

## Conversation on Arizona’s Restaurant Industry and the Pandemic: Steve Chucri

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Native Arizonan, Steve Chucri comes from Lebanese lineage on both sides. His maternal grandfather, Tony M. Coury, Sr., was a true entrepreneur in becoming the first licensed automobile dealer in Arizona. Chucri draws inspiration from his grandfather who couldn’t read or write, but whose hard work and success afforded Chucri first-hand insight into the complexities of running a business.

Father of two boys, and husband to Christine, his wife of 22 years, Chucri for the past 19 years has served as the President and CEO of the Arizona Restaurant Association (ARA). Leading an organization that promotes dining out is a perfect fit for Chucri, who had scorched so many dinners he had begun to wonder if “burnt” was a food group.

The insight Chucri gathered through his experience with the restaurant association was a contributing factor in his decision to run for public office. In 2012, Chucri was elected to serve as Maricopa County Supervisor for District 2 and has been proudly serving his constituents since he took office in January 2013. Chucri works with his county colleagues to eliminate excess regulations and create an environment that invites innovation and sustains entrepreneurial growth with a Best-in-class mindset. Recently, Chucri was appointed by the Republic of Estonia to be the Honorary Consul for Arizona. This distinction builds upon his experience having traveled around the world on delegation missions, visits with foreign dignitaries, sampling a variety of cuisines, and engaging in unique foreign customs.

Chucri remains focused on adopting policies that enhance the business cache of the county, eliminating unnecessary burdens and implementing strategies that make it more affordable and attractive to operate a business in Maricopa County. Prior to his work with the restaurant association and at Maricopa County, Supervisor Chucri spent 6 years on Capitol Hill working for an Arizona Congressman.

Chucri is an alumnus of Brophy College Preparatory and went on to obtain his post-secondary degree in Business Administration at the University of San Diego. He has received the Sentinel Award from the Greater Phoenix Chamber and the Business Journal’s 40 Under 40 award. Steve serves as a Board Member for the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, the University of San Diego Alumni, Boys Hope Girls Hope, MAG

Regional Council, Valley Leadership, Phoenix Downtown Partnership, National Restaurant Association, AZ Consular Corps and is past president of the Council of State Restaurant Associations.



**Says Supervisor Steve Chucri about agriculture’s relationship with the food service industry, “Look, we need you and you need us so we’re not breaking up. It’s always going to be an important relationship and quite frankly I think the market is going to dictate how that works or doesn’t work.”**

Wanting an up-close understanding of what took place in Arizona’s restaurant industry during the pandemic, I reached out to Supervisor Chucri for the clear view. The numbers alone make one shudder.

- During the shutdown, Arizona restaurants laid-off or furloughed 151,000 employees, or 66%.
- During the shutdown, Arizona restaurants lost \$27.16 million per day in revenue, a 74% decline.
- During the shutdown, daily payroll went from a projected \$14.5 million to \$4.9 million per day, a \$9.5 million loss.
- In 2020, the ARA estimates that the industry lost \$2.7 billion in revenue, a 20% decline from projections.
- In 2020, the ARA estimates that 12%, or more than 1,200 locations, were forced to permanently close.

We know industries across the board suffered during the pandemic. We certainly know what we experienced in agriculture. Our peers in food service certainly felt the pain too. This conversation with Chucri helps bridge our understanding of how important every link in the food chain is to the future strength of a well-functioning food system in America.

**Arizona Agriculture:** After the pandemic of 2020, what does the Arizona restaurant landscape look like?

**Chucri:** Well, we are healing. I’ve been part of this industry for nearly 20 years, 19 years running the Arizona Restaurant Association, yet I’ve never seen anything quite like what happened last March. You must remember our restaurant owners are resourceful people, very entrepreneurial very innovative. I was talking to some of my colleagues in other states like Louisiana and New York and they said take Hurricane Katrina

and 911 all together and it was not nearly as bad as what this pandemic has been for the restaurant industry. It put the restaurant industry on their tails.

The losses are significant and they’re very real and we feel them. But it doesn’t stop the innovative nature of this industry; they keep pushing forward. That’s what we continue to do and all we can do, quite frankly. So, it’s been a challenge to say the least.

See **CHUCRI** Page 2

## Ag Fest Reimagined: Virtual Launch with In-Person Wrap-Up

By Victoria Ocula, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

Save the date! Arizona Farm Bureau’s in-person Legislative Ag Fest is planned for April 15. In the meantime, our Virtual Legislative Ag Fest in January provided members with exciting opportunities to engage with their state legislators from the comfort of their home.

The festivities began when Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse paid a visit to the Arizona State Capitol to ensure that – despite not being able to all gather – Arizona Farm Bureau’s presence was felt at the legislature. Thanks to the generous donations from several County Farm Bureaus, we were able to present baskets of agricultural products to Governor Ducey’s office staff, Senate President Karen Fann, Senate Minority Leader



See **AG FEST** Page 5





### in this ISSUE

**Lurking on the Surface**  
Our Water Issues – Page 5

**Ag Labor**  
The Pandemic’s Impact - Page 6

**Customer Care**  
During the Pandemic – Page 8



Chucri continued from page 1

The hardest part has been the loss of our family, our employees, who were laid off. At the crux of this, more than 60% of our industry employees were laid off. You take that times over 300,000 people and look at the big number in our daily payroll rent that went from \$14 million per day to \$4 million per day. If you look at it like a stock chart you know it has a huge dip and then we slowly start to come up as we progress through the year.

Our banquet capacity is not back yet. People still are not booking banquet rooms because large groups cannot gather, whether it’s a pharmaceutical company coming to your presentation or just someone trying to celebrate a large family gathering or a Christmas party. Catering is suffering too because it’s just not there. These two categories have been the slowest to return and a frustration for some of our people. It’s also understandable, however, when you look at the ongoing situation with the pandemic.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Despite all these challenges, many in the “foodie” community talk about the innovations that emerged during the pandemic.

**Chucri:** The innovative nature has helped especially in shifting to “to go” or take out. Prior to COVID-19, take out amounted to about 5% to 6% of your sales or your P&L, now it is 20%. So, you can see where “to go” has been a saving grace to us. I give credit to our patrons who have said we are going to come and support you. We are going to buy gift cards, we’ll do take out; we don’t feel comfortable going into your restaurant, but we are still going to patronized you through take out and bring it into our own kitchen. That support kept the industry afloat.

In Arizona, we lost more than 1,000 restaurants in 2020, roughly \$2 billion in sales. Nationally, our estimated sales for 2020 going into the year were \$900 billion in restaurants sales across the United States. That basically makes us a trillion-dollar industry give or take a few \$100,000. But because of the pandemic, the restaurant industry lost an estimated \$275 billion nationally.

This tells you two things: One, we are a major economy and, two, a dramatic crisis like a pandemic can dramatically hurt a major economy in one fell swoop.

I continue to say that COVID-19 treats its friends and enemies the same, it eviscerates both. It does not play favorites; it is an equalizer. We will do the best we can to survive but it has been incredibly difficult.

**Arizona Agriculture:** What would you classify as the most rewarding issue of our resilient food service businesses in this crisis environment.

**Chucri:** I think resiliency is part of the fabric, our DNA, of the restaurant industry. It must be because it’s one of the hardest businesses to operate. Regarding resiliency, restaurants’ ability to modify menus to accommodate more take out, develop packaging, conduct research to make a meal that someone wants to have in their dining room and at the same time make sure it tastes the same as that traditional “restaurant dining” experience once it reaches customer door-steps is not an easy thing to do. These elements are good demonstrators of where the industry’s resilience, coupled with delivery options, food to go, take-home alcohol that was granted through Governor Ducey’s Executive Order represent good reasons for our success amid a pandemic.

**Arizona Agriculture:** The restaurant business was one of the hardest hits in this pandemic. Do we come back as strong as before? How?

**Chucri:** I believe we will come back just as strong. I’m not one advocating that we will have to get to the new normal; to me that doesn’t strike the right balance. The right balance or the right image that I see for this industry means we come back stronger including a better understanding of what something like this can do to a business, especially to a restaurant business.

The restaurant industry is here to stay. I think that we will continue to see this “take out” capacity and we will see an expansion of how we operate outside of the main restaurant to include more patio seating that’s comfortable even at the height of an Arizona summer. Technology played its role as well. For example, texting platforms instead of coming in and checking our reservation, you get a text. Then, QR codes on the tables to review the menu and probably more advances.

I think a lot of these features will continue. The natural evolution of technology improvements especially if they reduce costs, protect the customer, offer convenience, and more means a restaurant will continue to incorporate such features even when we start to see some normalcy to our dining rooms capacity. And we can’t forget that Maricopa County is one of the fastest growing counties in the country. When you have these back-to-back considerations, the more people that are here means more people that need to be fed well and conveniently. I think the area’s growth factor in our recovery as we go forward is a big consideration to a strong comeback.

**Arizona Agriculture:** For the past 18 to 20 years, you’ve served as the President and CEO of the Arizona Restaurant Association (ARA). Leading an organization that promotes dining out. Have some of the organization’s marketing strategies shifted and how?

**Chucri:** Oh, absolutely. I’ll start with our Restaurant Weeks. Most people didn’t know what they were when we first started them back in 2008 and 2009. Now, it’s an expectation that happens every year. So now how we use Facebook ads, how we communicate to our patrons, that we call affectionately foodies, has driven us to shift how we connect with consumers. Our marketing has changed quite a bit and in the direction of the industry when it comes to the culinary diversity of our menus. Growing up here as a native Arizonan, we used to say we had two kinds of food, Mexican food and then a different kind of Mexican food. The culinary diversity of today’s Arizona restaurant scene is broad and deep. For example, Chinese chef proven restaurants that come up with so many amazing menu options that people just absolutely love compared to 20 years ago as an industry, plus the growth, especially of James Beard nominees, is something to celebrate.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Prop 208 passed. How hard will this hit small business?

**Chucri:** It will be interesting to see what goes forward with Prop 208, as it’s in the courts right now. It is not good for our economy that’s for certain. I think it will in fact bring about difficulty for people who may change residency and split their time between Arizona and their new permanent residence. I think it is a concern and will have a ripple effect. Look, we at the end of the day are discretionary. We are not your mortgage payment, we’re a luxury as an industry – to go and dine out. We’re optional. So, when the economy or when someone’s pocketbook tightens up, we feel it.

Gas prices go up. This is the same thing. We’re a very fragile economy. We feel those types of economic impacts. We never take anything for granted. When you factor in the obvious fact that we are one of the most competitive industries known to man, all this makes that much more difficult. The restaurant opening across the street from me, or next door, means you have to fight for that dollar even more.

**Arizona Agriculture:** You’re an advocate for eliminating excess regulations and creating an environment that invites innovation and sustains entrepreneurial growth with a Best-in-Class mindset. What is front and center with your focus on this right now?

continued on page 4

It’s your future. Let’s protect it.®  
With offices across the state, we can help protect your family, home, car, farm/ranch and business.  
Contact your local agent today.

<b>BUCKEYE</b> 311 N. Miller Rd. 623.935.6209	<b>MIAMI</b> 520 W. Live Oak St. 928.473.1234
<b>BENSON</b> 898 W. 4th St. 520-586-8500	<b>ORO VALLEY</b> 10355 N. La Canada Dr. #197 520.219.3600 520-885-3083
<b>BULLHEAD CITY</b> 2071 Hwy. 95, Ste. A 928.763.8464	<b>PARKER</b> 1212 S. Kofa Ave. 928.669.2437
<b>CASA GRANDE</b> 408 N. Sacaton, Ste. E 520.836.2511	<b>PAYSON</b> 512 S. Beeline Hwy. #4 928.474.1775
<b>CAVE CREEK</b> 6554 E. Cave Creek, Rd. Ste. 10 480.575.0710	<b>PEORIA</b> 9051 W Kelton Ln, Ste 6 623.979.3842 602.997.6633 623.878.2491
<b>CHANDLER</b> 1820 E. Ray Rd. Ste. A205 480.284.4223 or 480.899.1997	<b>PHOENIX</b> 22601 N. 19th Ave. #106 623.434.8097
<b>CLIFTON</b> 214 N Coronado Blvd 928.865.3276	<b>PRESCOTT</b> 3005 N. Hwy. 89 928.778.9350
<b>COOLIDGE</b> 250 W. Pinkley Ave. 480-581-8004	<b>PRESCOTT VALLEY</b> 8008 Yavapai Rd Ste. B. 928.458.5880
<b>COTTONWOOD</b> 1759 E. Villa Drive, #113 928.649.8686	<b>QUEEN CREEK</b> 18933 E. San Tan Blvd. #107 480.987.9163
<b>DEWEY</b> 815 S. Dunivin Ln. 928.632.0014	<b>SAFFORD</b> 620 S. 1st Ave. 928.428.4618
<b>FLAGSTAFF</b> 2733 E Lakin Dr. #1 928.527.1343	<b>SCOTTSDALE</b> 7650 E. Redfield Rd. Ste. D-4 480.483.8787
<b>GILBERT</b> 325 S.Higley Rd. #100 480.635.3860	7702 E. Doubletree Rd. Ste. 300 480-348-3900
343 N. Gilbert Rd. 480.699.0861	<b>SHOWLOW</b> 810 E. Deuce of Clubs 928.537.2990
115 N. Pasadena #104 480.704.4182 480-993-2742	6101 S. Rural Rd. #120 480.967.7306
<b>GLOBE</b> 138 S. Broad St. 928.425.3632	4551 S. White Mountain Rd, Ste. 3A 928-251-7777
<b>GOODYEAR</b> 3673 S. Bullard Ave., Ste. 101 623.925.0190	<b>VAIL</b> 13105 E Colossal Cave Rd. #3 5520.276.5514
<b>KINGMAN</b> 2510 Stockton Hill Rd., Ste. B 928.377.5000	<b>WICKENBURG</b> 300 N. Tegner St. 928.684.6895
3518 N. Irving St. Ste. A 928.757.5555	<b>WILLCOX</b> 365 N. Haskell Ave. 520.766.3276
<b>LAKE HAVASU CITY</b> 1600 McCulloch Blvd. N., Ste. 5B 928.846.3232	<b>WILLIAMS</b> 128 W. Grant, Ste. A 928.635.2181
<b>MESA</b> 1012 S. Stapley Dr., #114 480.649.0260	<b>YUMA</b> 7175 E. 31st Pl., Ste. B & J 928.248.5038 928.341.0000
2509 S. Power Rd., Ste #106 480.279.1874	1185 S 4th Ave., Ste. E 928.257.3594
2919 Ellsworth Rd, Ste 129 480.626.8045	

All offices have AgWise certified agents.



**FARM BUREAU  
FINANCIAL SERVICES**

www.fbfs.com

Western Agricultural Insurance Company\*, Farm Bureau Property & Casualty Insurance Company\* and Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company\*/West Des Moines, IA. \*Company providers of Farm Bureau Financial Services



# Arizona Farm Bureau Federation

325 S. Higley Rd., Suite 210 • Gilbert, AZ 85296 • 480.635.3600 • fax 480.635.3781 • [www.azfb.org](http://www.azfb.org)

**OFFICERS**

**President • Stefanie Smallhouse • Redington**

**1st Vice President • John Boelts • Yuma**

**2nd V. P. • Richie Kennedy • Casa Grande**

**Exec. Secretary • Philip Bashaw**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**John Hart • Willcox**

**Sharla Mortimer • Dewey - Humboldt**

**ARIZONA AGRICULTURE STAFF**

**Julie Murphree, Editor**

**Taylor Rogers, Advertising**

**Please send comments to:**

**[arizonaagriculture@azfb.org](mailto:arizonaagriculture@azfb.org)**

**For advertising, e-mail [ads@azfb.org](mailto:ads@azfb.org), call**

**480.635.3609 or visit**

**[www.azfb.org/publications.htm](http://www.azfb.org/publications.htm)**

**Arizona Agriculture**

*is published 9 months, plus two special editions annually, (ISSN 0274-7014) by the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation...*

**325 S Higley Rd., Suite 210**

**Gilbert, AZ 85296**

**Periodicals postage paid in Higley, Arizona and additional mailing offices.**

**POSTMASTER**

Send address changes to:

**Arizona Agriculture**

**325 S Higley Rd., Suite 210**

**Gilbert, AZ 85296**

Subscriptions are included in annual dues.





**ATTENTION**  
FARM BUREAU MEMBERS

RECEIVE AN ADDITIONAL  
**\$500 FORD REBATE**

JUST FOR BEING A MEMBER

**SANDERSONFORD.COM | 623.842.8600**  
Valid with purchase of new vehicle. Excludes specialty vehicles and fleet deals.



## Chucri

continued from page 2

**Chucri:** Restaurants are the cornerstone of our community and they are going to continue to be part of the fabric of our neighborhoods and everything else consumers expect that from us. Consumers demand that we are going to be entrepreneurial and innovative. The restaurant across the street is competing with your restaurant for the same consumer dollars. And even though we have large population growth in Arizona, we also have a lot of new restaurants opening. With all those realities if you aren't growing by more than 3% each year, you're losing money because that's inflation, and if you are not continuing to look and see how you can be more competitive or to increase your market share, you're not going to survive and succeed in this industry.

Let me give you an example. Door Dash and other third-party delivery services cut into restaurant margins resulting in restaurants not getting too excited about using them. However, in this competitive environment if you don't use them, it will also cost you money. So, even if you're just breaking even, you're doing something you have to do. Continuing to think outside the box, if you have two brick-and-mortar buildings maybe it comes time to get smart and have a ghost kitchen located in an area that you can grow, especially if you don't have the capital or infrastructure to invest in a typical kitchen.

So those are the types of things that are going to be important to a restaurant going forward and what can they do to cut back on the labor cost especially if you've got President Biden now talking about raising the minimum wage to \$15 during a pandemic when restaurants are already hurting. As a restaurant you're going to turn to technology. More and more customers will order from a kiosk. That's going to eventually be the way of the future.

A mandated \$15 minimum wage will hurt us. Again, we're a demand-driven economy and certainly in the restaurant industry. So, when you start to artificially demand rates of pay for our employees in a setting where we operate with razor-thin profit margins it absolutely cuts at the profitability and survivability of a restaurant. Your biggest three costs are labor, real estate and food costs. The higher those things go the harder it is to be profitable.

We've got employees in some of our restaurants that have been there for decades. It's the only place they really want to work, and they've worked their way up and sometimes those same people now own the restaurant. It's never been about how cheap can we pay our employees; it's been about how successful can we run a restaurant and can we afford labor increases.

I think in the future, technology as I just stated, as it helped bridge this gap of COVID-19 it's going to be a technology-based environment in a very big way. I can show you a hamburger that was made by a robot. I can show you a robotic arm that can take French fries out of the oil, dump them into a pan and salt them.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Your comments above sound a bit like how we speak in the agriculture industry. Costs driving innovation. Okay, a question I must ask: While you might not have tried as many international cuisines as Andrew Zimmern of Bizarre Foods, you have traveled extensively and tried numerous cuisines. In addition to some of our unique southwest cuisines, what do you believe Arizona should be known for in the "foodie" circles?

**Chucri:** Most people don't know this, but for the last 20 years we've been sort of a taste-test market for foods like the wrap and a lot of different cuisines. The diversity of Arizona's population functions as an ideal setting for market researchers trying to determine what new trend is around the corner. This melting pot here in Arizona that includes people from the Midwest, people from California, and people from all over the country gives food marketers a good cross-section of people to kind of test our pallets and see what we want. It has been a little-known fact but an important one. Look at the dine-in and the various shows that are out there, whether it's Guy Fieri or whomever and they are coming to Arizona and they're checking out some of our places. Even these reality-type shows where they come and do these makeovers in part because the Arizona market is attractive to them. It will continue because it drives that fun, different and new mentality about food and experiences in Arizona. The question is how the consumers' pallet will change over time and how effectively restaurants will keep up with it.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Being president of ARA, how often are you obligated to eat out?

**Chucri:** Oh, quite a bit. I don't cook and there's a reason for it. It's funny, my little boy a couple years ago asked my wife, "Where's the iPad?" And my wife said, "It's next to the cooktop." And he said, "What's a cooktop?" My son's question was so apropos for our family. I'm eating at a lot of restaurants; I'm meeting with restaurateurs about going to new places they're thinking about building. It's a job and I want to make sure I'm advising my clients well including how we see trends emerging.

**Arizona Agriculture:** How can Arizona agriculture and restaurant owners build more of a relationship with one another?

**Chucri:** The partnership between restaurants and farmers is stronger than it has ever been before. You will recall the gate-to-plate phenomenon. You see eggs taking a whole new and central place in the past five to 10 years in the restaurant industry. Those two examples alone show an evolution in the relationship with the stakeholders in restaurant and ag industries. Look, we need you and you need us so we're not breaking up. It's always going to be an important relationship and quite frankly I think the market is going to dictate how that works or doesn't work. It can't be contrived; it can't be forced. It's going to be the consumer who decides how much we do or don't do together.

At the same time, it's not going to be everything. We can't do what you do [in agriculture]. We can do a fraction of it with a little garden out behind the restaurant, but we can't have that be something that's going to be our sustenance. Our partnership with agriculture will continue to evolve and grow just as we've seen the culinary diversity of Arizona grow.

**Arizona Agriculture:** Anything you want to add that I have not asked?

**Chucri:** This relationship between your industry and ours is always going to be so important and I think we have gotten along well when we've understood the difficulties that have impacted each one of our industries whether it is weather, cost to do business or market volatility. The relationships you have with larger distributors, like Shamrock, keeping conversations and lines of communication open and more will mean we will continue to be successful over time. 🍷

## Family Owned, Family Values, Great Prices

*Providing Arizona Fuel Since 2001*



We Specialize in  
Gas, Diesel and  
Lube Oils

**480-905-8400**

Petroleum  
Resources Inc.

*"For all your petroleum needs"*

[www.petroleumresourceinc.com](http://www.petroleumresourceinc.com)



Ag Fest *continued from page 1*

Rebecca Rios, House Speaker Rusty Bowers, and House Minority Leader Reginald Bolding. They shared their excitement and gratitude for the thoughtful donations while also taking the time to learn about Arizona Farm Bureau’s policy priorities for the legislative session. We also delivered save-the-date postcards to the offices of all 90 legislators reminding them that Legislative Ag Fest was not canceled – simply postponed.

In place of in-person meetings, we hosted a Virtual Legislator Roundtable with Senator Sine Kerr, Representative Tim Dunn, and Representative Gail Griffin. The insightful discussion was moderated by President Stefanie Smallhouse. The legislators shared bills they introduced this session and their thoughts about the future of agricultural water policy. During the discussion, legislators continued to underscore the importance of hearing directly from constituents. They asked that you give them a call or send them an email with direct stories about how legislation impacts you, your community, and your business.

Our members heard the legislators loud and clear, throughout the day they sent personalized emails to their legislators utilizing Arizona Farm Bureau’s call-to-action alert. In the message, members asked to keep agriculture a policy this legislative session and shared their unique industry perspectives. If you want to be apprised of future opportunities to contact your elected officials on policy matters and stay up to date on upcoming events, text AZFB to 50457 to sign up.

The recorded roundtable, link to contact your legislators, and other helpful tools can be found on our website, [azfb.org](http://azfb.org). 📱

Arizona’s Surface Waters Protection Rule


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

Over the last year, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) has been working closely with key water users to develop a framework for a State-led surface waters protection program. After months of working closely with stakeholders, ADEQ has presented bill language to the legislature.

When discussions about this program began in February of 2020, Farm Bureau voiced serious concerns about the conceptual framework of the program. At the time, ADEQ claimed that the purpose of the program was to “protect” all the waters that became unregulated by the Trump administration’s Clean Water Rule, which replaced the 2015 WOTUS Rule. Our fear was that this would practically undo the rollback of the 2015 Rule. Not wanting to waste all the time we spent fighting for clean water and clear rules, Farm Bureau joined with many other Arizona business and industry groups to push back against creating an Arizona program that had the potential to nullify our hard-fought victory over WOTUS.

What followed was months of stakeholder meetings and public forums to discuss what a state-led waters protection program should look like. And now, we are happy to say we can support a bill currently before the Arizona Legislature that outlines an Arizona Surface Water Protection Program.


See **SURFACE WATERS** Page 6

**Reinke**  
MORE RIGHT THAN RAIN

Reinke announces the addition of  
**Mortimer Ag Services**  
to our network of professional, reliable  
irrigation dealers.

Visit **Mortimer Ag Services** today to learn the  
benefits and advantages of a mechanized system  
from Reinke.

**MORTIMER AG SERVICES**  
12907 E. State Route 169  
Dewey, AZ 86327  
928.925.6653



**ESSENTIAL**  
**water**

CAP delivers an important renewable supply of  
Colorado River water to agricultural land in central  
and southern Arizona.

**YOUR WATER. YOUR FUTURE**  
[www.KnowYourWaterNews.com](http://www.KnowYourWaterNews.com)

**CAP**  
CENTRAL ARIZONA PROJECT



Surface Waters

continued from page 5

The Basic Framework

The proposed program basically imposes existing Clean Water Act framework onto certain state waters that may not fall under federal jurisdiction. These state-specific protected waters will be subject to the same permitting program and fees as the Clean Water Act’s 402 program, so there will be one set of standards, regardless of whether the water is regulated under the federal program or the state program.

One of the major concerns we had going into this process was how to determine which of Arizona’s waters would be regulated – and how an individual landowner could do so without hiring a team of engineers and hydrologists. ADEQ worked with stakeholders to develop a concrete list of state-specific protected waters which will be subject to this framework. Upon completion of the program’s rules, there will be a literal map of regulated waters that shows which waters are regulated and which waters are not – a level of clarity that was impossible under the 2015 Rule.

Moreover, before this list is finalized, there will be a public rulemaking period that allows stakeholders to comment on the waters included on the list. This will give Farm Bureau members an opportunity to say whether there are waterways that should be removed from the list and require ADEQ to respond to those concerns.

But perhaps even more positive is the list of waters that are not regulated under the Arizona program. The bill specifically lists waters that “shall not” be regulated, including ditches or canals, irrigated agriculture, stock tanks, groundwater, and ephemeral waters. These are key exemptions to help protect agricultural interests from having to obtain permits to undertake normal and proper resource management projects on their own land.

Added Layers of Protection

No matter how well-structured the framework, however, there is still a lingering question: what is the point of all this if the Biden administration is just going to reinstate the 2015 Rule anyway? It’s true that President Biden has very quickly made it clear that

environmental regulations will be a key focus of his administration. EPA secretary designate Michael Regan said in his confirmation hearing that he is “looking forward to convening multiple stakeholder groups” to continue the discussion about the definition of WOTUS. But rather than discouraging us from supporting this framework, the near certainty that the new administration will be opening this discussion once again is one of the reasons we support the ADEQ program.

With an Arizona Surface Waters Protection Rule in place, Arizona will be in a stronger position to push back against additional regulation from the federal government. When we can show that our state has already undertaken to protect our water, we have strong legal footing to challenge (and seek an injunction against) misguided bad federal policies. Without it, we play into the argument that states aren’t equipped to protect water on their own, when in reality, the opposite is true: these kinds of programs should be state-led and state-driven and based on the unique needs of the people and industry of that state.

We believe that this bill represents a success story: an agency saw a need for additional regulation but worked with the regulated community to make sure that the program made sense. Those of you who are Farm Bureau veterans will know that support of surface water regulation is not something we often proclaim as an organization. Yet, thanks to the tireless efforts of ADEQ to work with the regulated community as it drafted this program, we are happy to say that we support the framework and believe it is best for Arizona.

Understanding the critical need for a program that worked for all stakeholders, ADEQ provided ample opportunities for us to express our concerns. Then, ADEQ listened. The result was the creation of a program that does not contain the troubling aspects of the 2015 Rule but will still satisfy the concerns of those who want additional protection for Arizona water. That’s the kind of government we can get behind, and we look forward to updating you on the program’s progress over the next few weeks. 🚗

Agriculture Labor During the Pandemic

By Victoria Ocula, Arizona Farm Bureau Government Relations Manager

The H-2A visa, an immigration program for temporary agricultural workers, is an essential way to meet the United States’ labor needs. An analysis of H-2A program usage throughout the pandemic and COVID-19 related travel bans illuminate the need for reform to address the labor shortage in the agriculture industry.

Recently released data by the Department of Labor on the H-2A program demonstrates the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of granted visas in the first quarter of fiscal year 2020 climbed by nearly 20 percent; however, the number of certified visas granted declined in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020. In the first quarter of fiscal year 2021, Arizona was second in the nation for the number of H-2A visas granted.

It appears that the impact on H-2A visas was caused by a decline in the number of applications which impacted the number of visas granted in the following quarter. This initial decline was not caused by decreased demand, but rather caution about how the H-2A program would operate during a pandemic. This suggests that while the pandemic has shifted the pattern of worker arrivals, it has not curbed the overall upward trajectory

of the program.

The reliance on the H-2A visa was particularly evident in January when travel restrictions to combat COVID-19 infections went into effect for Brazil, China, Iran, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the Schengen Area of Europe. These restrictions were an immediate concern for H-2A program users, especially those who hire approximately 5,000 of these essential workers from South Africa. After outreach by the agricultural community, the State Department quickly clarified on January 28 that agriculture workers from South Africa entering the U.S. qualify for national interest exceptions on a case-by-case basis; unfortunately, restrictions on H-2A workers from the other countries remain in place.

Addressing the labor shortage in the agriculture industry and making necessary reform to the agriculture visa process is a top priority for the Arizona Farm Bureau in the 117th Congress, and for years to come. For questions and more information, please contact [advocacy@azfb.org](mailto:advocacy@azfb.org). 🚗

**BUILD YOUR DREAM GARDEN**

Grow your garden with the best walk-behind agricultural equipment available. **All gear drive** gives you the power and performance to break new ground, cultivate, power compost and more. **Reversible handlebars** and **PTO driven attachments** mean one engine is all you’ll ever need.

Rear Tine Tiller

Power Harrow

Rotary Plow

HANDLES ROTATE 180°

BEST WARRANTY

ALL GEAR DRIVE

**APD POWER CENTER (800) 789-7894**

[www.apdpowercenter.com](http://www.apdpowercenter.com) [apdpowercenter@yahoo.com](mailto:apdpowercenter@yahoo.com)

To browse our catalog of two-wheel tractors and attachments from home, visit [www.bcsamerica.com](http://www.bcsamerica.com) today!

Exclusive savings for

**FARM BUREAU MEMBERS**

We value our long-standing partnership with Farm Bureau and are proud to offer their members exclusive savings.

FORD F-150

FORD SUPER DUTY

FORD RANGER

BUILT PROUD

**Visit [FordFarmBureauAdvantage.com](http://FordFarmBureauAdvantage.com) today!**

FARM BUREAU

**ADVANTAGE**

How We’re Driving Change.



# Virtual Tours Bring Agriculture into the Classroom

By Katie Aikins, Arizona Farm Bureau Education Director

If you are anything like me, one of the highlights of being in school was the field trips you got to take. You know, those places you were able to experience along with your friends that you might never have seen if it were not for that school trip. Now fast forward to 2020/2021. Students in many areas have not stepped foot into their classrooms this year. Those field trips, not even a possibility.

Enter Arizona Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom (AIRC). Recognizing that many students would be missing out on these memorable educational experiences, several of our Farm Bureau members have come to the rescue and allowed students to travel with them to their farms and ranches, virtually. Each month, students and teachers can log on to a Live Virtual Ag Tour hosted by the AIRC Program. Students can spend 50 minutes seeing and experiencing Arizona agriculture while engaging with those individuals that are #stillfarming. The best part? They can ask questions and get the answers the same as if they were there in person! Curious as to where our Arizona students have been traveling?

- Riverview Dairy, Cochise County



- Arizona Queen Bee's hives, Maricopa County
- Mortimer Farms Pumpkins, Yavapai County
- Cotton Fields and Gin, Maricopa and Yuma Counties
- Arizona Desert Premium Farms Lettuce, Yuma County
- Cattle and Cactus with Carlink Ranch, Pima County
- Sossaman Farms, Maricopa County
- Bayer Marana Greenhouse, Pima County
- Arizona Game and Fish Hatchery, Yavapai County

The tours have been a big hit. Our most attended tour to date had 750+ students in attendance and another 931 views of the tour recording once it was posted online. That is the potential to have reached over 24,000 students, considering that most views are by a classroom full of students. That is more than we could ever imagine getting out to the farm in person.

If you are interested in allowing AIRC to offer your farm or ranch as a virtual tour, please contact us at [aicr@azfb.org](mailto:aicr@azfb.org). Be on the lookout for our remaining tours! 🐾



## Our First President: Dr. James Collier Norton, Arizona's Territorial Vet



Arizona Farm Bureau's first president, Dr. James Collier Norton was a son of a prosperous Iowa cattle grower. After finishing first in his class of veterinary medicine, he stayed on as an assistant professor until he moved to Phoenix, opened his practice here. That same year, he married his Iowa sweetheart -- Miss Clara Tufts.

His first office was at 144 W. Washington and he kept his horse and buggy across the street. When he received his appointment as territorial veterinarian in May 1893, they provided 10 cents a mile travel expense for the new official.

Before he retired from this position, he was credited with eradicating the cattle tick in the state. In 1904 he was named national

president of the United States Livestock Sanitary Association.

When the doctor arrived in the town, he was dismayed to find that there was no Young Men's Christian Association. Through his efforts, first meetings were held in a rented storeroom. The late William B. Christy, a civil war colonel, was first president. Finally, in 1904, a board



See **OUR FIRST PRESIDENT** Page 8

““

I earn cash dividends ON EVERY PENNY I BORROW.””

JOHN LACEY

Cattle Rancher | Paso Robles, CA

Farm Credit West Customer

For 2020, our members earned 1.5% of average eligible loan balances in cash patronage. This included a special mid-year payment to provide relief from the impact of COVID-19. If you're not earning a portion of your lender's profits back, **it's time to make the switch to Farm Credit West.**

800.909.5050  
FarmCreditWest.com



Committed. Experienced. Trusted.



# Our Customer Care Calls Became Our Pandemic Care Calls

By Julie Murphree, Arizona Farm Bureau Outreach Director

Just over three years ago, Outreach instituted a “Customer Care” program where we attempt to reach out to two members and one potential member a week. The program checks on a current member and someone whose membership has recently expired. And, in our networking when we run across someone who fits the perfect profile of an agriculture member, we solicit them.

But last March when everything shut down, we moved to a new strategy with our agriculture members.

The Outreach department’s pandemic-era pivot forced us to lay down our set of keys and pick up the telephone. Gathering the team to discuss the implication of staying connected, I asked each team member to make three calls a day to current agriculture members of Arizona Farm Bureau. These calls were added to the already day-to-day tasks we conduct in our department:

- Daily check in calls as team members,
- weekly planning and strategy conversations with county leaders on a variety of issues,
- member benefit management (which hosts daily calls),
- program planning and implementation for Women’s Leadership and Young Farmer & Rancher committees,
- We still must put out our monthly publication Arizona Agriculture,
- the monthly Agent Advantage,
- the quarterly CHOICES,
- daily social media implementation,
- sponsorship work,

- advertising and marketing work,
  - video production oversight,
  - market research and outreach results work,
  - and much more.
- Even without a pandemic, the Outreach Team will tell you some days feel like their telephones are permanently attached to their ears. With all our modern com-



munications tools, the trusty phone truly works (though one of the best ways for me to get in touch with certain farmers and ranchers is through Facebook’s Messenger). So as of the end of December we had completed all 2,400 pandemic customer care calls. All current ag

members with the correct contact information have been called with either a live connection or a voice message. During our conversation, or when leaving a message, we provided COVID-19 ag-specific information directing members to azfb.org where regularly updated information was posted by the Government Relations team. When the worst of the crisis was behind us, we directed our ag members to emerging issues and programs including telling them about our new Webinar Wednesday series that will continue monthly.

This effort has been labor intensive, but for me a labor of love. We know our ag membership much better. The whole team has referenced the great conversations with farm and ranch members who had a moment to visit with us (indeed, most of our farmers and ranchers were a bit too busy to stay on the telephone too long).

A common comment from those we caught answering their telephones: “Julie, we’re used to sheltering-in-place here on the ranch [or farm] and our freezer if full of meat. We’ll be fine.”

The bigger concern for many was that other Arizona families might not be faring as well with jobs lost and much more. Our conversations also cover depressed agriculture commodity prices and the economic outlook for agriculture.

The pandemic calls don’t reflect all the other calls we make in any given week. But we’re a member-driven, grassroots organization and connecting is our business. The Pandemic customer care calls were truly a revelation to each of us on the team. 📞

## First President

continued from page 7

was elected, and Dr. Norton spearheaded the first YMCA building program fund drive.

His association with the First Presbyterian Church spanned nearly 60 years. For 48 he was chairman of its music committee, served as an elder, and was named a commissioner of the general assembly of the church in 1931.



He also found time to serve as president of the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce in 1916, as president of the Arizona Farm Bureau, and a member of the Phoenix Rotary Club. He aided in efforts to rebuild the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and managed the project to permanently dike the Salton Sea, whose escape necessitated the rebuilding.

In 1912, he resigned as territorial veterinarian to establish the Norton Dairy. The spacious home was built shortly after for his wife, sons James, Oakley and the late Victor, and his late daughter Marietta.

Mrs. W. W. Pickrell recalls living with the Norton family during 1916 and 1917 when she and Marietta attended college in Tempe. In those days, the two younger boys helped with the dairy and the oldest was a student at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Norton’s leadership service to Arizona Farm Bureau was quite brief. He served as president for less than a year.

**Editor’s Note:** Excerpted from article in The Arizona Republic, Phoenix, July 30, 1961. As we celebrate Arizona Farm Bureau’s 100 years, we will continue to feature some excerpted stories from our history book, “A Century of Progress, 1921-2021.” 📖



I know you say I need life insurance, but do I really?

Yes! While the reasons for having life insurance vary from person to person, coverage is a smart move no matter what stage of life you’re in. Talk to your agent about the many ways life insurance can help protect you and your loved ones.

**FARM BUREAU FINANCIAL SERVICES**

It’s your future. Let’s protect it.®

Auto | Home | Life | Business | Farm & Ranch | Crop | Financial Planning

Securities & services offered through FBL Marketing Services, LLC,\* 5400 University Ave., West Des Moines, IA 50266, 877.860.2904, Member SIPC. Advisory services offered through FBL Wealth Management, LLC.\* Farm Bureau Property & Casualty Insurance Company,\*\* Western Agricultural Insurance Company,\*\* Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company\*\*/West Des Moines, IA. \*Affiliates. \*\*Company providers of Farm Bureau Financial Services. LI193 (8-20)



Instagram live!

Remember talk to a farmer/  
rancher occurs every  
Friday morning.