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Saudi Arizona: Desert geopolitics and the entangled fates of Arizona and Arabia

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In 2014, the Saudi Arabian dairy company Almarai bought a farm near Vicksburg Arizona—and with it, near unlimited access to underground aquifer water. The company wanted to grow and send alfalfa back to Saudi Arabia, where its industrial-scale herds of milk cows make Almarai the largest dairy company in the Middle East. This talk unravels the complicated geopolitics of this deal by contextualizing it as part of a longer history of desert farming exchanges between Saudi Arabia and Arizona since the 1940s. Moving away from sensational stories of ’land/water grab’ accounts to Saudi agricultural investments, the talk directs our attention to the geopolitics of connection that has long linked the US Southwest and the Middle East.