



GROWING SMARTER

News & Information To Help You Grow

The Changing Face Of Agriculture In The Southwest Local Growers Move From Cotton To Forage

From routine crop rotation to a decline in supply and demand, there are many factors that motivate growers to switch from one crop to another. But one of the main reasons growers in the Southwest are moving from cotton to forage is related to a spike in the local real estate business.

In the last several years, there's been a significant housing boom in the Southwest. For dairy farmers in this area, this growth brought some difficult times. Weary of complaints from homeowners, dairymen sold their properties and bought land closer to where other farmers were established – and growing cotton. In turn, the relocation caused a major change in agriculture. As more dairies moved into Pinal County, there was an increased need for forage and silage production and a decreased demand

Pratt Farms Partnership, Maricopa, AZ



for cotton. “At one time I was responsible for more than 3,000 acres of cotton in Arizona,” says James Holland, independent pest control advisor. “Now I’m checking cotton for just one grower.”

Making The Switch

According to Loren Pratt, manager of Pratt Farms Partnership in

Maricopa, “We have about half our acreage in alfalfa, and in the last six years, we’ve switched 400 cotton acres to corn silage production. With corn silage, we average 36 tons per acre on the spring crop, and then we turn around and replant half that acreage to fall corn silage, which averages 28 tons per acre. This amounts to 64 tons per acre at \$28

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COMPTON'S CORNER

Rising Agriculture Costs Affecting Everyone

Every grower has probably noticed a recent increase in costs for inputs used in the agricultural industry. In particular, we have seen a rise in fertilizer costs. The reasons for this are varied. For one, worldwide demand for agricultural inputs is very strong right now. In addition, consolidation of input sources has caused fertilizer prices to climb. Also, transportation costs are on the move, and fuel surcharges are being tacked on to each shipment.

We want to let you know that even with these rising costs, Fertizona and Compton Ag Services are with

you every step of the way. Believe it or not, we are feeling the crunch as well, and we're definitely not benefiting from these high prices.

We hope that prices for agricultural inputs will stabilize and begin to decrease, and soon. In the meantime, please count on us to work hard to serve you — just as we always have.

Jim Compton



Jim Compton Jr., President, Fertizona and Compton Ag Services.

The Changing Face Of Agriculture In The Southwest

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per ton versus cotton, which averages 1,740 pounds per acre at \$0.65 per pound."

With 1,050 acres as well as 300 head of registered Brahman, Hereford and Gelbvieh cows, Pratt reiterates that the most important factor for any operation is profitability and sustainability. But in addition to cost savings, forage crops are also good soil builders. "Wheat, barley and milo are excellent crops for adding organic matter into the soil," he explains.

Exciting Times

Overall, there are few negative effects from the switch to forage. In fact, it seems to be good for all those involved — from the growers to the cows! But despite the trend, local growers will not likely abandon cotton any time soon.

"Some growers like growing cotton," explains Holland. "They've invested in the equipment, and they're simply adding forage to spread risk over several crops." Pratt agrees, "This valley was founded on cotton production, and some of us will always grow cotton because it's still profitable. Due to the country's ethanol craze, all crops have followed an upward trend in prices. Never have I seen an era in which you can plant any crop and project a good profit in the same year. These are exciting times for agriculture." ▲



Loren Pratt's son, David proudly displays healthy corn crops.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Fertizona Introduces Signature Ryegrass

New Ryegrass Varieties Make Every Hole A 'Signature' Hole

Golf courses often get asked 'what's your signature hole?' In a lot of cases, golf courses have a unique hole that distinguishes the course from the rest. In the case of the new Signature Classic and Signature Advantage ryegrass varieties offered by Fertizona, every hole on your golf course can be a 'Signature' hole.

These new varieties of perennial ryegrass are offered through Fertizona by Pickseed West, a strong research-based company located in Tangent, Oregon.

"This new seed allows us to be more competitive in the local market," says Craig Allen, manager of Fertizona — Fennemore. "The research that Pickseed does in the turf industry results in a higher quality product."

Giving Superintendents The Advantage

Signature Advantage is a four-way blend of perennial ryegrass that is perfect for overseeding in Arizona. This variety features a very dark-green color and a fine-leaf appearance. In addition, this ryegrass is drought and heat tolerant and ideal for lower mowing heights.

Signature Classic Also Available

Another perennial ryegrass variety now available from Fertizona is Signature Classic. This is the original high-performance ryegrass blend developed by Pickseed West. Signature Classic is a three-way ryegrass blend for overseeding that offers good looks, outstanding performance and unparalleled consistency.

Highly Rated

Although this is the first season Fertizona will be actively offering these varieties, those who have tried out this seed have reported great results.

"Several golf course superintendents and landscape managers used this seed last year and we had absolutely no negative feedback," says Allen.

A Fungus Among Us

When overseeding with perennial ryegrass, fungus problems such as rapid blight can be a concern due to the constant watering of the seed. While Fertizona offers both preventative and curative controls for this problem, Allen recommends creating a low-sodium environment to minimize these effects.



"We find that fertigating with N-Control, a reacted nitrogen fertilizer, provides a nice environment for overseeding," says Allen. "I'm not saying that it halts rapid blight, but we seem to have fewer problems with that particular disease because the conditions just aren't there for it when we use N-Control."

For more information about the new Signature Classic and Signature Advantage seed varieties or N-Control, contact your Fertizona representative. ▲

Nutritional Recommendations

Product	Rate	Timing
6-20-20	200 Lbs. Per Acre	At Seeding
15-15-15	200 Lbs. Per Acre	At Seeding
7.5-26-0-8S	10-25 Gals. Per Acre	At Seeding

SmartBlend™

OPERATION OVERVIEW

The Bold And The Beautiful

Michael Francis Knows The Sweet Smell Of Success



Michael Francis Roses is a 3.3 million rose bush operation located in western Maricopa County.

As rich in history as they are in beauty, roses remain the favorite flowers of more than 85% of Americans. From coast to coast, roses bring happiness (and sometimes aid in the process of forgiveness), but this highly specialized crop isn't grown everywhere across the Nation.

On a commercial scale, there are only about 15 rose growers in the United States, and of those few, five are located in Arizona, with five more in neighboring California. So chances are good that at some point and time, you or someone you know may have purchased, received or enjoyed roses that came from Michael Francis Roses in Maricopa county.

Not a simple operation, roses require dedication, patience, know-how and a strong nerve. This is not a business for everyone. While the flowers may be exquisite and the end results may be favorable, the labor and time that's required and the amount of risks involved are immense.

Humble Beginnings

Ask anyone who works with roses, and they'll tell you that the rose business is not easy, and it's not easy to learn, either. That's why it's a bit unusual that Michael Francis – a relatively new face in the business – ended up as the owner of his own rose operation.

Michael Francis Roses At-A-Glance

- Office in Glendale, AZ
- Farms in Waddell, Glendale and Surprise, AZ
- Operating since 1982
- Owned and operated by Michael Francis
- 164 acres of roses
- 3.3 million rose bushes

After college, Francis left a job in real estate to join his father's cotton gin business. But when much of the business was sold off, Francis took a risk and started growing cotton,

wheat and watermelons. "I was young, and I wasn't even sure what I was doing," Francis recalls. "Then in 1982, a good friend of mine referred a rose buyer to me. I got my first contract— 12 acres. And that's how it all started."

Today, Francis employs more than 150 workers to help care for 164 acres of roses. "We have about 3.3 million rose bushes," Francis says. For people more familiar with greenhouse-grown roses, 3.3 million rose bushes may be difficult to visualize. "Try to imagine rose bushes growing all over a yard... and then multiply that by several powers of ten," Lin Evans, independent pest control advisor, states. "That's what a rose field looks like. Undeniably, the bloom cycle is really amazing."

Demanding Efforts

To get amazing roses, a lot of work must be done. While the Southwest may provide an ideal location for growing roses, with a good climate and good soil, the business is very high risk and the process is labor

intensive. “This is a very hands-on business,” Evans says, “literally and figuratively.”

A field-grown ornamental crop, roses require from 24 to 30 months of work and preparation. And it’s rarely mechanical; just about everything is done by hand. In fact, according to Francis, all attempts to mechanize and possibly simplify the planting, growing and harvesting processes have been unsuccessful.



Owner Michael Francis in his fields.

Common Rose Varieties Grown In The Southwest

While growers can take on hundreds of different rose types and varieties, there are still some that outshine the others, especially here in the state. A few of the roses that are most common for Michael Francis Roses include the following:

- Mr. Lincoln
- Oklahoma
- Queen Elizabeth
- Piñata
- Sterling Silver

The good news is roses do not require much fertilization. “There’s no big pre-plant fertilizer like with vegetables,” Francis says. Also, there aren’t too many pests to combat in these crops. Evans states,

“With the potential to defoliate the crop, the red spider mite is the worst pest in this area. I usually spray for it in the spring, as soon as the weather gets hot and dusty. My job is also to keep out nutgrass and be sure the roses are healthy and have good vertical development.”

Ironically, though Evans has been working with Michael Francis Roses for more than 15 years, he hated roses as a kid. “Growing up, I had to trim them and help my dad, who was a plant pathologist, care for them,” he explains. “Even now I refuse to have any growing in or around my house... but the kind in vases are fine.”

The basic process for field-grown roses begins with fumigation. Francis explains, “Roses are highly susceptible to nematodes, and the ground must be certified as nematode free. We must also be certified free of a series of soil diseases because of the possibility of contamination.”

Next, the ground preparation is done. Around October and November, cuttings are taken from “mother blocks,” and workers plant the sticks in the ground. When spring arrives, and the sticks are established, they’re budded.

During the last part of December and the beginning of January, the tops of the roses are taken off. The buds swell and create the flowers until the following December. The harvest then takes place from the middle of December through March, in which the roses are packaged and shipped bare root to various packaging facilities.

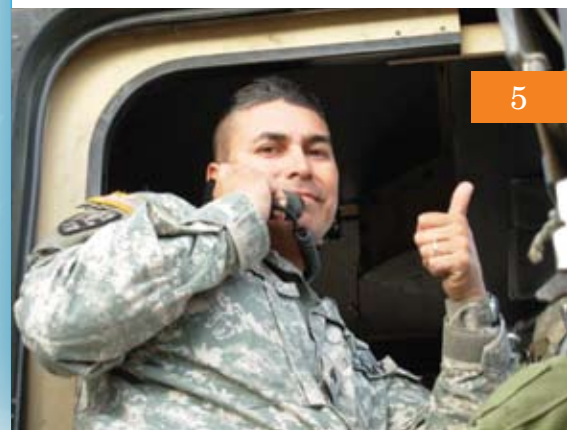
“The business is a little more of a headache nowadays than it used to be,” Francis mentions. “We used to have more fun when we sold to independent nurseries. With garden centers popping up at big chain stores, we have to be more cautious. The risks and the pressures are getting even greater. Hopefully we still have opportunity in the future to continue our operation gainfully and remain one of the few rose growers in the nation.”

For more information about how Fertizona can help your operation grow, contact your Fertizona field representative. ▲



Welcome Home Jimmy Juarez

*2 Year Iraq Arizona National Guardsman and
Fertizona - Casa Grande employee.*



TECH HELP

Alfalfa 101

Back To The Basics



With the recent changes and trends in the Southwest, many growers are now considering alfalfa crops. Sometimes called the “queen of the forages,” alfalfa supersedes other high-profile crops like chilies and cotton and can have a lifespan of 10 years or more. It also has the ability to go dormant during extended dry periods and is one of few crops that can recover with adequate rain or irrigation.

When determining the best time to plant, Walsh recommends taking into account the harvest time for outgrowing crops, the amount and type of ground preparation needed for alfalfa, current and future crop rotation plans and, of course, the weather. Other key production strategies to consider are cutting and irrigation management, along with effective insect control and fertilizer programs.

Fertility Programs

Alfalfa requires relatively large amounts of phosphorus (for successful establishment and root development) and potash (for maintaining yields, reducing susceptibility to certain diseases and increasing stand survival). But according to Walsh, “fertility programs for alfalfa vary by area, and while some growers depend heavily on the results of annual soil tests, others tend to do what’s worked best historically.”

Local growers are also evenly split between using a dry fertilizer or a liquid application of Phosphoric Acid or a SmartBlend™ of Phosphoric Acid with N-pHuric Acid. For Central Arizona growers who prefer a dry program, Walsh recommends a 150 to 250 lb. pre-plant application of 11-52-0 for new alfalfa fields or a SmartBlend of 11-52-0 with potash.

Pest Management Strategies

“Pest management strategies for alfalfa production differ across

Alfalfa Seed Varieties

When selecting an alfalfa seed, it's important to look for a high producing variety and a stand with longevity and good quality. Your location will also help determine which seed is best. Call your sales rep to see what's right for you. In the meantime, Gene Kempton, Fertizona's Seed Products Manager, offers the following suggestions for alfalfa growers throughout the region.

Central Arizona and Colorado River Area Growers:

- Fertilac 10
- NK® Sedona
- Cibola
- CUF 101

Eastern Arizona Growers:

- Fertilac 804
- NK Sequoia

Growers in Higher Elevations:

- NK Expedition

“Fertility programs for alfalfa vary by area, and while some growers depend heavily on the results of annual soil tests, others tend to do what’s worked best historically.”

—Tim Walsh, Manager of Compton Ag Services—Blythe

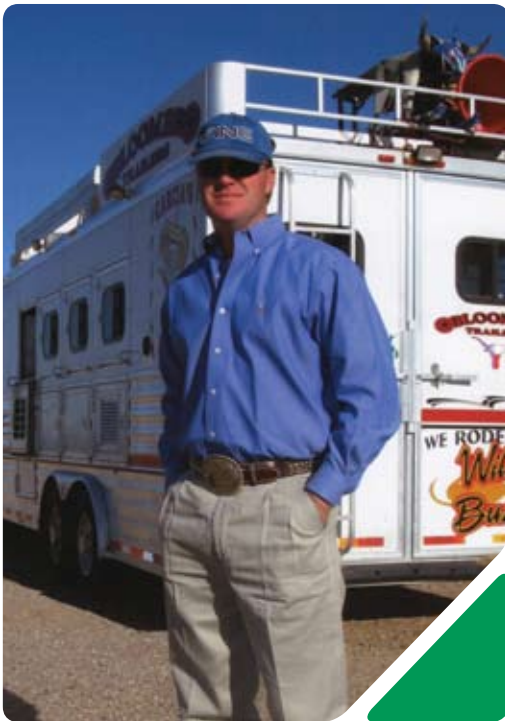
Alfalfa plantings are generally established in the fall of the year, as soon as the weather cools. Tim Walsh, Manager of Compton Ag Services’ Blythe location, says, “Most growers wait until early- to mid-October for planting, but some start as early as September.”

the state as well, but growers can minimize damage by catching pests early and by implementing sound preventative and curative programs,” says Ian John, PCA from Compton Ag Services – Blythe. “Common pests in the Southwest include alfalfa weevils, aphids, cutworms and armyworms.” Our field reps are equipped with the knowledge and expertise to scout for signs of these pests, diagnose potentially devastating problems and enact crop protection programs to minimize damage.

Whatever the problem, Fertizona and Compton Ag Services can suggest herbicides to ensure lasting control of weeds in your area. ▲

MEET YOUR REP

Turf Expert Marty Latta Knows The Ropes



Marty Latta's low-key approach is the key to his success.

Although one of Marty Latta's responsibilities includes working with golf courses, he may be more apt to rope a calf than to score an eagle. Marty, who was born in California and grew up in Kansas and Texas, spent most of his life on a farm. His father was in the cattle business and was involved with the rodeo. So it's fitting that Marty was drawn to the agriculture industry and became a rodeo man, too.

The rodeo was so important to Marty growing up that he decided to get a degree in education so he could have summers off for rodeo competition. "I thought teaching would be a great match," Marty explains. "I love working with kids, and I

was really into the rodeo. But teaching just didn't work out."

Luckily the rodeo did work out, and it became an integral part of the Latta family. Marty and his wife, Jolene, have been married for 15 years and have a 14-year-old son, Dustin, who competed in the rodeo and began roping at age 11. To stay closely involved, Marty and Jolene began the Arizona Junior High Rodeo Association. Marty also started the Marana Junior Rodeo with friend, Jon Post in 2004. The group is still going strong, and Marty helps as director of some of the events.

"I guess I've been involved with the rodeo just about all my life," he says. "I still rope and compete every once in a while, but nowadays, it's mainly about being a dad and watching my son."

Life today for Marty is also about helping his clients, a job he loves

and describes as more like vacation than work. A turf and ornamental sales representative with Fertizona since 2003, Marty mainly takes care of golf courses, nurseries and landscape companies in Pinal and Pima counties – "and the occasional farm, here and there," he adds.

Overall, Marty prefers to take a low-key approach to his job and focus on building good relationships. "I've been in sales almost all my life, but I haven't really had to sell Fertizona," he explains. "We provide quality products and great service, and my clients know they can trust me."

The relationships Marty has built with his clients have clearly made an impact. Almost 100% of the products they use are Fertizona



The Latta Family: Marty, Dustin and Jolene.



Marty Latta's son, Dustin, at the Junior High Nationals.

products, "and there is a lot of competition out there," Marty states. Fertizona has also made an impact on Marty. "It's great to like what you do and work with such wonderful people," he says. "Fertizona allows me to have time for career and family. I can really enjoy life."

LOCATIONS

Fertizona—Casa Grande Main Office

2850 South Peart Road
Casa Grande, AZ 85293
(520) 836-7477
Dennis Osborn—Crop Protection
Gene Kempton—Seed Products
Jimmy Compton—Crop Nutrition
Lamont Lacy—Credit Manager
Larry McGee—Lawn & Garden
Jeffrey Bengé—Controller
Keith Hall—Director of Operations

Fertizona—Buckeye

26705 West Baseline Road
Buckeye, AZ 85326
(623) 386-4491
Tim Walsh—Manager

Fertizona—Fennemore

17102 West Olive Avenue
Waddell, AZ 85355
(623) 935-4252
Craig Allen—Manager

Fertizona—Roll

4212 South Avenue 39E
Roll, AZ 85347
(928) 785-9016
Doug Canan—Manager

Fertizona—San Tan

San Tan Industrial Park
Sacaton, AZ 85247
(520) 836-0103
Tom Montoya—Manager

Fertizona—Thatcher

4257 US Highway 70
Thatcher, AZ 85552
(928) 428-3161
Steve Marshall—Manager

Fertizona—Willcox

512 East Maley Street
Willcox, AZ 85643
(520) 384-2264
Lee Walker—Manager

Fertizona—Yuma

4290 East County 10½ Street
Yuma, AZ 85365
(928) 344-9806
Mike Espil—Manager

Fertizona De Mexico

KM. 271.6-FN La Victoria
Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico
Call Bill Jarman in the US at
(520) 281-7388
Call Jose Muñoz in Mexico at
011-52 (662) 280-0121

Compton Ag Services— Blythe

19751 South Defrain Boulevard
Blythe, CA 92225
(760) 922-3117
Tim Walsh—Manager

Ag Express

17102 West Olive Avenue
Waddell, AZ 85355
(623) 935-9438
Dave Barrett—Manager



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accept Visa and MasterCard.*

Want to be Furst? Call 800.782.3266
and ask how.

*Send address changes to:
Ty Currie, 2850 S. Peart Rd.,
Casa Grande, AZ 85293
tcurrie@fertizona.com*

www.fertizona.com
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