

# From the farm gate to national security

**ASU's new Center for Agriculture and National Security examines how food production, supply chains, technology, homeland security and global competition shape US resilience**

By Raymie Humbert, ASU News  
September 25, 2026

Agriculture has long been understood as an economic sector, a source of food and a way of life. But in an era of global competition, cyber threats and tightly connected supply chains, it is increasingly being recognized as something more: a national security issue.

That was the focus of a launch event for Arizona State University's [Center for Agriculture and National Security](#) at ASU's Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center in Washington, D.C.

"Agriculture isn't just something that national power has to protect; it's part and parcel of national power itself," said Alicia Ellis, director of the center, during opening remarks.

That broader view matters because the food system begins long before products reach a grocery store. Farmers depend on fertilizer, seeds, crop-protection products, water, equipment, transportation, energy and digital technologies.

A disruption at any one of those points can ripple outward, affecting producers, processors, communities and consumers.

Richard Rushforth, a research associate professor in ASU's [School of Complex Adaptive Systems](#), said understanding those connections requires looking beyond any single resource.

"It's inputs. It's transportation. It's logistics. It's cold storage. It's a very complex system," Rushforth said.

That complexity also creates an opportunity for the center to bring together expertise that often operates in separate worlds — from agriculture, national security, water, technology, industry and supply chains — to better understand where the U.S. food system is vulnerable and how those vulnerabilities can be addressed.

For David Kilcullen, a professor of practice in ASU's [School of Politics and Global Studies](#) and a member of the center's board of advisors, one of the center's key roles will be helping decision-makers understand those interdependencies before they become crises.

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The center, he said, brings together areas that many people “don’t fully recognize are actually all one connected system,” one with both vulnerabilities and sources of resilience.

## **Risks are evolving**

Precision agriculture can improve irrigation, forecasting and productivity, but connected equipment and sensors can also introduce cyber-physical vulnerabilities. Dependence on overseas inputs or concentrated transportation and processing networks can expose producers to disruptions far beyond the farm. Control over seed genetics, agricultural technology and other critical inputs can carry strategic consequences as well.

For Mark Purdy, a retired U.S. Army colonel who grew up on a farm and later returned to agriculture after a 25-year national security career, identifying those risks is only a first step.

“If we stop at information and education, then I don’t think the center will be successful,” Purdy said. “We have to get out and activate, and actually implement and do something about the risks and vulnerabilities and opportunities that we identify.”

That emphasis on action may be what gives the new center significance beyond ASU. Its work can help connect the farm gate to the national security community, translating research into stronger supply chains, better preparedness and a more resilient food system.

Because when agriculture is disrupted, the effects do not stop at the farm.

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## **Main image**



Cabbage grows along U.S. Route 95 in Yuma, Arizona. Agriculture is the area's leading business, worth more than \$4 billion annually, according to the Visit Yuma website. The industry also has the potential to be a national security issue. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

**Text image(s)**



Guests mingle at the launch of the Center for Agriculture and National Security at the ASU Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Hager Sharp

## Gallery



Magda Hinojosa, dean of social sciences at ASU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, kicks off the launch of the Center for Agriculture and National Security and introduces its director, Alicia Ellis, at the ASU Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center in Washington, D.C.



Alicia Ellis, director of the Center for Agriculture and National Security, explains the importance of agriculture and its correlation to national security at the launch of the center in Washington, D.C.



Attendees converse at the launch of the Center for Agriculture and National Security at the ASU Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center in Washington, D.C.