

Meet Your Local Conservationist
Bobbi McDermott



Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I grew up in Tucson after moving with my family from Wisconsin in 1957, and currently live in Yuma. I earned my B.S. in Agronomy from the University of Arizona in 1969 – I was the first woman in 10 years to have graduated from that program! I started my college career in Animal Science but was told I would never get into vet school because they did not want women. Sophomore year I was in the Soils Department but to graduate I would need to take three chemistry courses more than my male counterparts. My junior year found me in the Agronomy Department which welcomed me. I did not choose agriculture as much as it chose me. I was also selected for Alpha Zeta, an ag honorary (professional society), but denied entry – again, I was still a woman. (It wasn't until 1972 that Alpha Zeta granted women entry into the professional fraternity – [click here](#) to learn more.)

How did you become involved in resource conservation?

While going to school I held several jobs to pay my way. I worked in food service; I spent a summer in the soil and water testing lab on campus; I worked as a student trainee with the Coronado National Forest for one summer; and finally, in my senior year, I was a field worker for the USDA Plant Materials Center in Tucson. When I graduated I was happy working outside and making \$2.00 an hour, but my supervisor insisted I apply to the USDA Soil Conservation Service – what we all



know now as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – for a soil conservationist position. I became a Soil Conservationist in September of 1969. Immediately after college I worked out of the Yuma Field Office (FO). After a year I transferred to the Phoenix FO, where I stayed for two years, and then returned to Yuma. (I saw the error of my ways!)

After three years I was promoted to District Conservationist and moved to the Wellton FO. I am, proudly, the first woman to be promoted to DC in Agency history! I worked extensively with the Wellton-Mohawk Salinity Project from 1975 to 1987. In 1987, the Wellton FO was closed and combined with the Yuma FO. I suddenly became DC working with three counties, two states, and four Conservation Districts: Laguna, Yuma, and Wellton-Mohawk Valley in Arizona and Bard in California. After working for 38 years for the agency, 36 of them in “God’s Country” of Yuma County, Imperial County and La Paz county, I retired. I have always had the support of my Conservation District Boards and the farmers I worked with.

What kinds of conservation practice implementations have you helped with over the years?

I have worked with growers on soil and water conservation projects, including ditch lining, land leveling, irrigation system design, conservation cropping systems, soils, irrigation water management, crop residue use,



and conservation tillage. It's important to remember that the work by farmers is done voluntarily and using the farmer's money. When we worked together, it was for practical and cost-efficient improvements to the resource base to maintain and improve it for future generations. In fact, 95% of the cropland is still locally owned and operated, with 5th and 6th generations taking over. I continue to utilize my knowledge to assist the community and individuals on soil, water, and other conservation matters when asked.

How long have you been involved with NRCDs, and why did you get involved with NRCDs?

I have been involved with NRCDs for 50 years. Districts identify and prioritize local resource concerns and share with NRCS to work in partnership with the private landowners. I am a District Supervisor on the Yuma NRCD board, and I am very vocal about local conservation issues. I care about local field office staffing and locally led conservation, planning, and practices. Yuma County agriculture is my favorite topic!

What is your favorite thing about being involved with NRCDs?

The people involved with Districts and their dedication to continue to fight for programs and assistance that apply to the resource needs of their farmers. The sacrifice of individuals to become involved in what often seems like hopeless pursuits to address local needs and objectives. The "if it is to be, it is up to me" philosophy runs deep within Districts.



What other conservation or agricultural activities/organizations are you involved in?

- I was honored by being inducted into the AZ Farming and Ranching Hall of Fame in 2017. I continue to nominate Yuma County individuals from Yuma County who have made stellar contributions to the agricultural industry in different capacities. So far, both nominees were inducted.
- I am a regular contributor to the Yuma Sun newspaper, writing the column "Yuma Ag & You."
- I attend many meetings on local and statewide agricultural issues to continue my knowledge and to write about for my column.
- When asked, I teach classes at Arizona Western College (where I previously taught a Soils Course for several years post-retirement).
- I am a Hospice of Yuma Bereavement team volunteer.
- I am on the AACD State Board and Cropland Chairman.
- I continue to speak to local church and civic groups about agricultural issues and Yuma County agriculture when asked.
- I do volunteer work as needed with Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association.
- I push Food Safety issues and how it is necessary for the public to support the Food Safety Industry by attending local seminars and meetings.
- I am a Member of Yuma Area Ag Council.
- I served on the Yuma County Planning and Zoning Commission.
- I was Treasurer of the Yuma Area Habitat Partnership Committee in association with the AZ Game and Fish Department.
- I was a participant and member of Arizona Heritage Fund Advisory Committee, selected by the AZ Game and Fish Commission.
- I am a member of the PM-10 Air Quality Committee and assisted in drafting Yuma County Best Management Practices.
- I am a member of the International Water and Boundary Commission (IBWC Advisory Committee-third 2-year term).
- I was the Secretary/Treasurer of Desert Bass Anglers, the largest Bass fishing club in Yuma since 1992.



- I am a “Step On” tour guide for agricultural tours.
- I am a past member of the Yuma County Cotton Wives, Yuma League of Women Voters, Hospice of Yuma Board of Directors – YRMC Fundraising Committee.