Paul Brierley to Lead Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
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The UA’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences[1] has named Paul Brierley the inaugural director of its recently launched Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture.

The center, based in Yuma, is a public-private partnership between the college and the Arizona and California desert agriculture industry, dedicated to addressing “on-the-ground” industry needs through collaboration and research.

Brierley, who was identified after a national search, will oversee the center’s research activities. He joins the UA after more than a decade of executive service to the Arizona Farm Bureau, where, as the bureau’s director of organization, he helped agricultural producers improve their industry by actively identifying and solving problems.

“He has exceptional qualities in leadership and project management and a lifelong background in and commitment to Arizona and California agriculture,” said Shane Burgess, UA vice president for veterinary sciences and Cooperative Extension and dean of the UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Brierley grew up working on his family’s diversified central California farm, which grew sugar beets, cannery tomatoes, alfalfa, wheat, vegetables and flowers for seed. He later spent 12 years as managing partner in an Arizona production agriculture business. In between, he spent five years as an electrical engineer conducting applied telecommunications research. A graduate of UA Cooperative Extension’s Project CENTRL rural leadership program and the Flinn-Brown Civic Leadership Academy, Brierley developed management skills, in-depth knowledge and a statewide network of fellow leaders.

The Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture, established earlier this year, will provide research and information on pest management, food safety, plant diseases, water conservation, new crops or varieties that are profitable for desert growers, labor, wildlife and even public relations challenges. Brierley will work with an advisory council to initiate the most effective and efficient responses to a variety of issues that may be encountered by growers across the Southwest and in arid lands around the world.

“Yuma agriculture is an amazing entity and I look forward to working with them,” Brierley said. “The solutions we come up with in Yuma will apply to desert agriculture across the world, which is 40 percent of the world’s agriculture.”

Brierley plans to bring an innovative leadership philosophy to the center, working closely with stakeholders to identify key issues, putting together “dream teams” to address those issues, and securing the resources needed to get the job done.

More than two dozen industry partners from Yuma and Salinas, California, have invested in the center, together committing more than $1.1 million over the next three years.

“I think the public/private partnership ties in well with the vision of UA President Ann Weaver Hart and CALS Dean Burgess to transform the University to get really meaningful results,” Brierley said. “They see the Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture as a model of that new University. Industry will be happy because they have a crack team to solve their problems. And because we do things the industry finds useful, we'll be able to enhance a premier University research program.”

To learn more about the Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture, contact Brierley at PaulBrierley@email.arizona.edu [2], 928-782-5864 (office), or 928-920-4983 (cell).

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