



Buy these photos at YumaSun.com

PHOTOS BY RANDY HOEFT/YUMA SUN

AS THE AGRICULTURAL LABOR FORCE AGES AND DWINDLES, farmers are turning to automation, such as this Agmechtronix row crop thinner displayed at the 2019 Southwest Agriculture Summit. The machine is capable of thinning row crops such as lettuce using computer machine vision to identify plant locations and a herbicidal spray to eliminate unwanted plants, replacing the traditional thinning method of hand labor.

## Taking **DESERT AGRICULTURE** to the next level

Yuma industry is top notch, but  
still faces challenges

BY MARA KNAUB  
SUN STAFF WRITER

With or without a pandemic, some things never change. People still eat three times a day.

Agriculture was designated an essential business and has continued to produce the food needed by the nation. That's good news for Yuma, which has an economy that largely relies on the agricultural industry.

"That part hasn't changed. Agriculture keeps working hard to provide for you, the public out there," said Paul Brierley, executive director of University of Arizona Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture.

Brierley reviewed what's going on with agriculture and some of the challenges the industry is facing during the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce "Good Morning, Yuma!" virtual program on Thursday.

Yuma agriculture supplies about 80% of the winter leafy green vegetables for the U.S. and Canada from November through

March. It's in the top 0.1% of U.S. counties in crop sales for vegetables and top 0.5% for all agricultural products.

"There's a lot of other things we produce besides those veggies we're famous for," Brierley noted.

For example, Yuma County is one of the top producing areas of Med-jool dates in the world, with more than 5,000 acres dedicated to growing the fruit. In the summer, Yuma and Arizona also produces durum wheat, which is exported to Italy, cantaloupes, watermelons and other fruits.

About 150 different year-round crops contribute \$3.2 billion to Yuma's economy. "Some of which I don't even recognize or know what they are, and one of the reasons is seed crops. We grow a lot of seed crops to produce the seeds for other areas to grow a crop," Brierley said.

Industrial hemp, a new crop with a lot of industrial uses, is now grown here.

"It's in the same family as cannabis or marijuana, but it won't get you high. If you see it in the field, don't try to smoke it, it

won't get you high," he quipped.

Brierley noted that there's a lot of excitement around hemp. "The growers are always looking for something new, especially if it can be a rotation crop outside of the vegetable season, if it uses less water, does something good for the soil and, of course, it has to have a good market. So you'll see more of that growing as time goes by," Brierley said.

Agriculture directly contributes 1 in 5 jobs and effects 1 in 4 jobs in Yuma County. "We all have a vested interest in making sure this industry is healthy because it's what makes Yuma County's economy healthy," Brierley said, adding that YCEDA works with the chamber and local businesses "because almost every kind of business here has some touchpoint with agriculture, whether it's equipment dealers, labor contractors, cooling facilities, trucking, the boxmakers, the car dealers, the restaurants, seed dealers, all these things are impacted and largely depend on agriculture."

SEE AGRICULTURE/B3



A worker with Sunrise Packing of Calexico puts labels on each Dulcinea Farms Tuscan-style extra sweet cantaloupe in a box during a 2019 harvest in a field in the Yuma Valley.



THIS 2017 PHOTO SHOWS TRACTORS going in different directions, each performing different functions, in the same freshly planted vegetable field in the Yuma Valley. It signaled that the winter vegetable season was underway throughout the Yuma area.

## Claire's opens inside Walmart, Curries Indian restaurant coming soon

18-year-old owner of Lara's Landscaping offers his services



Comings  
and Goings  
Mara Knaub

Some Yumans are already celebrating the coming of an Indian restaurant. Curries Indian Cuisine and Bar is taking over the former space of Maria Bonita Restaurant and Bar on the site of the Ramada, 711 E. 32nd St.

Unfortunately, Maria Bonita, which opened in June 2019, is a casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately for lovers of Indian food, Curries is described as "authentic" Indian restaurant and bar.

Andrew Sab, owner of the Ramada, started dropping teasers on Facebook a few weeks ago. I reached out to him, and he asked that we keep it hush-hush while they worked on the remodel and were issued a business license.

But once the "Curries" sign went up, it seems the whole of Yuma noticed, judging from the Facebook posts and emails sent to me.

"We don't have the



Buy this photo at YumaSun.com

PHOTO BY MARA KNAUB/YUMA SUN

CLAIRE'S HAS OPENED a store in the Walmart in the Foothills and San Luis. This photo shows the Foothills store.

exact opening date yet," Sab told me last week. On Wednesday, he posted on Facebook, "We are currently working on remodeling and we are in the final stages of completion. At this time we are thinking 2 more weeks to complete the work and announce the opening date."

Finally, on Saturday, he announced that the grand opening would be July 22.

Let me introduce you to Lara Landscaping, a business recently started by 18-year-old Oscar Lara. He has experience in land-

scaping and has his own commercial equipment, including truck, trailer, tools, etc.

"I am a hard and willing worker with an ambitious attitude. My purpose for working is to move out of home and begin my own family as well as pay my way through college," he posted on Facebook.

He said he can lift heavy equipment, work long hours (even in the sun), start early in the morning and adjust to your needs. He is also a fast learner, easy to talk to and always willing to pick up new



Buy this photo at YumaSun.com

PHOTO BY MARA KNAUB/YUMA SUN

CURRIES INDIAN CUISINE AND BAR is coming soon to the site of the Ramada at 711 E. 32nd St.

skills, he added. The services he offers include pool plastering/painting, sheetrock repair, regular lawn maintenance, new yard creation, irrigation system installation and repair, laying seed/sod/turf and manure, laying bricks/pavers, tree/bush trimming and more. "I am flexible with the services I provide, depending on your needs," Lara

said. If interested in his services and for free estimates, call or text any time of day: 928-920-6945.

Claire's has opened locations inside the Walmart in the Foothills and San Luis. Claire's offers the latest trends in jewelry and accessories for girls, teens and tweens. For many, it's the go-to place for ear

piercing and must-have hair accessories, stylish beauty products and more, according to the company. Claire's in the Foothills, which already has a location in the Yuma Palms Regional Shopping Center, is located at 8151 E. 32nd St. The Claire's in San Luis is located at 1613 U.S. Highway 95. They're open from noon-8 p.m.

SEE COMINGS/B3



## BBB Scam Alert: COVID contact tracing work inspires copycat scams

Public health officials are using COVID-19 contact tracing programs to help slow the spread of the disease by informing people who have had contact with someone who has tested positive. Of course, scammers are finding nefarious ways to use these efforts for their personal gain.

### HOW THE SCAM WORKS

You receive an unsolicited message via text, email, or a social media messenger. The message explains that you've come into contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. The message instructs you to click on a link for more information. Alarmed, you are tempted to click and get more details. But don't fall for it! These links can contain malware that downloads to your device.

Another version of this scam involves a robocall claiming to be part of "contact and tracing efforts." Again, the call informs you that you've been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. After electing to speak to a representative, the "contact tracer" asks you to verify personal information. This starts with questions about your full name and date of birth, but can quickly



Better Business Bureau  
Janet Torricillas

move to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and/or financial accounts. While contact tracers do normally reach out by phone, be sure to hang up if the caller doesn't meet the guidelines described below.

### HOW TO TELL A REAL CONTACT TRACER FROM A SCAM

Contact tracers will ask you to confirm your identity, but not for financial information. Tracers will ask you to confirm your name, address, and date of birth. In most cases, they will already have this information on file. They will also ask about your current health, medical history, and recent travels. They will not ask for any government ID numbers or bank account details.

Contact tracers will identify themselves. The call should start with the tracer providing their name and identifying themselves as calling from the department of health or another official team.

Contact tracing is normally done by phone call. Be extra wary of social

media messages or texts.

A real contact tracer will never reveal the identity of the person who tested positive. If they provide a person's name, you know it's a scam.

Think the link may be real? Double check the URL. Scammers often buy official-looking URLs to use in their cons. Be careful that the link is really what it pretends to be. If the message alleges to come from the local government, make sure the URL ends in .gov (for the United States) or .ca (for Canada). When in doubt, perform a separate Internet search for the website.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about scams related to the coronavirus and how to protect yourself from them, go to <https://www.bbb.org/council/coronavirus/>. To read up on some general tips for avoiding scams, visit BBB.org/Avoid-Scams.

If you've been the victim of a coronavirus related scam, please report it on BBB.org/ScamTracker. Your report can help others to stay alert and avoid similar scams.

Yuma-based Janet Torricillas is the regional director of the Better Business Bureau serving the Pacific Southwest. She can be contacted at [janet.torricillas@bbb.org](mailto:janet.torricillas@bbb.org) or 928-929-7940.

## COMINGS

FROM PAGE B1

I received the list of Yuma business licenses issued in May, and one particular business caught my eye. It seems that the former **Hunter Steak House** is being resurrected as **Hunter Steak House and Pizzeria**. I'll have to find out more, but a license has been obtained for that same site with that name. Here is the list of companies that obtained or renewed business licenses in Yuma in May.

**CONTRACTOR:** Trane Energy Services, 850 W. Southern Ave., Tempe, 608-787-3516.

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE:** Yuma Real Estate Photography, 712 S. 2nd Ave., 928-366-8665.

**RESTAURANT:** Hunter Steak House & Pizzeria, 2355 S. 4th Ave., 928-446-8963.

**RETAIL:** Page's Drapery Shop, 13499 E. 46th St., 406-740-1291; Merciless Defense LLC, 6210 E. 42nd Lane, 513-296-8352; Claire's #3419, 8151 E. 32nd St., 954-392-4446.

**SERVICE PROVIDER:** Aftermath Services, 3914 E. 41st Place, Suite 6, 630-423-4256; Archikona LLC, 5868 E. 39th St., 928-446-2773; Liver Pool Services, 1540 S. Hettima St., 928-510-5165; R&M Removal Services, 10160 S. Spring Ave., 928-502-0461; Yuma's Own

Cleaning Services, 4667 W. 27th St., 928-323-4427; Castillos Metal Fabrication, 2149 S. Factor Ave., Suite 2, 928-261-6899; Marina Linn, 2554 W. 16th St., Suite 417, 760-909-5151.

Business is still slower than normal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but if you know of a new business that has or will be opening, relocating or closing, please let me know at [mknau@yumasun.com](mailto:mknau@yumasun.com). I appreciate the readers who always act as my eyes and ears. My thoughts are with our readers and all the businesses struggling to survive this pandemic. Stay strong and healthy!



FILE PHOTO BY RANDY HOEF/YUMA SUN

IN THIS 2019 PHOTO, a worker with Sunrise Packing cuts a Dulcinea Farms extra sweet cantaloupe in a field in the Yuma Valley.

## AGRICULTURE

FROM PAGE B1

**A WORLD-CLASS AGRICULTURAL CENTER**  
A few factors came together to make Yuma a world-class agricultural center. The area has 230,000 acres of fertile soil and a year-round growing season with most acreage producing at least two crops.

"It's not desert sand, like people like to think. It's wonderful dirt that's been brought by the Colorado River over the ages. It's been flooding and receding and putting out all that silt out there, and it's nice fertile soil," Brierley explained.

Yuma also has an available workforce, thanks to its proximity to Mexico, and senior water rights. "We don't do anything with water," Brierley noted. "Yuma is lucky to have very senior rights on the Colorado River. We need to be watchful and protect those, but with the water we're able to produce the crops that America needs."

Local farmers are willing to explore and use technology. "We've got a great farming community here that is always looking for the next best thing and the better way to do it," he noted.

The industry has great business and community support. "It's not like that in a lot of the country, and that's very much appreciated by the ag industry and helps make it a success," Brierley added.

Yuma has one of the most efficient irrigation networks in the world, with growers using 18% less water than in 1975, and in that time, the lettuce production nearly doubled from 1970-2010.

"Any place you can get the most crop for drop is the place you ought to be farming. When people say, oh why are you farming in the desert, just remind them this water in the Colorado River it's going to be used somewhere, why not use it in the place that's the most reliable, most productive place to do that?"

## INDUSTRY FACING SOME CHALLENGES

However, the industry is still facing some challenges related to food safety, COVID-19, water, soil health, plant disease, labor/immigration, pests, weeds, weather and ag tech, such as remote sensing and drones/robotics.

"The industry does so much behind the scenes to keep this product safe. It's a challenge because people don't cook this product, so these e-coli and things like that, you can't see them, you can't taste them, yet you've got to keep them out. The industry is doing amazing things to keep that food safe," Brierley explained, adding that this involves research, growing practices, grower training, government inspections and technology.

Crops are perishable, yet they're needed everyday in grocery stores. "It takes a lot to do that. Upwards of 1,500 refrigerated trucks a day roll out of here every day, taking that product to where it needs to be," he noted.

COVID-19 has impacted the markets. Half of the produce goes to retail and the half to the food industry, which includes restaurants, hotels, airlines, conference centers and schools.

"Half of that market just disappeared overnight when everything shut down due to COVID," Brierley said. "You saw shortages in your grocery market, and that's a shame because the crop was there, the product was there, it just couldn't get through the supply chain."

A lot of crops got dished under, milk got dumped out. It was really sad knowing there was a need and there was the supply, but it couldn't get through. He explained that the produce grown for retail is packaged differently and it couldn't be changed overnight.

With COVID-19, a lot of changes were made to protect workers, who work close together, travel together and, in some cases, live together. "One bit of good news is that the FDA came out and

said that this disease is not transmitted in food," Brierley noted.

Yuma has great water rights, but it's at the end of the Colorado River, the last one to have access to the water. Brierley cautioned that Yuma needs to stay vigilant to protect those water rights.

"There's also work that needs to be done in irrigation efficiency and making sure the quality is there whether it's the salinity in the water or pathogens that come in the water," he said.

With tens of thousands of people working in the fields, labor and immigration are always a big deal. It's an aging workforce, and less people want to do this work. The industry is also facing border crossing complications, which affect the 15,000 people who cross every day to work in the fields and then go home at night. Growers worry about border closures and visa programs that are getting harder to work with.

With that comes automation technology. "It's not a matter of getting rid of jobs, but a matter of how do you keep producing when you don't have the workforce that you're used to having?"

Remote sensing, drones, robotics and satellites allow farmers to know what's going on in the fields in real time so they can make quick decisions.

These kinds of technology require broadband. The industry is working with a coalition in Yuma to get better broadband service in Yuma, especially in the very rural areas where most ag fields are located.

"Without broadband, it's a nonstarter," Brierley said.

He pointed to a quote by Dr. George Frisvold: "Yuma is a unique national center of agricultural production. Yuma is to agriculture what Napa is to wine and Silicon Valley is to computer technology."

Then he added: "We really believe we have that opportunity here in Yuma to keep pushing that envelope and do world-class ag tech development."

## Renters face financial cliff ahead; limited help available

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Renters are nearing the end of their financial rope.

People who rent have largely been able to survive the initial months of the pandemic helped by unemployment and federal relief checks. But the extra \$600 in unemployment benefits ceases at the end of July and local eviction moratoriums are expiring. There is no agreement between the White House and Congress on a second federal relief package.

More broadly, there are fewer supports in place for renters than for homeowners. And as a jump in virus cases in numerous states nationwide adds more uncertainty to the economy and job market, many who rent are facing a precarious future.

"It's an incredibly stressful situation for renters," said Bruce McClary, spokesman for the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, a non-profit that works directly with consumers. "I don't know what lies in the road ahead."

Sam Moore knows this pressure all too well. Shortly after the stay-at-home orders hit in California, Moore and his four roommates who live in San Francisco's Treasure Island found themselves with no regular income. Only two of them received relief checks from the federal government, one was receiving unemployment and two are still waiting on it.

Ultimately, they had to decide whether to use the money they did have to cover rent or food; they chose to stop paying rent. The five eventually used a GoFundMe campaign to raise the roughly \$10,000 needed to pay the back rent for April through June plus the \$2,500 bill due for July.

The group, all in their early 20s, are looking for work but will have to move in with their families if they aren't able to find jobs and face eviction.

### ROUGH TIME TO RENT

Renters already faced a dire situation before the pandemic hit, said Alexander Hermann, a researcher at the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies.

The center reported in January that vacancy rates for rentals had hit the lowest level in decades, pushing up rent far faster than income. At last count,

one in four renters spent more than half their income on housing.

Then came the pandemic, which hit renters particularly hard financially. U.S. Census data shows about 19% of renters were late or deferred their rent payments in May. And about 31% of renters surveyed in June said they have little to no confidence they will be able to pay next month's rent.

Renters tend to have lower incomes and to be more economically vulnerable than their homeowner counterparts. They also cannot tap into the equity in their homes as a line of credit in case of an emergency. A disproportionate number of renters are black, Hispanic and other minorities.

The COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project, a coalition of economic researchers and legal experts, estimates that 19 million to 23 million Americans are at risk of eviction by the end of September.

**FIRST STEPS**  
If possible, tenants should continue to pay rent. Reach out to your landlord or property owner if you are having financial difficulties to see if an agreement can be made. Some are willing to negotiate discounted or deferred payments.

If you live in federally-subsidized housing and your income has changed, you may qualify for a reduction in rent; contact your housing authority to talk about income recertification.

Renters should be sure to take advantage of other relief programs as well to free up cash. If they qualify for unemployment, apply as soon as possible as the process takes time. Banks have been willing to make some accommodations for credit card and other loan payments for those financially hurt by coronavirus.

**PROTECTIONS**  
A number of cities and states have put some assistance programs in place, as well as moratoriums on evictions amid the pandemic.

See if you qualify for help. The National Low Income Housing Coalition has a list of state and local rent assistance programs on its website. United Way's 211.org website also has links to local charitable assistance for housing, food and other essentials. Find out what local pro-

## AFFORDABLE CREMATION SERVICES AVAILABLE

ALL SAINTS CREMATION & MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Dignified Simplicity

- Locally Family Owned and Operated
- Advance planning Available
- Serving Yuma and All Surrounding Areas

170 E 17th Pl, Yuma, AZ 85364  
(928) 276-9871

## PREPARING FOR FALL

**Safety 1st**  
**So We Can DANCE**

Limited class size  
Staggered class times

Careful adherence to health guidelines

Registration begins Monday, July 6th

Office Hours: Mon-Thur 10am-4pm

**Yuma Ballet Academy**  
928.314.4762 | 3942 S. Avenue 4½ E  
[www.balletyuma.org](http://www.balletyuma.org)

Get the Yuma Sun delivered to your home!  
Visit [YumaSun.com](http://YumaSun.com) or call 928-783-3333.

