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by Larry A. Quinn



45th ANNUAL AG SECRETARY BROADCAST INTERVIEW — On December 10, 2019, **Orion Samuelson** (WGN Radio, Chicago, Illinois) marked his 45th year of doing a live year-end TV-radio interview with the Secretary of Agriculture in his office in Washington, D.C.

“It started in the mid-’70s on *U.S. Farm Report* when **Earl Butz** was Secretary, and this year it was with **Sonny Perdue** on *This Week in Agri-Business*. I will always remember Earl’s words to me when we finished the first interview: ‘Well, I just gave you enough material to last a year,’” Samuelson said. “I enjoy the opportunity to provide my listeners and viewers with some fascinating insights from agricultural leaders.”

Pictured during the December 10, 2019, interview are Samuelson (left) and Secretary Perdue.

ROOT RETIRES — **Ken Root** (Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network, Guttenberg, Iowa) has retired!

“I pulled the plug on my broadcasting career January 3, 2020. Since then I’ve received several emails; and my wife, **Jane**, put together a party and decorated one wall with letters from friends who wished me good things in retirement and often cited their memories of our interactions during my long and checkered career. I received 100 letters that Jane made into a wall of memories for me,” Root said.



Root attended his first NAFB meeting as a farm broadcaster from WKY radio and television (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) in 1974. He went on to work at the Kansas Ag Network, the Kansas Broadcasting System, AgriTalk, WHO, and Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network. Also, he served as NAFB executive director from 2002 to 2004.

“Ken has been a great friend to many of our members and is well-known throughout the industry,” said Current NAFB Executive Director **Tom Brand**.

Root was born in 1949 on an Oklahoma farm. He attended Oklahoma State University and graduated with a degree in agriculture education. He taught for 2½ years in Union City, Oklahoma. This western Oklahoma town was hit by the first documented F-5 tornado during that time. Root found some excitement in documenting the loss of homes and other property for the journalists who arrived to cover the event.

“I took my first job in broadcasting at WKY in May 1974. I worked at that top-of-the-line property for six years. During that time, the TV station was sold (and became KTVY), and the general manager, **Norman Bagwell**, died of cancer. I realized my future was not always controlled by me. In 1980, the long-running morning farm show was cancelled.”

Root returned to Oklahoma State University in 1980 where he served as head of radio and TV for agriculture. Next, he moved to Kansas and helped start the Kansas Agriculture Network. The parent company went bankrupt after three years.

“Then, I moved to KWCH-TV (Wichita, Kansas). It was one of the most enjoyable rides of my life,” Root added.



Root was elected president of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters (now, National Association of Farm Broadcasting, or NAFB) in 1986 after serving three years as a national officer. Then, he left broadcasting and moved to American Cyanamid in Wayne, New Jersey.

“It was an amazing culture shock for me and my family. I was hired by **David Butterfield** in public affairs. I worked there for six months before being offered an opportunity to set up a national organization of ag chemical dealers. In March 1988, the National AgriChemical Retailers Association became a reality. This was another amazing experience. I was executive director of NARA for four years.”

In 1989, Root moved to Washington, D.C., to run NARA’s four-person staff. NARA did its job and then merged with the National Fertilizer Solutions Association to form the Ag Retailers Association that exists today.

In 1992, he started Root Environmental Services and began inspecting fertilizer/ag chem dealerships.

“I kept Root Environmental going with the help of my brother, **Jim**, and wife, **Gail**. We ran it until 2000 when American Cyanamid was purchased by American Home Products. It was broken up and disappeared in less than a year.”

Root then moved to Kansas City in 1994 and joined the startup of AgriTalk.

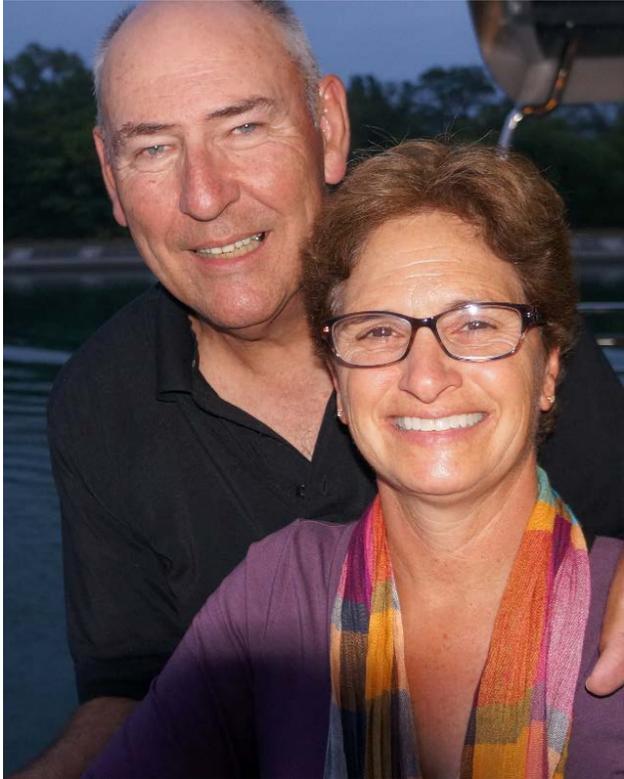
“What a great experience to do rural-focused talk radio on more than 100 stations! My love remained in broadcasting,” he said. “In 2003, I was asked to apply for the NAFB executive director position. I was selected and directed the move of NAFB headquarters from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Platte City, Missouri. I served as executive director for three years.”

In 2005, Root moved to WHO Radio in Des Moines, Iowa.

“I was terminated in November of 2009. Two days later, I was hired on contract by the Agribusiness Association of Iowa (AAI) to help prepare for their Showcase, a statewide agri-dealer event. Also, I was offered a chance to start an agriculture segment on WHO-TV (not related to WHO Radio).”

Root used AAI as his base and partnered to take additional jobs including farm director at WGFA in Watseka, Illinois, and AAI director of public affairs. Also, he was a columnist for the *High Plains Journal*, for which he wrote for 17 years from the late 1990s to 2017. Also, he served as communications director for the Knights of Columbus state organization, and he produced a weekly half-hour radio show for them.

“In 2011, from AAI offices, we started the Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network (IABN). **Russ Parker** was a partner along with **Bill Farmakis**. The network was my sole remaining job that I left upon my retirement.”



“In 2011, Gail and I divorced. In 2015, I married **Jane Ertl** from Dyersville, Iowa. I remained with AAI and all my other jobs until I began retiring from each one and moved to Dyersville,” he said.

On January 3, 2020, he ended his daily programming on IABN.

“In 2019, my son, **Russell**, died of alcoholism. I am deeply saddened by his death. I think of him every day. I will always carry questions in my heart about what might have been,” Root concluded.

Pictured in the bottom photo are Ken and Jane Root, who live in Iowa in summer and Florida in winter.

SHEPERD JOINS RADIO OKLAHOMA AG NETWORK — **KC Sheperd** is from Canute, a town of about 400 people in western Oklahoma.

“I grew up on a farm showing several breeds of cattle (Chianina and Maine-Anjou, mostly). My dad grew wheat and bred club calves; and after I quit showing, we continued to be active in the club calf business. I was active throughout high school in FFA and had the opportunity to sing at the State FFA Convention,” Sheperd said.



Pictured are Radio Oklahoma Ag Network team members (from left): **Dave Lanning**, **KC Sheperd**, and **Ron Hays**.

Sheperd started her work in broadcast as an intern at KWEY (Weatherford, Oklahoma) during her first year of college. She gradually worked her way up to doing morning broadcasts on the Coyote, 97.3 in Weatherford. The station aired the Radio Oklahoma Ag Network farm reports. From there she moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, where she did mornings on KOUL 103.7 and then eventually moved back to western Oklahoma to be program director for the Coyote on Wright Radio. In 2007, Sheperd moved to Oklahoma City to do morning radio on King Country and afternoons on Hank FM.

“In my broadcast career, I’ve had the opportunity to do morning shows, afternoon shows, news, sports, play-by-play, and sales,” she said.

“For the past six years, I have been working at Loves Corporate Offices as an IT project manager and doing afternoons on Hank FM. That is where **Ron Hays** found me and asked me to join the team. I’m very excited to be back on the radio full-time. It’s my passion and what I love. Not only do I get to do radio once again, but I get to cover ag news, which has been so important to my family throughout the years. I’m also grateful to have this opportunity to learn from one of the best in the business, Ron Hays,” she added.



“My husband, **Jordan**, and I have six-year-old twin girls, **Crosslee** and **Londyn** (also pictured), who keep us on our toes! We still go out to the farm in western Oklahoma about every other weekend to let the girls play with the cattle, their mini-horse, Woody, and their donkey, Kris. I’m excited to be raising girls who know about farming and livestock,” Sheperd concluded.

KETELSEN WINS SOYBEAN AWARD — Lynn Ketelsen (Linder Farm Network, Owatonna, Minnesota) received the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council's 2019 Industry Leader of the Year award.



“Throughout his storied career, Lynn has showed steadfast support of Minnesota farmers. He truly is the voice of Minnesota agriculture and the go-to source for all matters related to Minnesota farming. During these tough economic times, we also are grateful to the Linder Farm Network for donating a full year of their *Soybean Spotlight* to promoting our organization in fiscal year

2020. We are proud to partner with your organization and look forward to strengthening our relationship in the future,” said **Cole Trebesch**, chairman of the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council.

First photo: Ketelsen (middle) is congratulated by Trebesch (left) and **Jamie Beyer**, president of the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association.

Second photo: **Bill Gordon** (right), president of the American Soybean Association, adds his congratulations for Ketelsen's award.



PATTON NAMED MARKET ANCHOR OF RURAL RADIO NETWORK — Farm broadcaster **Clay Patton** has shifted into a new role with the Rural Radio Network. Patton will anchor the market desk, providing timely updates and interviews with commodity brokers. Earlier, the Nebraska Rural Radio Association (NRRRA) announced that longtime broadcaster and market anchor **Dewey Nelson** was retiring after 49 years in radio. Nelson spent 35 of those years with the NRRRA.



Patton is a native of Limon, Colorado, and has been a farm broadcaster at the Lexington studios for the past two years. Prior to joining the NRRRA, Patton worked in Kansas as a farm broadcaster.

“He brings a wealth of market information with him from previous experience,” Rural Radio Network Farm Director **Susan Littlefield** said. “I am excited to see Clay in the market chair bringing important information to those in and out of the industry.”

As for his new role, Patton says he plans to bring an approach similar to Nelson’s.

“Change is never easy, but I hope to be a consistent voice on the markets, build a reputation for being accurate, and provide timely information for our listeners. Nelson left big shoes to fill,” Patton said. “He’s a great professional who always kept the agriculture producer in mind. Also, he was a mentor to many of us in the company.”

NRRA is the only radio group in the nation owned by a cooperative of farmers and ranchers. The NRRA-owned Rural Radio Network reaches six states across the Midwest.



LSU PRIDE — Don Molino (Voice of Louisiana Agriculture, Baton Rouge, Louisiana) proudly reported:

“The Louisiana State University football team completed a 15-0 season with a 48-25 shellacking of Clemson University for the 2019 National Championship. They produced the Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback, scored more points than any team in modern NCAA history, and set more records than there is space here to list. The team is from Louisiana (Agricultural & Mechanical) State University. Agriculture wins yet again!”

WE WANT YOUR NEWS — Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact Larry Quinn at larryquinn@outlook.com or phone at **703-819-6532**. *Airing on the Side of Agriculture* is included in the blog section of NAFB.com. For an archive copy of any past issues, go to **Membership** and click on ***Airing on the Side of Agriculture***.

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