

## NRCS NEWS

Provided by George Couch  
State Public Affairs Specialist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service helps people help the land. We do this by promoting productive lands and a healthy environment as compatible goals. Our primary customers are farmers and ranchers, and we help agricultural producers to voluntarily meet their conservation goals. NRCS provides technical expertise and financial help to improve our soil, water, air, and wildlife. We also serve the country by inventorying and reporting on the condition of the nation's natural resources.

NRCS provided more financial help to Arizona's farmers and ranchers in 2008 than in any other year. With the 2008 Farm Bill authorizing an increase of more than \$4 billion over the 2002 Farm Bill and advancements in our technical abilities, NRCS has more tools than ever to help our country's farmers and ranchers. Our staple Farm Bill program in Arizona continues to be the Environmental Quality Incentives program. Approximately \$23 million was given to Arizona farmers and ranchers for conservation practices through EQIP in 2008. Wildlife also benefited greatly in 2008 from the record \$1.7 million of assistance landowners received from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

While the amount of money available for conservation has increased in recent years, the strength of NRCS services comes from our conservation planning and technical expertise. A new addition to NRCS-Arizona offices are new soil quality testing kits. Farmers wanting to get the most out of their soil and water can request that an NRCS expert come to their farm to evaluate their natural resources and make recommendations on how to improve those resources. More information about the soil quality kits is available at [www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/news/releases/soilkit.html](http://www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/news/releases/soilkit.html).

With fiscal year 2008 complete, NRCS-Arizona is preparing to implement programs in the new 2008 Farm Bill. EQIP will remain as the highlight of our financial help, but some new Farm Bill programs could be a good fit for Arizona. The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Open Fields Program are three new offerings in the 2008 Farm Bill. NRCS will soon be able to implement these programs, and basic information about these new programs is available at [www.az.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.az.nrcs.usda.gov).

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### Third Quarter 2008

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## AGRI-BUSINESS COUNCIL OF ARIZONA, INC.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As you are all aware, ABC is the state association for the National Water Resources Association. However, in addition, we are working closely with the Family Farm Alliance on a number of issues.

We, and a number of others across the West, have been providing input to the Bureau of Reclamation as part of their "Managing for Excellence" Program or M4E. The Program is intended to improve the transparency and efficiency in the operations of Reclamation. Reclamation is scheduling a face to face meeting with water users during the NWRRA annual meeting in San Diego on November 19 to discuss the next steps. The meeting will focus on Reclamation's "right sizing" and collaboration developments and products.

We have also participated in the preparation of the Family Farm Alliance's Western water policy paper which was discussed briefly at a recent ABC Executive Committee meeting. As the West urbanizes, water supplies are being stretched and the existing infrastructure in some areas is deteriorating. The paper lays out a number of issues and discusses them in detail. We can all agree that Western irrigated agriculture is a strategic and irreplaceable national resource that must be protected. The policy paper was developed just in time to provide guidance for a new Administration in Washington. The paper is now in the process of being printed and will be available for distribution soon.

An important omnibus land and water legislative package, S3213, will hopefully be brought up in a Senate "lame duck" session after the November elections. The decision on whether there will be a lame duck is important for water interests in the Lower Colorado River Basin States because this is the only opportunity for action on S3213 in this session of Congress. This package contains the House-passed legislation for implementing the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP), the New Mexico Navajo settlement and Senator Harry Reid's (D-NV) Canal bill, which would improve inspections of Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) facilities in urbanized areas and authorize funding for extraordinary operation and maintenance repairs to Reclamation projects. The Senate committee said that it would assemble the package for action in the lame duck, if one is scheduled. If the omnibus package is not passed in the lame duck, it will have to be re-introduced when the new Congress convenes in January.

We have also been following Title Transfer legislation, H.R. 6992. The House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing a few weeks ago on legislation to facilitate title transfers for uncomplicated Reclamation facilities. The Family Farm Alliance by Dan Keppen was the only non-Federal witness. Because the bill was introduced near the close of the congressional session, no action is expected this fall. The bill delegates to the Secretary of the Interior the authority to transfer title of uncomplicated or non-controversial projects. Currently, Congress must approve all title transfers which led to delays in the final approval of transfers.

Bill Plummer  
President

*Serving Arizona from ditch bank to dinner plate for 30 years.*

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I want to start off by thanking many of you for your participation and or financial support for the Agri-Business Council of Arizona's upcoming 17<sup>th</sup> Annual H2Open Golf Tournament. We anticipate a very good turnout and a lot of fun on October 31<sup>st</sup> at the Francisco Grande Hotel and Golf Resort in Casa Grande! The announcement was sent last month; please let us know if you did not receive one.

It has been a busy summer and early fall at ABC. We (ABC, Az. Water Institute, and researchers from U of A and ASU) held our 5<sup>th</sup> agricultural "Listening Session" in Tucson on September 19<sup>th</sup> with our Native American colleagues. The meeting coincided with the Southwest Indian Agriculture Association's Annual Planning meeting. I venture to guess that some in the well attended session were surprised to discover that the difficulties that Indian nations face, when it comes to farming, are very similar to the non-Indian agricultural struggles throughout the state. Each region we visited has had some unique but also very similar issues and anxieties. Some examples are: difficulty finding labor; increased energy costs; the next generation having no interest in farming; poor quality of water or lack of water and so on. We look forward to carrying on this dialogue in the future, looking for scenarios that will allow us to strengthen agriculture even in the face of urbanization and other major challenges.

On another note, a few ABC members recently met with representatives from the Umbria region or the geographical heart of Italy. They are seeking Arizona's agricultural expertise to assist them with their agricultural production and water supply concerns surrounding Lake Tresimeno, which is the third largest lake in Italy and is gradually going dry. The region is comprised of one million inhabitants and produces a variety of crops including olives, tobacco, salad crops, and grapes. They are very interested in researching and applying various water conservation methods in their farming practices while also looking to grow alternative crops that utilize less water. Additionally, they would like to develop a statutory and regulatory framework for water use and water rights in their region which, from conversation, sounds minimal or non-existent. There is also an interest in working with Arizona's University researchers and developing a better rapport with their own Universities.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, a Scrap Metal Taskforce meeting was held at the State Capitol to discuss workable amendments to the new metal theft statutes signed into law over a year ago. Representative Jerry Weiers chaired the meeting. ABC had good representation and good points to provide those in attendance. A few topics discussed were: looking again at requiring a manifest; creating a "Peddler's" license; ensuring all scrap dealers are licensed and reporting; preventing some yards from staying open 24/7; addressing data entry backlog; branding and marking wires, pumps, and not waiting for law enforcement to protect your interest, etc. There will be additional meetings in the near future as the legislature gears up for the 2009 session.

Lastly, I want to advertise the recent inclusion of an agricultural conservation section on the Arizona Department of Water Resources website. We appreciate the opportunity to work with staff and provide input to the draft. We look forward to additional positive changes to the site in the future. Please visit [www.azwater.gov/dwr/conservation](http://www.azwater.gov/dwr/conservation).

Enjoy the fall weather and remember to vote on November 4th!

Chris Udall  
Executive Director

## FAMILY FARM ALLIANCE RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Provided by Dan Errotabere  
Treasurer, Family Farm Alliance

The Family Farm Alliance is recognized as a leader and a key influencer on issues dealing with Western water policy. Our targeted focus enables us to be extremely effective. Since 2005, Alliance representatives have been asked to testify before Congressional water and environmental committees sixteen times. Further, in the past two years, President Bush has signed into law measures advocated by the Alliance that will:

- Give irrigators tools to finance aging infrastructure challenges ("Rural Water Supply Act");
- Make headway on finding ways to use the "produced waters" associated with petroleum extraction as a supplemental water supply;
- Set caps on site security costs charged to Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) water customers; and

- Provide funding that allows irrigation districts and large producer groups to undertake water supply and water quality enhancement projects (Farm Bill Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program).

In the current Congress, the Alliance has worked on several pieces of legislation that await Senate floor action before going to the president's desk for signature. These bills include climate change legislation (SECURE Water Act) that we helped influence, as well as a canal safety bill that the Alliance worked closely on with Senator Harry Reid (Nevada). In fact, the Alliance was the only non-governmental witness asked to testify on Senator Reid's bill as it moved through committee.

The Alliance fought hard for five years to assure that Reclamation customers have a say in the design and construction of Safety of Dams projects. In 2004, the House of Representatives unanimously passed S. 1727 and made it the law of the land.

Four years ago, the Family Farm Alliance launched an aggressive and forward looking project that pulls together a master data base of potential water supply enhancement projects from throughout the West, called the "Western Water Supply Enhancement Study". The Alliance also worked with Congress to develop provisions that would require Reclamation to provide an update on all authorized storage studies and projects in the Western U.S. That language – offered by Rep. George Radanovich (CALIFORNIA) - was included in the final version of the Energy Act of 2005.

The Family Farm Alliance partnered with state and federal agencies and academia to host a two day conference in 2006 on the hottest new topic in the Western water policy arena—the "produced waters" associated with petroleum extraction and the opportunities and challenges involved with converting these waters to beneficial use. The Alliance co-sponsored the conference in Fort Collins (COLORADO).

We continue to build coalitions and create powerful alliances to advocate for irrigated agriculture. And on an everyday basis, we facilitate the delivery of accurate and timely information to Congress, regulatory agencies, the media and our members on issues which impact Western irrigators.

The Alliance was founded in the early 1990's with one overriding ethic: Agriculture doesn't need another association, but it does need an effective, low cost grass roots group that can get the job done. Whether you support the Alliance's advocacy, outreach or education efforts, you can rest assured that your investment will promote the protection of Western irrigated agriculture and the strong rural communities that it supports. Make your tax-deductible gift to the Alliance today by mailing a check to the address listed below. Thank you in advance for your loyal support.

Dan Errotabere, Treasurer, Family Farm Alliance  
Errotabere Ranches  
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## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

I would like to introduce Kelley Hall, a Right of Way Agent in the Tucson Division of the El Paso Natural Gas Company. She just recently joined ABC in July of this year. El Paso Natural Gas recently assigned the responsibilities of managing the company's water rights and assets to its Land Department, so Kelley wants to learn as much as possible about water issues and water management practices in Arizona and the Western states. Way to go Kelley!

## NEW MEMBER

We would like to welcome Andy Yates as the newest member of the Agri-Business Council of Arizona. We are thrilled to have him join us and thank him for helping to make ABC the exceptional organization that it is!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

| Date              | Event                       | Place                |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| October 31, 2008  | H2Open Golf Tournament      | Casa Grande, Arizona |
| November 14, 2008 | Executive Committee Meeting | Tempe, Arizona       |
| December 12, 2008 | Executive Committee Meeting | Tucson, Arizona      |

