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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

With Sober Consideration, the Arizona Farm Bureau Withdraws from the Governor’s Water Policy Council

Arizona, October 13, 2023 – With thoughtful and sober consideration and in the best interests of our members, Arizona Farm Bureau announces its withdrawal from the Governor’s Water Policy Council.

The following statements can be attributed to Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse.

“On behalf of the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation, I express our disappointment in what has been the workings of the Rural Groundwater Committee (RGC) of the Governor’s Water Policy Council (The Council),” said Arizona Farm Bureau President Stefanie Smallhouse. “While we respect the efforts made by Governor Katie Hobbs’ administration to address pressing issues related to rural groundwater, we believe the current process in place has been deaf to the concerns and priorities of Arizona’s farm and ranch families and we must withdraw from it entirely.

“Arizona agriculture contributes 23.3 billion dollars in economic benefit to the State of Arizona; contributes to both local and national food security; provides open space; and 24/7, 365 days of on-the-ground watershed management to the state. From the onset, we were optimistic that the RGC presented a unique opportunity to move beyond the contentious debates of the past and foster innovative solutions multiple stakeholders could embrace for safeguarding our rural groundwater resources while ensuring the economic vitality of rural communities.

“The priorities we have championed for Arizona’s farm and ranch families from the beginning of our involvement in this process have been driven by their desire to be good water stewards

while protecting current uses and creating opportunities for the future, which enable even greater conservation. First and foremost, we believe that a new and innovative approach for the protection of water users and their uses is a prerequisite for any new regulatory structure in rural Arizona. Secondly, any new regulatory process must be driven by a locally elected planning body. This is by no means an unusual concept. Several of these entities currently manage natural resources in Arizona and have been very effective with local direction and accountability for decades.

“After months of deliberation, the committee’s direction, and thereby the outcome of the greater Council, appears to be pre-determined as essentially a cross between the seriously flawed attempts of the past and an AMA. At best, our priorities have been given very little committee consideration or, at worst, have been totally dismissed. This is unacceptable to our members, farm and ranch families who will undoubtedly be impacted directly and immediately by any rural groundwater regulatory framework.

“Arizona Farm Bureau exists to solve problems. We have quite a bit of experience in bringing together disparate views and collaborating towards solutions. Therefore, we intend to press on with advocating for reasonable, innovative, equitable, and common-sense alternatives to the current regulatory frameworks. An alternative that can better address the needs of rural areas, protect groundwater users, and promote economic incentives for conservation rather than relying on heavy-handed and unaccountable regulation.

“Although we must withdraw to turn our attention and time towards an effort where we can be heard, we appreciate the Governor’s invitation to serve on the Council and value her leadership initiative. We have extended an offer to Governor Hobbs to convene a diverse group of agricultural stakeholders from around the state to meet with her directly. In the interest of Arizona’s food security and water future, we hope she accepts.”

About Arizona Farm Bureau

The Arizona Farm Bureau is a member-driven, grassroots organization dedicated to preserving and improving the Arizona agriculture industry through member involvement in advocacy, outreach, education, programs, and services. The organization has nearly 30,000 member families. Go to www.azfb.org to learn more about Arizona agriculture.