/publications/choices-magazine>) which does deeper dives into analysis, but is still very accessible. AAEA also has a blog, *Agricultural Economists in the News* (<http://blog.aaea.org/2026/01/members-in-news-january-12-2026.html>) that is a good way to keep up with the news of the week. On top of that, read Arizona newspapers and check Google News for Arizona stories. Trade journals are also a good place for information. If you're an aspiring agricultural economist, don't just access these information sources, but figure out how you can contribute to them. Don't just communicate with policy or academic insiders. Get out and talk with and write for everyone. 

Social Media



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PRACTICAL BENEFITS FOR FARM AND RANCH FAMILIES *continued from Page 4*

workdays. Reliable communication remains essential for safety and efficiency in agriculture.

WHAT YOUR DUES DO FOR ARIZONA AGRICULTURE

Beyond discounts and services, Arizona Farm Bureau membership supports a broader mission centered on education, advocacy, and community. Membership dues help fund efforts to represent agriculture at the local, state, and national levels. Farm Bureau works with lawmakers and regulators to promote sound science, protect private property rights, support water security, and ensure that farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table when policies are developed.

Communication plays a critical role in this mission. Arizona Farm Bureau provides resources, publications, and programs that keep members informed about issues affecting agriculture, from regulatory changes to market trends. Through newsletters, magazines, events, and digital content, members receive timely information that helps them make informed decisions for their operations.

Membership also connects individuals to a statewide network of producers, industry professionals, and agricultural advocates. This network fosters collaboration, mentorship, and shared problem-solving. Whether through county Farm Bureau meetings, Young Farmer and Rancher programs, or statewide events, members gain opportunities to build relationships that strengthen both individual operations and the agricultural community.

For many members, the value of Arizona Farm Bureau membership becomes clear quickly. A single insurance adjustment, vehicle discount, or travel savings can offset the cost of dues for the entire year. Over time, the combined impact of financial savings, advocacy representation, and community connection makes membership a practical investment.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE

At its core, Arizona Farm Bureau membership is about supporting the people behind agriculture. It recognizes that farming and ranching are not just occu-

pations, but ways of life rooted in family, stewardship, and long-term commitment to the land. By offering meaningful benefits and strong representation, Arizona Farm Bureau helps ensure that Arizona agriculture remains viable, respected, and resilient.

WHAT TO EXPECT FOR THE FUTURE

Arizona Farm Bureau continues to expand its member benefits program with new offerings focused on practicality, safety, and everyday savings. Members now receive exclusive discounts with Canyon Coolers, providing durable, high-performance coolers built to withstand long days in the field, on the ranch, or in extreme Arizona heat. Affinity Cellular offers affordable cell phone plans designed to keep farm and ranch families connected without unnecessary costs or contracts.

In addition, Arizona Farm Bureau has added expanded hearing health benefits through Start Hearing and SoundGear Hearing Protection, giving members access to hearing evaluations, hearing aids, and protective gear designed for agricultural and industrial environments. Together, these benefits reflect Arizona Farm Bureau's commitment to supporting the real needs of those who work the land and depend on reliable tools, communication, and long-term health.

To learn more about Arizona Farm Bureau member benefits or to become a member, visit azfb.org/membership.

Member Benefits on the Go!

Get easy access to special benefits for Farm Bureau members – download the Farm Bureau Member Benefit App!



AFBF ESTABLISH 2026 POLICIES *continued from Page 1*

bor programs to meet the needs of America's farmers and ranchers, including formalizing support for the new Adverse Effect Wage Rate methodology, and further revisions to avoid unpredictable rate swings in the future.

They voted to support federal funding for research and biosecurity facilities to better identify and combat illnesses and pests that threaten the health of crops and animals. New policy also includes committing more resources specifically to eradicate the New World screwworm, and keeping the U.S.-Mexico border closed to cattle trade until the screwworm is controlled.

Delegates revised national farm policy to provide more protection for dairy farmers who may suffer losses due to market challenges.

Delegates also formalized support for prioritizing locally grown fruits, vegetables, bread, and proteins in institutional purchases such as schools and government facilities.

Additionally, several policies submitted by the Arizona Farm Bureau were adopted into the national policy book, including support for funding FDA Rapid Response Teams for food safety and funding for desalination plants to help address

drought-related water shortages on the Colorado River.

Voting members also requested that the board of directors analyze several agricultural issues, including the impact of tariffs, the lack of affordable insurance options for poultry farmers, and a proposal from Arizona to commission an economic study comparing the costs and affordability of desalinated water for food production versus municipal and industrial uses.



Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts takes the open microphone during the American Farm Bureau delegate session to advance a policy issue.



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AZFB MAKES PRESENCE KNOWN AT AFBF

communicate, collaborate and influence! With hundreds of thousands of followers, Arizona Yuma farmer Jon Dinsmore is telling the Arizona farmer's story!

Said Dinsmore, "I'm thankful for the chance to stand at the American Farm Bureau Convention and talk about showing up genuinely and being ready to share our message with all audiences."

The closing general session featured remarks from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, followed by an inspiring keynote address from Heisman Trophy winner, former NFL player, and five-time New York Times best-selling author Tim Tebow.

Most general session programming was livestreamed on the homepage of AFBF's website, fb.org. Highlights included a keynote address from AFBF President Zippy Duvall on Sunday. Later that day at 4 p.m. Pacific, a congressional panel featured the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate Agriculture committees.

Additionally, 20 Cultivation Center Stage events were livestreamed. These presentations included competitions, award announcements and TED-style educational speeches and panels from several of agriculture's top thought leaders. A few highlights of Cultivation Center Stage programming are listed below.

Fireside Chat with AFBF President Zippy Duvall. Tara Beaver-Coronado, a content creator and mental health advocate, hosted this session. She and Duvall explored the importance of reducing the stigma around mental health and the essential role authentic storytelling plays in the social media era.

Rural Development Drives Prosperous Communities. This discussion explored the state of rural economic and business development across the country as well as the ongoing efforts of determined leaders and innovative entrepreneurs working to ensure rural America's Main Streets continue to thrive. Speakers included Rodd Moesel, former president, Oklahoma Farm Bureau; Dr. Doug Steele, vice president, food, agriculture & natural resources at the Association of Public & Land Grant Universities; and Joby Young, executive vice president, AFBF.

Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. Entrepreneurs competed for \$145,000 in startup funds, with the Final Four teams competing before judges and a live audience. Previously, Arizona Farm Bureau has had two competitors to the Innovation challenge, with one of them advancing to the Top Ten back in 2017.

Celebrating Veteran Farmers and the 2026 Veteran Farmer Award of

continued from Page 2



Young Farmer & Rancher Competitor
Alex Dobson advanced to the Sweet Sixteen in the national Discussion Meet Competition.

Excellence Winner. Retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Rutter for his dedicated service to our nation and his continued leadership in agriculture and community engagement was recognized.

YF&R Discussion Meet Sweet 16 Announcement. State Farm Bureau teams advancing in the competitions were revealed live on the stage where Alex Dobson from Arizona was announced. Go to [@AZFarmBureau's Instagram to relive the moment.](https://www.instagram.com/azfarmbureau)

In the 2026 Ag Innovation Challenge, FarmMind (a Louisi

siana startup that integrates agricultural workflows into one platform) was named the winner, earning a total of \$100,000 in prize money sponsored by partners including Farm Credit, Bayer Crop Science, John Deere, Farm Bureau Bank, Farm Bureau Financial Services, and T-Mobile. KiposTech from Pennsylvania took runner-up honors.

Members of the AFBF Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee elected a new executive team: Tommy Salisbury from Oklahoma as chair for 2026 (beginning in March after the YF&R Conference, with a one-year term also on the AFBF board of directors), Daniel Jones of California as vice chair, and Allison Whiten of South Carolina as secretary. Arizona Farm Bureau's Ben and Ashley Menges were also appointed members to the AFBF YF&R Committee.

Arizona Farm Bureau proudly celebrates the participation of its members and the outstanding performance of Alex Dobson, showcasing the dedication and leadership of Arizona's agricultural community at the national level.

Mark your calendar! The 2027 American Farm Bureau Annual Convention is scheduled to take place in Charlotte, North Carolina. The dates are January 8-12. 

REVIVING A LEGACY: THE FIGHT AGAINST THE SCREWWORM

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Director of Communications

In the vast landscapes of the American Southwest, a tiny but terrifying parasite once wreaked havoc on livestock and wildlife: the New World screwworm. This flesh-eating fly larva, capable of burrowing into wounds and causing devastating infections, was eradicated from the U.S. decades ago through innovative science and sheer determination. But with recent detections creeping northward from Mexico, the threat is back – and so is the call to arms.

A HISTORICAL TRIUMPH: THE DOUGLAS FACILITY AND THE STERILE INSECT TECHNIQUE

In the 1960s, American agriculture was under siege from the screwworm, a parasitic fly whose larvae feed on living tissue, leading to painful deaths in cattle, deer, and even humans in rare cases. Enter the USDA's groundbreaking Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), a method that turned the pest's biology against itself.

From 1963 to 1983, the USDA facility at Douglas Municipal Airport in Arizona served as a frontline fortress in this battle.

Strategically positioned along the U.S.-Mexico border, it released millions of sterile male screwworm flies each week. These flies were irradiated to render them infertile, then packed into specially designed cardboard boxes and dropped from airplanes over targeted areas. When sterile males mated with wild females, no viable offspring resulted, crashing the population and creating a biological barrier against northward migration from Mexico.

The program's success was staggering. By 1966, the U.S. was declared free of indigenous screwworms, but the Douglas facility continued operations for nearly two more decades to maintain the barrier amid ongoing risks from south of the border. This effort safeguarded U.S. livestock and wildlife, saving the agricultural industry an estimated \$1.5 billion annually in losses, a figure that underscores the economic devastation the pest could unleash if left unchecked.

The facility's closure in 1983 marked the end of an era, but its legacy lives on as a model of innovative pest control without the use of chemicals. Aerial drops of sterile flies, often from small aircraft buzzing over rugged terrain, became a symbol of human ingenuity triumphing over nature's threats.

THE RESURGENCE: USDA'S MODERN ARSENAL AGAINST THE SCREWWORM IN 2026

Fast-forward to today, and the screwworm is stirring again. According to the USDA, detections in Mexico – starting in Chiapas in late 2024 and spreading to areas like Nuevo Leon by 2025 – have put U.S. authorities on high alert.

The USDA estimates annual losses of \$4.3 billion for producers alone. As a result, the agency has launched a multifaceted response to prevent re-infestation.

At the heart of these efforts is a revival of the Sterile Insect Technique, scaled up for the 21st century. USDA is dispersing over 100 million sterile flies weekly in Mexico, with plans to ramp up to 500 million through expanded infrastructure.

A key component is the new sterile fly dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in Edinburg, Texas, set to open in early 2026. Backed by an \$8.5 million investment, this site will produce and release up to 300 million flies per week, using advanced eBeam technology for sterilization as a safer alternative to traditional radiation methods.

USDA's five-pillar strategy, announced by Secretary Brooke Rollins, goes beyond flies:

- Innovate to Eradicate:** \$100 million for breakthrough tech, including new traps and treatments, plus an "NWS Grand Challenge" for crowdsourced solutions.



Representatives from Arizona Farm Bureau, Arizona Cattle Growers, Cochise County and the Arizona Department of Agriculture met to uncover opportunities for a screwworm fly remediation. History proves that Arizona is a good place to make things happen.

ARIZONA'S PITCH: BRINGING THE FIGHT BACK HOME TO DOUGLAS

As a border state with a storied history in screwworm defense, Arizona isn't sitting on the sidelines. The University of Arizona has been named one of three national sites for screwworm screening and diagnostics, with its College of Veterinary Medicine's lab handling initial detections and verifications as part of USDA's readiness push.

But Arizona leaders are going further, actively lobbying to revive a fly facility right where it once thrived. In a bipartisan effort, Arizona Representatives Juan Ciscomani, Eli Crane, Andy Biggs, Paul Gosar, and David Schweikert sent a letter to USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins urging the reconstruction of the sterile fly facility at Douglas Municipal Airport.

They argue that Douglas's proximity to the Mexican border makes it an ideal location for rapid response, leveraging the site's historical infrastructure to bolster the national barrier. This pitch aligns with broader calls from groups like the National Cattlemen's Beef Association for domestic facilities, emphasizing that a rebuilt Douglas hub could prevent billions in losses while creating jobs and strengthening local economies.

Arizona's involvement also includes on-the-ground actions like trap deployments and education for ranchers, highlighting the state's commitment to protecting its vital agriculture sector, from cotton fields to cattle ranches.

A recent visit to Douglas with several representatives from Arizona Farm Bureau, Cochise County, the Arizona Cattle Growers Association, and the Arizona Department of Agriculture revealed the potential for hosting a facility once again in Douglas. Arizona has plenty of land mass and even abandoned hangers that could be retrofitted to serve as a hub for fly sterilization. The possibilities are evident.

"We're looking forward to seeing what would happen if USDA were to put this Douglas facility on its radar, and we encourage USDA to do so," said southern Arizona rancher and Arizona Farm Bureau Second Vice President Ben Menges who was with the group touring the area to determine the possibilities.

WHY THIS MATTERS: SAFEGUARDING AMERICA'S FOOD FUTURE

The screwworm saga is more than a bug story; it's a testament to how science, policy, and regional advocacy can shield our food systems from existential threats. As USDA ramps up its \$850 million war chest against this parasite, Arizona's push to revive Douglas could prove pivotal in maintaining a screwworm-free America. 

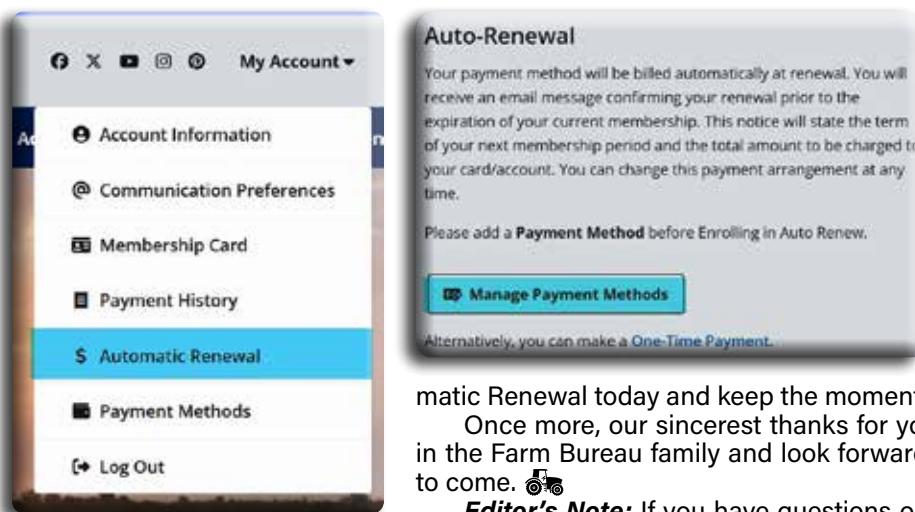
REMEMBER: YOU CAN AUTOMATICALLY RENEW YOUR FARM BUREAU MEMBERSHIP

By Staff Reports

From all of us at the Arizona Farm Bureau, thank you for being a dedicated part of our community. You and our other members truly are the heartbeat of our organization, your passion and commitment fuel everything we do. We deeply value your ongoing support and can't express how much it means to us.

If you haven't done so yet, remember renewing your membership just got simpler and more seamless. We're thrilled to highlight our Automatic Renewal option, designed with your convenience in mind.

With Automatic Renewal, you'll never miss a beat when it comes to unlocking our members-only perks—like exclusive discounts, tailored programs, and essential services—all without the annual reminder to renew. Best of all, it's completely risk-free:



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Protect the benefits you've come to rely on—don't let your membership expire. Enroll in Automatic Renewal today and keep the momentum going strong.

Once more, our sincerest thanks for your loyalty. We're honored to have you in the Farm Bureau family and look forward to supporting you for many seasons to come. 

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

CONTRIBUTE TO ARIZONA FARM BUREAU'S AGPAC

As we enter 2026, the upcoming election cycle will be critically important for electing candidates who champion agriculture.

Last November, the AgPac Board of Trustees convened and established an ambitious target: raising \$50,000 in contributions to AgPac. This will bolster our political influence and enable substantial support for candidates who advocate for Arizona agriculture.



AMERICAN FARM BUREAU ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR PAL CLASS 13

The American Farm Bureau Federation is now accepting nominations for its Partners in Advocacy Leadership (PAL) program. This program builds on the personal development journeys of promising young members, elevating them to the next level through an intensive, executive-style curriculum that demands significant effort and commitment. The core competencies developed include self-awareness, industry knowledge, message development, message delivery, policy engagement, and interpersonal skills.

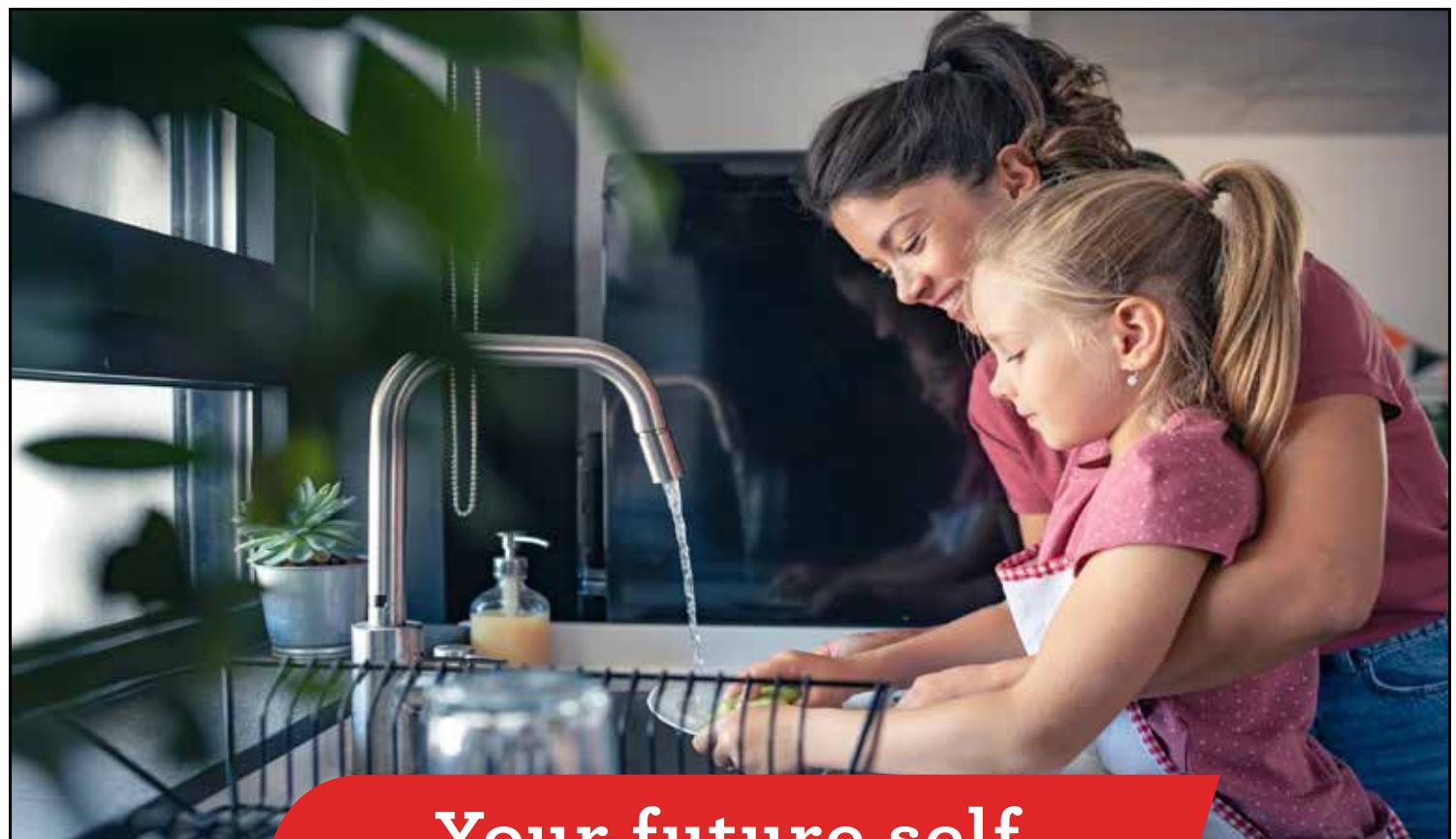
Notably, both former Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse, PAL Class 3 graduate and current Arizona Farm Bureau President John Boelts have successfully completed the program, emerging as stronger advocates for agriculture and exemplifying the impact it can have on leadership at the state and national levels.

Each state Farm Bureau may nominate up to two candidates by submitting letters of recommendation. Ideal candidates are passionate about advocacy and policy, eager to leverage social media, and fall between the ages of 30-45 at some point during the program years (2026-2027).

The state nomination is part of the application process, which requires three recommendation letters, including one from the state Farm Bureau president. Applications must be emailed to johnnam@fb.org by 8:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on March 23, 2026.

The application form is available at the link below and on the AFBF website: <https://www.fb.org/initiative/pal-partners-in-advocacy-leadership>. 

Scan the QR code to donate today. We are deeply grateful to all our generous supporters and look forward to expanding our political action committee, increasing our impact, and strongly representing agriculture throughout 2026 and beyond. 



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