

Meet Your Local Conservationist
Brenda Hauser, Verde NRC



A tradition of family farming

Traffic out of Phoenix in the summer is one long line of cars filled with families anxious to reach the mountains. But for those in the know, the trip always includes a quick detour into Camp Verde for a stop at Hauser and Hauser Farms to pick up a dozen or more ears of what is undisputedly the best sweet corn in the state.

Supervisor Brenda Hauser and her husband Richard started farming in the Verde Valley in 1968, migrating from Scottsdale and Tolleson where Richard's family had citrus groves and farmed alfalfa. Their earliest crops included alfalfa, hay, and cotton and they raised four children on property scattered throughout the Valley including 40 acres in what is now Dead Horse Ranch State Park. It was there the corn operation almost ended before it began when Brenda threw her picking sack and hoe to the ground and made a hasty retreat away from an extremely disturbed rattlesnake.

However, through hard work and perseverance, through floods and gophers, the corn and the family prevailed. The original farm stand was a flatbed truck parked on a dirt road. Brenda set out some signs and invited in the neighbors. Seniors had their own day. Hauser-grown watermelons are a recent addition to the menu. Community traditions continue as Hopi families arrive annually at the farm, tying small gifts for children on corn stalks and digging up entire stalks for use in ceremonial dances.

Hauser and Hauser Farms is a multi-generational business. Concentrated now in Camp Verde, the day-to-day farming operations are managed by daughter-in-law Claudia and grandson Zach who meet each morning and, over a cup of coffee, discuss their plans for the day. Grandson Chance is the best mechanic in the family and keeps the farm equipment running, son Ben returned from a career in law enforcement to work alongside his brothers, and granddaughter Emily runs the farm stand. There are great grandchildren galore, and all are potential farmers.

Zach said he always knew he wanted to be a farmer and Claudia likes nothing better than to be out in the field. But critical to any decisions the family makes is the understanding that preserving the agricultural heritage of the Verde Valley for future generations means acting now to conserve and protect their resources. The Hauser's have not hesitated to incorporate the best, most efficient irrigation practices currently available. Turning from original straight flood irrigation, most of the farm is now irrigated by subsurface drip systems on cultivated land or micro jets on acreage recently converted to pecans. Pecan tree roots have an added benefit of stabilizing soil and providing protection in the event of flooding. The Hauser's are committed to the restoration of wildlife habitat and the removal of invasive species from the river corridor along their properties. Crop conversions have transformed high summer water use alfalfa into low water use winter barley. The barley, once malted, is a profitable, high demand crop and is a favorite of many Arizona brewers. Plans include installing additional subsurface drip irrigation. And perhaps, most importantly, the Hauser's have made use of conservation easements to preserve the family farm for all those farmers-in-waiting.

Brenda and her family have not done this alone. All of them give credit to The Nature Conservancy and to the Natural Resource Conservation Service for providing the imagination and resources necessary to transform the family farm into a profitable, sustainable, modern, water savvy, environmentally friendly agricultural oasis.

In addition to Brenda, both Zach and Richard have served as Supervisors for the Verde NRCD. Brenda is in her second elected term and says one of her favorite things about her involvement with the Verde NRCD is it gives her a voice for agriculture in the broader community. As far as changes go, Brenda particularly likes the more focused attention the Board is giving to the concerns addressed by stakeholders at Local Work Group meetings. Brenda is heavily involved in the Surface Water Education program being developed by the Verde NRCD with the aid of a grant from the Walton Family Foundation.