

# Farm Bureau Convention

## Farm Bureau president acknowledges differences with Trump

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

PHOENIX — Zippy Duvall, the slow-talking president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, acknowledged he's frustrated by the Trump administration's delay in appointing an agriculture secretary.

"We think it should have been the first position he filled rather than the last one," Duvall said during a news conference as the annual convention opened Jan. 8.

But Duvall, a Georgia chicken and cattle producer, said President-elect Donald Trump has interviewed some "tremendous candidates" and said he has "full faith the new president will pick the right person."

One of the candidates men-



Courtesy of American Farm Bureau Federation

American Farm Bureau Federation president Zippy Duvall addresses the opening session of the organization's annual national convention Feb. 8 in Phoenix. Duvall acknowledged that while many farmers and ranchers voted for Donald Trump, some of the president-elect's positions run counter to agriculture's interests.

tioned lately is Sonny Perdue, a former Georgia governor and a friend of Duvall. Perdue would be a good choice, Duvall said.

The incoming president posed something of a quandary for producers. Rural residents generally voted for him, but some of Trump's campaign

rhetoric on trade and immigration ran counter to what farmers and ranchers believe. Many farmers employ workers who are in the country illegally, for example, and those who export products to Asia and elsewhere don't want that trade disrupted.

Duvall said he told the Trump team early on that agriculture disagreed with Trump's opinions on trade agreements such as NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which Trump vowed to scrap.

"We're concerned about Mr. Trump's opinion on trade," Duvall said he told Trump's representatives. "He seems to be negative on trade and ag is very dependent on it."

Duvall said illegal immigrants in many cases have worked on farms for years

and are highly skilled and ingrained in the community. The government should adjust their status and allow them to stay if they are law-abiding people, he said. "Morally we've got to do the right thing," he said, adding they should be allowed to "pay a fine and get on with it."

Duvall also said he's not worried if it turns out Trump doesn't know corn from cattle.

"If it does come up we will educate him," Duvall said. "I've been in 33 states and across the country and I know where to take him." Vice president-elect Mike Pence, from Indiana, is familiar with agriculture, Duvall said, and that will help.

On another topic, Duvall said he's excited about Trump's choice to head the Environmental Protection

Agency, former Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt. Many producers feel the EPA has become an over-reaching agency that is harming agriculture, while Pruitt understands the limit of the laws and will carry out the intent of Congress. "I think he's a really good guy who will make a really good person in that position," Duvall said.

Before meeting with reporters, Duvall delivered the opening address. He said producers need to speak up and tell the public how they are producing more food with less water, less pesticides and less plowing.

"We need to take back the concept of sustainability, because nobody works harder on sustainability than the American farmer and rancher, and that's you," he said.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Burr and Rosella Mosby farm row crops near Auburn, Wash. They wonder why the guestworker issue has to be so complicated.

## Ag labor shortages defy easy fixes

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

PHOENIX — Washington state vegetable farmers Burr and Rosella Mosby shifted in their seats and furrowed their brows as they listened to a panel discuss immigration issues during a session at the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention.

USDA economist Tom Hertz was providing some troubling numbers for the Mosbys and other farmers who depend on workers to plant, prune, pick and pack their crops. "We hand-harvest everything," Burr Mosby said.

Mexican immigration to the U.S. has been declining since 2007, Hertz said, and the number of Mexican-born people in the U.S., legally or illegally, has dropped from 13 million to an estimated 11.7 million in that time. The crop workers remaining are getting older: 14 percent were 55 or older in 2013-14, compared to 11 percent in 2007-09.

That's a concern because the ability to do manual labor declines with age, he said. Also, the percentage of workers who are settled in one spot, not migrating from job to job, has increased to 84 percent from 74 percent.

Hertz said a USDA study compared two immigration reform options. Expanding H-2A ag worker visas would add 156,000 workers to the farm labor workforce, he said, while cranking up deportations would remove an estimated 5.8 million unauthorized workers, 40 percent

of the ag workforce, over 15 years.

He said removing workers would force producers to pay even higher wages to those left behind, at a time when labor costs as a percentage of farm expenses are leveling off.

The Mosbys don't believe expanding the H-2A program is a cure for agriculture's labor shortage.

"I just don't know why it's so complicated," Burr Mosby said after the panel discussion.

Mosby Farms grows row crops on 350 acres in the Green River Valley near Auburn and sells to Safeway, Kroger and wholesalers. The farm employs about 100 people during the "heat of the battle," a four- to six-month season. The Mosbys said they pay \$11 to \$12 an hour for basic laborers, more for supervisors.

Getting more workers through the H-2A program would cost more. The Mosbys said they would be required to pay \$12.47 an hour, provide housing and pay for transportation to and from Mexico.

Mosby, a first-generation farmer, said his farm's income went down this year by 15 cents to 25 cents per box of produce. "Our insurance never goes down," he said.

Mosby said a simplified guest worker visa would be a better system. He said Mexican workers, assuming they pass criminal checks, should be allowed to come work on his farm, stay with relatives who are already here, and then return home after a set period of time.

## Arizona a land of contrasts for farming

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

PHOENIX — Cecil Pratt, who farms in Yuma County, in the southwest corner of Arizona, recites the numbers from memory.

His farm is 25 miles from the California border and 25 miles from Mexico. The county receives an average of 3.23 inches per year. In his lifetime, nearly 52 years, he has seen it snow once. The temperature dropped into the teens for five hours, once.

Yet from roughly Thanksgiving to March, when the mean temperature is 73 degrees, Yuma County becomes the salad bowl of America. Under irrigation, vast fields blossom with all kinds of lettuce, baby spinach and brassicas that become the country's winter greens.

"It's been that way for years," says Kevin Rogers, president of the Arizona Farm Bureau.

But the state's image is parched desert and cactus. The average temperature in Phoenix, "Valley of the Sun" after all, cranks over 100 degrees in June, July, August and September. "Salad bowl" doesn't compute.

"What we need is snow in the Rocky Mountains," says Pratt, the Yuma County farmer. Melting snow feeds the Colorado River system, and Arizona and other states sip it nearly dry. Native American tribes have the oldest water rights, but farmers like Pratt are next in line. His allocation is 4 acre-feet per year, and lettuce takes 2, as does wheat. Growing something like alfalfa takes 6 to 8 acre-feet of water — but results in a dozen cuttings.

"We all have rotation crops — wheat or cotton — but produce dominates it," Pratt said.

Various researchers have warned for years that Arizona will run out of water, but it hasn't happened yet.

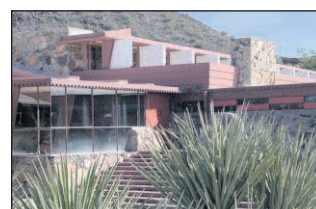
Meanwhile, the sprawling Phoenix metro area, which includes Tempe, Scottsdale, Mesa, Chandler and other cities, added nearly a million people from 2000 to 2010, when the Census counted 4.2 million residents.

The city's rapid growth is a land-use planner's nightmare, with ponderous, dun-colored buildings looming beyond



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Cecil Pratt at the American Farm Bureau Federation convention in Phoenix, Ariz. The Yuma County, Ariz., farmer receives a water allocation of 4 acre-feet per year.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

A Frank Lloyd Wright home near the site of this year's American Farm Bureau convention in Phoenix.

human scale and fleets of single-occupant cars swerving aggressively across six-lane freeways that lead from one mall or gated community to

the next. Neighborhood commercial development is spotty, forcing many people to drive everywhere. Chain restaurants predominate, long city blocks discourage walking and only fools with a death wish would venture out on a bicycle.

Yet Phoenix and Arizona aren't so easily pigeonholed. The Arizona Republic newspaper reported in June that urban farming is "taking root" in Phoenix.

The local food movement is taking hold as well. Taco Guild, a restaurant near downtown Phoenix, opened three

years ago in an old church and looks like it was dropped in from Portland — complete with hipster customers. Manager Sam Cavallaro said the restaurant makes a point of buying local products whenever possible, and serves a collection of Arizona beer and liquor.

The warm winter weather continues to draw retirees and famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright may have been the first snowbird. He spent winters in Arizona from 1937 until his death in 1959, and his Taliesin West home and architectural training camp in Scottsdale are open for tours. Wright's spare, organic architecture, with building lines that mimic the landscape, is reflected in many of the homes in the area.

And 95 miles north of Phoenix, near spectacular Sedona, are reminders that Arizona's first residents shared a bond with Pratt and his fellow Yuma County farmers to the south.

A cliff dwelling, built by the Sinagua people about 1200 A.D. and now part of the Montezuma Castle National Monument, hugs the bend of Beaver Creek. The Sinagua used the creek to irrigate their crops, beans and corn.

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