



GROWING SMARTER

# GROWING SMARTER

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NEWS & INFORMATION TO HELP YOU GROW

## Know Before You Grow

### Soil tests and custom-blend fertilizers help maximize yields

Are you starving your fields?

Every experienced grower understands the vital importance of fertilizer and effective nutritional uptake for raising successful crops, but just how much nutrition is the right amount? And exactly which nutrients do different crops need? What about micronutrients?

Those can be complicated questions with a wide range of answers. Determining the ideal fertilizer for a particular field depends on a number of variables. First, of course, is the crop itself. For example, alfalfa has a tremendous

appetite for potassium (K) while other crops have a greater need for nitrogen (N).

A field's nutritional requirements are affected by many factors, such as anticipated fruit load, soil mineral content and pH, altitude, and moisture. Nutrient levels are even influenced by whatever was grown on those acres previously.

### Test early, test often

Soil testing is a valuable diagnostic tool for evaluating a crop's specific nutrient needs. A simple analysis of a soil profile can tell what amounts of plant nutrition should be provided for a given location. Several macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur) and micronutrients (iron, zinc, copper, boron, etc.)

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## Growers Applaud Passage of 2019 Farm Bill

After two years of arguing and deliberating in Washington, Congress finally agreed to pass a new farm bill earlier this winter. The final approved bill – officially named the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 – was quickly praised by U.S. farmers and ranchers who had been eagerly hoping for programs that can give them more support and stability.

The new bill is a welcome bit of economic optimism at a time when growers and livestock producers have been struggling with years of depressed commodity prices, tariff disputes,

and unsettled regulatory issues. The provisions of the bill will guide key agricultural policy decisions and allocate funding for a wide range of key farm programs for the next five years.

"The passage of the 2019 farm bill is good news because it provides a strong safety net for farmers and ranchers who need the dependability and certainty this legislation affords," said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue in a statement. The new bill reauthorizes important loss-coverage programs, emergency assistance, and risk-management support.

Among the bill's highlights for Southwestern agriculture are specific efforts to benefit growers of vegetable crops, nuts, and fruit, including millions of dollars designated for fighting HLB Citrus Greening disease and other invasive pests. Significant funds are also being invested

for expanded agricultural research, training for young farm employees, new programs to stimulate agricultural exports, and much more.

We've all had to face a lot of uncertainty in recent years, but we manage to keep riding out the storms. For now, maybe we can breathe a little easier knowing those new "safety nets" are out there for us.



**Jim Compton**  
President, Fertilzona & Compton Ag Services

*Story continued from cover*

are essential for any crop's successful growth, and the right combination of those elements will change from field to field. Any significant imbalance in available nutrients can really hurt a crop.

Knowing what the soil needs in advance of planting is extremely cost-effective for a number of reasons. For one thing, you gain the assurance of knowing your incoming crop will be getting optimal amounts of the nutrients needed for top yields. That makes your fertilizer dollar go farther and produce a better return on your investment.

A soil test and nutrient analysis will also help you avoid using the wrong fertilizer, or too much of the right one – either of which is a waste of money. Excessive nutrients can actually damage a crop.

### Find the right custom blend

Custom-formulated SmartBlend™ fertilizers from Fertilzona and Compton Ag Services give growers the advantage of having personalized

crop nutrition programs. Each SmartBlend product is unique, created and balanced for a specific crop's own requirements.

"After doing soil and tissue testing for our growers, we figure out the best and most affordable recipe for each of them," said Fertilzona's Casey Compton. "We can do either liquid or dry. Then we test it in our labs to make sure the formula is right."

Because every field is different, it's critical to have accurate testing on each one. By identifying particular crop needs and any potential nutrient deficiencies, it's much easier to determine the unique balance required, and that takes the guesswork out of fertilization.

"For example, we had a grower who needed certain levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, fulvic acid, zinc, and copper in his blend," Compton said. "We were able to match it exactly with the highest analysis and least cost possible."

Another attractive benefit of a custom-blended fertilizer mix is that all of a crop's nutrients can be applied in one trip across

the field, reducing the time and fuel needed for multiple applications.

Compton also recommends additional testing during the season, both in the soil and with plant tissue analysis. Petiole tests are very helpful to verify that nutrients are being taken up into the plants. In-season tests can alert the grower to any new deficiencies or changes that have taken place during the growing cycle.

Sometimes a crop will let you know when it's facing a nutrient deficiency, because there will be telltale signs on the plants themselves. If you're lucky, the symptoms – such as yellowing leaves, stunted growth, or spindly stalks – will show up early enough while you still have time to remedy them with supplemental nutrients. In worse cases, the lack of nutrition may not be obvious until it's too late, like when you're hit with aborted cotton bolls or reduced yields.

**For more information about soil testing or customized fertilizers, contact your local Fertilzona or Compton Ag office or visit [www.fertilzona.com](http://www.fertilzona.com).**

# Tasteful Selections

## Arvin, California

### Changing the landscape of potatoes

If you ask most people to name a crop that's grown in the Southwest, you're likely to get the same usual answers: citrus, lettuce, cotton, melons, and so on. It's probably a safe bet you wouldn't hear "potatoes" very often. However, there's a large and impressive operation now growing 12,000 acres of potatoes in Fertizona country.

Tasteful Selections is a producer and marketer of specialty small potatoes – several varieties and unique flavors of them – with a group of farming operations in Arizona, California, and Nevada. Headquartered in Arvin, California, Tasteful Selections started their business in 2010 as industry pioneers. Since then they've

grown into the recognized national leader of the bite-size potato category. In 2015, the company expanded into a new 200,000-square-foot processing facility which can distribute their products to all 50 states. Compton Ag Services in Blythe, California, is honored to be part of the company's amazing success story.

"People like our small potatoes for many reasons," explained Greg Hebdon, Farm Manager for Tasteful Selections. "The potatoes have great taste and a fine, creamy texture, and you don't have to peel the skins. They're also really simple to cook."

The "baby" potatoes from Tasteful Selections are very popular in many top restaurants as well as among consumers for home cooking. Certain varieties are even available in single-serve convenience packages for microwaving.

### "Compton Ag really exceeded our expectations."

– Greg Hebdon, Farm Manager  
Tasteful Selections

"Another important difference is that our potatoes are always fresh, because we grow and market them continuously," Greg added. "Some Russet potatoes might have been harvested last year and then sat in a warehouse for months before you eat them."

Because Tasteful Selections insists on freshness, their farming operations are continually growing potatoes every month. Their harvesting takes more than 300 days a year.

"We're always planting, so we have to stagger our timing to keep things moving," Greg said. "In the heat of the summer we go up into the mountains to grow where it's cooler." That constant planting schedule means Greg must have a reliable fertilizer supplier who can accommodate the company's frequent and widespread needs.

"Compton Ag provides us with liquid and dry fertilizer, and we've been very impressed with them and their service," he said. "They send their trucks and tanks wherever we need them."

"Greg originally came to us and asked if we could make a special fertilizer blend for him," recalled John Haggard, Manager of Compton Ag Services. "We don't usually get requests for potato fertilizers. We met with their team of agronomists and worked together to custom-blend the right nutrients. We also demonstrated that we had the capacity they needed."

"Compton Ag really exceeded our expectations," said Greg. "They make my job easier."

"Tasteful Selections is a first-class operation," added John. "They're good people to work with."

**For more information about the many types of specialty potatoes offered by Tasteful Selections, plus dozens of enticing creative recipes, visit the company's website at <https://www.tastefulselections.com>.**





# The Faces of the Future

## Meet some bright new stars at Fertizona

Fertizona newsletters typically include “New Product Spotlight” and “Meet Your Rep” articles in which we introduce readers to a noteworthy new product or a key employee. For this edition, we’re doing things a bit differently: we’ve combined those two regular features to present five young employees. After all, with Fertizona’s emphasis on excellent personal service, our highly capable people are some of the best “products” the company can offer.

Thanks to you, Fertizona is able to continually seek out and hire bright new people like these. Because you help our business grow, now they get to do the same for you.



**Mitchell Bartlett**  
PCA, Fertizona – Casa Grande

When you ask Mitchell about his job at Fertizona, you immediately know you’re talking to someone who’s in the right place.

“I like working outdoors, and it’s exciting to be in an ever-changing environment,” he said enthusiastically. “Every day is different.”

Mitchell has been with Fertizona full-time since graduating from U of A in 2017 with a degree in Crop Production. He also had internships with the company in 2015 and ’16. His agricultural connections actually go back much farther, because his great-grandparents were early Arizona homesteaders.

As a PCA in our Casa Grande location, Mitchell spends most of his time working with cotton and alfalfa growers, and he loves the challenges.

“We see new things all the time, and I like solving problems,” he added. “I owe a lot to (PCA) Tom Montoya and Pat Cockrill who always give me good directions.”

A native and resident of Coolidge, Mitchell is single and a big sports fan. In his spare time, he also enjoys dirt-biking.



**Mikayla Bush-Ramirez**  
PCA, Compton Ag Services – Blythe, California

Mikayla has the abilities and attitude to take her a long way in her career, but she didn’t have to go far to get it started.

Growing up in Blythe, she had summer internships at nearby Compton Ag Services while still in college, and then transitioned to full-time employment after graduating from Cal Poly Pomona (California State Polytechnic University) with a degree in Agricultural Science in 2018.

Although she wasn’t raised on a farm, Mikayla was interested in ag work when she was young and got involved in 4-H. “I actually wanted to be a veterinarian,” she said. Mikayla now has her PCA license (for both California and Arizona) and works mostly with melons, alfalfa, produce, and cotton.

“I like scouting fields,” she said. “Through my eyes, I can let growers know what they need.”

When not busy with work, Mikayla enjoys spending time with her family – including a twin sister – who still live in Blythe, along with her husband Damian and their mini-Dachshund “fur baby” named Koozie.





**Trent Drachenberg**  
PCA Trainee, Fertizona – Fennemore

People in agriculture don't usually grow up in many different places, but Trent's background is a bit uncommon.

"My Dad worked for a seed company and we moved around the Midwest a lot," he explained. "I didn't grow up on farm, but ag is in my blood."

His father eventually got transferred to Yuma, and that changed Trent's career path.

"I got a job on a research farm and really liked it," he said. "And then I met Jimmy Compton, which led to me getting hired at Fertizona."

Moving to Arizona also led to Trent earning his Bachelor's degree in Agribusiness from U of A. In his current position, Trent is teaming with Fertizona PCAs in the field to learn as much as possible while working toward his PCA certification.

"I just want to get out there and ask questions," he said. "I want to earn growers' trust."

Trent is single, and in his free time, he enjoys weight-lighting and outdoor activities, especially hiking.



**Byron Ollerton**  
PCA, Fertizona – Casa Grande

A good PCA needs a strong knowledge base, and Byron has developed his on several levels. In addition to working on his own family's farm, Byron has compiled impressive academic credentials and even international experience. Last year, he was selected to attend an intensive training class in The Netherlands to learn more about plant physiology, nutrition, resource use efficiency, and other vital topics.

"My goal was to come away with better information that I could use to help our growers," he said. "In my role at Fertizona, I have to be able to offer good advice for maximizing yields."

Byron joined the company in 2017 after graduating from U of A with a degree in Agricultural Technology Management with an emphasis on crop production. Originally from Casa Grande, he's the fourth generation of his family to farm their property.

Byron is single, but not for long, as he got engaged in February. For relaxation, Byron enjoys woodworking, mountain biking, and playing with his two Labrador Retrievers.



**Tyler Smith**  
PCA, Fertizona – Willcox

They say what goes around comes around, and in a way, that describes Tyler's career at Fertizona so far.

"I grew up here in Willcox, on a cattle ranch," said Tyler, "but Fertizona offered me a position at our Yuma branch."

Eventually, though, Tyler realized he would actually prefer to be back in Willcox.

"My family is here, and I have a lot of connections with local growers," he said. "It's a good fit for me, and I really like being in a location with such a diverse range of crops."

He now focuses his PCA skills on vineyards, row crops, and orchards, with particular expertise in pecans and pistachios.

"I love the unique challenges we face here in Willcox with the shorter growing seasons," he added.

Tyler joined Fertizona full-time in 2016 after graduating from U of A with a degree in Agricultural Technology Management and Crop Production. Away from work, Tyler's hobbies include roping and golf, or just spending time outdoors with his Golden Retriever.



# New Hires

**EUGENIO CORRAL**  
Casa Grande

**ERNESTO PEREZ**  
CYC

**FELIPE REYES**  
Willcox

**ENRIQUE ALVAREZ**  
CYC

**JERRI DAVIES**  
CYC



# Dealing with Drift

## Ongoing herbicide challenges demand careful application

Arizona cotton growers have new questions to face when it comes to maximizing their weed control, but more good herbicide choices are becoming available, especially with tank-mix options.

Part of the challenge is an increasing occurrence of herbicide-resistant weeds, most notably Palmer Amaranth, also known as pigweed, which can no longer be controlled by glyphosate (Roundup® branded products).

One promising solution in recent years was the introduction of genetically modified cotton that's tolerant of auxin herbicides, either 2,4-D or dicamba. That allowed growers to use over-the-top applications of certain auxin herbicides to control glyphosate-resistant weeds. The EPA

issued conditional registrations for a select group of acceptable dicamba herbicides, but only for use in 2017 and 2018. However, problems arose in some areas when those products were used improperly – or when older dicamba formulations were applied illegally. As a result, dicamba spray particle drift (physical movement of droplets) moved off-target and caused damage to neighboring crops. Sprayer contamination was another contributing factor in many cases.

“There was a substantial number of complaints about dicamba drift,” said Dr. Bill McCloskey, Extension Weed Specialist at the University of Arizona, “especially on soybeans in the Midwest and Mid-South.”

Although soybeans aren't a risk issue in Arizona, dicamba drift is a threat to a lot of vulnerable Southwestern crops, particularly melons among many others.

Considering the ongoing need for better weed control, the EPA decided late last year to extend the temporary dicamba registrations until December of 2020, but with new rules added.

“One big change is that dicamba is now a restricted-use pesticide, so only certified applicators can apply it,” McCloskey said. “Growers really need to manage off-target risks with dicamba, and that comes with many precautions, like thoroughly cleaning out your spray equipment.”

Other important steps include having the right nozzles and using a maximum boom height of 24 inches. According to AGDISP™ (AGricultural DISPersal) models, a boom height of 48 inches can increase drift potential by more than five times. Also, applications should always be avoided on windy days or if there's a temperature inversion.

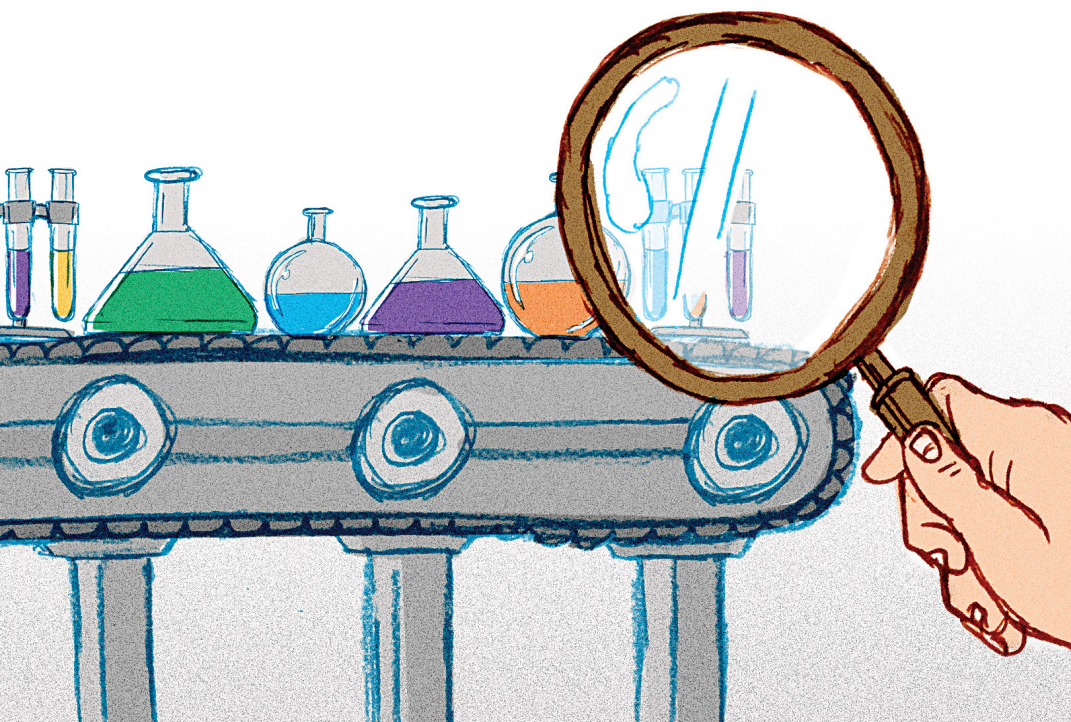
“Nozzle selection is the first and most important decision made by an applicator,” McCloskey added. “Incorrect nozzles can increase drift.”

There are many effective herbicide options currently available for fighting resistant weeds. Dr. McCloskey suggests several different tank mixes, some of which he said are “awesome on broadleaves.” It's essential that applicators follow specific label directions for each product, because certain herbicides have additional restrictions and requirements. For example, a drift-reduction agent must be added to the spray mix when XtendiMax® herbicide or Engenia® herbicide is tank-mixed with other herbicides.

“These products come with a long list of conditions and special procedures,” said Dennis Osborn, Crop Protection Sales Manager, Fertilizer. “The best thing to do is work with your field rep to determine the products and rates that are right for you. Fertilizer can help with all of it.”







## A Fond Farewell to Doug Canan

### Long-time Manager of Fertilzona – Roll Retires

After almost 28 years with Fertilzona, Doug Canan retired at the end of February, and he'll be missed. Doug was an experienced and respected PCA when he joined the company in 1991, and he later worked his way up to become Branch Manager at our location in Roll, Arizona -- a position he held for the rest of his career.

Doug had a well-deserved reputation as a "go-to" guy when things needing doing, even mopping the floors at times. He was also admired for his vast knowledge about Southwestern crops and his impressive organizational abilities.

"Great service is the key," Doug often said. "Staying in contact with customers allows us to do better scheduling so we can stay ahead."

We don't yet know what will be on Doug's schedule now, although he's always enjoyed hiking and camping in the desert, and he used to fly Ultralight aircraft. He'll also get to spend more time with Paula, his wife of 39 years.

Happy retirement, Doug! Thanks for everything you did for Fertilzona and our customers!



## Changes at the EPA

### Better approval processes bring new pesticides to market

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has a serious responsibility for helping to assure that American citizens can enjoy clean air and water, but like any huge organization, they often can't keep up with all of the work they have. When that happens, it can directly affect agriculture, especially if there's a hang-up in getting important new chemicals approved.

In 2018, the EPA made several restructuring moves and underwent other changes to improve the way they handle chemical registrations. Specifically, the agency took a backlog of 672 new chemical requests that were pending review and reduced that number by more than 200. During the same period, the EPA registered 23 new active chemical ingredients and 147 revised uses of existing pesticides. Those steps greatly enhanced the options available to growers for pest management. Among the agency's major

decisions in 2018 was to extend the conditional use of dicamba herbicide for two more years (see related story on page 6).

The EPA works under the rule of a law known as the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). Starting in 2009, chemical manufacturers had supported efforts to update the TSCA, partly with the intention of minimizing different state regulations about various chemicals. An amended version of the Act is now in effect, and last year, the agency said in an official statement: "This rule (TSCA) will provide resources needed to support the valuable work EPA does to review chemicals for safety, manage risk as required, and make chemical information available as appropriate."

Changes at the EPA are ongoing, and Fertilzona will continue to inform you when relevant new laws and provisions take effect.

**For more information about current chemical regulations, talk to your PCA or Fertilzona representative.**





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