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by Larry A. Quinn

IARN REPORTERS COVER IOWA'S DERECHO — “The morning of August 10 in Iowa was hot and sticky,” reports **Dustin Hoffmann** (Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network, Des Moines, Iowa). “If you took two steps outside, it was no surprise that we had severe thunderstorm watches up already at 6 a.m. By 10:30 a.m., we had warnings going up around central Iowa. By 10:45 a.m., small hurricane-force winds started ripping through the state on the start of its 700-plus-mile trek across the Midwest.



“The ‘derecho,’ as we have come to know it, flattened corn acres across Iowa. The soybeans faired a little better, and the worst reports we saw were of plants becoming entangled with each other. All in all, it is reported that the state had 14 million acres damaged. Corn damage was seen in more than eight million acres, and more than five-and-a-half million acres of soybeans were affected.



"Besides the loss to grain, we saw the devastation to grain storage. Parts of grain legs and pieces of grain bins were laying all over the fields and communities of rural Iowa. With harvest only days away, the loss of almost 57 million bushels of storage is going to put a strain on farmers, elevators, and the transportation network which moves grain around the country."

"Rural communities also were severely affected. We have all heard the stories of Cedar Rapids, and our hearts go out to them. However, we cannot forget these small communities of less than 5,000 people. Agriculture is the backbone of their economies, and agriculture was just sucker-punched for the third time by Mother Nature in as many years. The people of Iowa remain resilient and determined to rise from the wind-fallen fields and shattered structures."

Anna Hastert (IARN, Des Moines, Iowa) also added to the derecho commentary: "Where do I even begin? It is hard to describe the event, which turned many lives upside down on August 10. Somehow, we made it out alive, with few impacts. Working from home during a pandemic, without power, may not have been ideal. But I am constantly reminded just how lucky I was. Many whom I have worked and connected with over these past few years were not as lucky.

"Take **Steve Anderson** of Beaman, Iowa, for instance. Anderson was not home when the storm destroyed various aspects of his farming operation. Instead he watched the event play out live from video cameras placed strategically on his farm. The storm ended up claiming a grain bin and machine shed. Other damages included a dented grain bin, flattened commercial and seed corn acres, and a broken grain leg.

"I have enjoyed working with Anderson over the past two years. He is an open book who maintains a positive attitude despite the many challenges he faces in farming. After the storm blew over, I called Anderson. He invited me to come see the damages and said he would entertain an interview. Not once during my visit did he complain about his current situation. So, I asked him, 'Why are you choosing to move forward with a positive attitude?' His answer gave me goosebumps. He chuckled a little and said, 'As I get older, I'm starting to



notice I don't have control of the world. I am relying on God to take care of me more than I used to. It's a lot easier to accept things when you know you aren't in control.' While these past few years have not been ideal for agricultural producers, I am encouraged by producers like Anderson who choose to remain optimistic and praise God during the storm."

Brent Barnett (IARN, Shenandoah, Iowa) also added: "My role in covering the derecho and its aftermath has been unique in the sense that I do not live in the Des Moines area along with the rest of my colleagues. I work remotely and am based in Shenandoah, located in the far southwest corner of the state, about two and a half hours from the capitol. So, my ability to get out and cover the developments of the storm and its impact in-person have been limited since the derecho mostly devastated central and eastern Iowa. I have taken on the role of covering the disaster from the 'government reaction' standpoint. If there is one thing the COVID-19 pandemic has created, it is more opportunities to gather information and interviews through technology, which proved vital for me in this situation. From the Governor of Iowa's online press conferences, to Iowa State University Extension webinars, to monitoring the White House Facebook Live feed, I have been collecting news about the derecho for our listeners through multiple online channels.

"Most of the stories about the storm that I have written have been about crop damage and estimates, breaking down the storm itself from wind speeds to path of travel and to aid at the federal level. A big lesson out of all this madness has been communication, and I feel our team at IARN has excelled in that department. It takes a unit to provide timely, accurate coverage of a natural disaster, and I am proud to say I work with this dedicated group of journalists."



BARNETT IS NEW TO FARM BROADCASTING —

Brent Barnett (Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network, Des Moines, Iowa) is a new farm broadcaster and NAFB member who grew up in the small northwest Missouri town of Burlington Junction. After graduating from West Nodaway High School, Barnett earned his BS in mass media from Northwest Missouri State University in 2015.

Barnett's first full-time job out of college was as a news reporter with KMA Radio (Shenandoah, Iowa) — the area's leading ag radio station and the pillar station for the Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network (IARN). He worked in a variety of positions at KMA over a five-year period, including news, sports, farm reporting, video production, and early morning on-air hosting

duties. He started with IARN in June.

"Since joining the network, I've had nothing but positive experiences being a new farm broadcaster," Barnett said. "My past experiences in media have helped shape the journalist that I am today. I'm so grateful to be a part of such a dedicated, hardworking team at IABN."

In his career, Barnett has gathered and reported agricultural news on a regular basis, covering issues that impact area farmers. In 2018, he was recognized by the Iowa Broadcast News Association as a winner of its In-Depth Series. Barnett enjoys outdoor activities including bow hunting, slow-pitch softball, and golf. He also is an avid Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals fan. Barnett currently resides in Shenandoah with his wife, **Regan**, and one-year-old daughter **Quinn**. The Barnetts are expecting baby number two in November.

**BIEHL-OWENS NAMED KRVN
MARKET MANAGER — Amy Biehl-Owens** has been named market manager for the Lexington-based Nebraska Rural Radio Association (NRRA) stations, KRVN AM, 93.1 The River, and KAMI.

NRRA Chief Executive Officer **Tim Marshall** made the announcement. Biehl-Owens has been with the company for 21 years, serving most recently as director of sales.

"I listened to 'The Best Farm Station in the Nation' as a kid," Biehl-Owens said. "For more than 20 years, I have witnessed first-hand the dedication and professionalism of the people who work hard to serve our mission each day. I am honored and humbled to help lead those efforts as we build on our rich history and explore new ways to serve rural America."



Marshall said he is excited for Biehl-Owens and the company's direction.

"We interviewed several strong candidates," Marshall said. "The committee believes Amy puts us in the best position for future success. With our growth in recent years and our more recent expansion, it makes sense to have a station manager focus solely on KRVN."

Last fall, the NRRA purchased five additional radio stations, bringing the company total to 14. KRVN is the 50,000-watt flagship of the NRRA. Other markets include Scottsbluff, West Point, York, Cozad, and Holdrege.

The Nebraska Rural Radio Association is the only radio group in the nation that is owned by a cooperative of farmers and ranchers. Along with flagship studios in Lexington, other stations include KNEB, KMOR, KOZY, KHYY, and KOLT in Scottsbluff; KTIC in West Point; KAMI in Cozad; KUVR in Holdrege; and KAWL/Max County in York. In addition to the radio stations, NRRA has production studios on the Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln. The NRRA-owned Rural Radio Network reaches six states across the Midwest.



Fugate is shown interviewing a first-year 4-H'er.

year has been filled with trying times for all of us, but your support allowed me to have some sense of normalcy through my internship at WYXY Classic. The experience gained during my time at WYXY Classic was invaluable. My internship was anything but ordinary. Not just because of my later start date due to the pandemic, but also because what Gale and I considered normal was no longer possible.”

With this being her second year as the WYXY Classic intern, Fugate already had settled into a routine that looked something similar to Cunningham going to a county fair on one side of their 32-county listening area and Fugate taking off to cover a county fair on the other side of the station's listening area.

FUGATE REPORTS ON NAFB FOUNDATION-SPONSORED INTERNSHIP — Supported by the NAFB Foundation Internship Grant Program, **Maddie Fugate** worked this summer with NAFB President-Elect **Gale Cunningham** (WYXY, Champaign, Illinois).

Additionally, Fugate is one of the four finalists in the National FFA Star in Agri-Science competition.

“I am very proud of her and personally proud to serve agriculture with her,” Cunningham said.

In a letter to the Foundation Board, Fugate said, “*I want to express my appreciation and gratitude for your support of the next generation. This*

"The faith that Gale put in me and my abilities from the start was unmatched," Fugate said. "Not many people would put a fresh 20-something — with no previous radio experience — on the air and let her run half the programs, but Gale did. That is part of what made my time at WYXY Classic so special. Hollywood has glamorized the interns being the coffee-getters or errand-runners, but none of this is true if you are one of Gale Cunningham's interns. After he taught me how to enter programs, run the board, and other necessary systems, he sent me out of the nest to fly. Over time, he has shown me the ins and outs of broadcasting — not just from the technical side but also in many other aspects from never meeting a stranger to the enthusiasm you carry when interviewing a shy first-year 4-H'er.

"It is obvious that my time as WYXY Classic's intern has had a tremendous impact on me. When looking to the future, I know I want to take what I have learned and continue to communicate agriculture's story. Yet, none of this would have been possible without the NAFB Foundation's support. Thank you for encouraging and believing in the communicators of tomorrow."

RRFN CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY — The Red River Farm Network (RRFN) is celebrating its 25th anniversary. RRFN made its debut on December 4, 1995.



RRFN Founders (left to right) Jerry Fiskum, John Vasichek, and Mike Hergert worked together at 1440 AM KKXL in Grand Forks, North Dakota, before starting their new company. The Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers was an original investor in RRFN. A business plan was written on a napkin at a local diner, and the concept became a reality.

RRFN believes in long-form programs to inform the vital agricultural audience. The on-air schedule includes Country Morning from 6:30 to 7 a.m.; Agriculture Today from 12:30 to 1 p.m., and five-minute market reports throughout the trading day. In total, the RRFN team produces 90 minutes of farm broadcasts each day.

RRFN prioritizes pocketbook issues in its news coverage, a philosophy that began with Mike Hergert. “Reporting Agriculture’s Business” was adopted as a tagline for the company and as a mission for the RRFN team.

Don Wick joined RRFN 17 years ago, taking over ownership of the company in recent years. In addition to Wick, RRFN employees include **Randy Koenen**, **Carah Hart**, and **Megan Overby** on the farm broadcast team. The on-air product is complemented by a weekly electronic newsletter and digital news coverage. RRFN also manages the editorial content for a regional commodity organization, the Northharvest Bean Growers Association.

"Twenty-five years is a milestone, and it is being recognized," said Wick.

The Red River Farm Network has been on the road visiting with its radio affiliates and thanking them for their roles in serving farmers and ranchers. A short history of the network also is being compiled.

In a publication reflecting on the past 25 years, former National Association of Wheat Growers President **Erik Younggren** is quoted: "*Oftentimes, during the long hours in the tractor and combine, the radio becomes a farmer's eyes on the rest of the world. When we would rather the world just stop until harvest is done, it is the radio that brings the world to us. It is the voice on the radio that becomes your best friend.*"

Younggren also offered comments when presenting Hergert with an award from the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers: "*Not a convention, meeting, or gathering went by without an appearance or report from Mike. When we couldn't attend a meeting or learn about the latest research or farm bill action, you attended for us. If we wondered what the crop was like, it didn't matter if it was Nebraska or Mato Grasso, you had a source and would tell the story. You were our eyes and ears. You gave us the information we needed to make our operations better. By Reporting Agriculture's Business, you made us all better farmers.*"

RRFN will recognize its 25th anniversary at the Big Iron Farm Show in mid-September. During a time when most major farm shows and conventions have been canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, Big Iron is the exception. RRFN again will host its series of daily forums; topics include the market outlook, weather, and land values. There also will be a joint discussion with North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner **Doug Goehring** and Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner **Thom Petersen**. EPA Regional Administrator **Gregory Sopkin** and EPA Agriculture Advisor **Carrie Meadows** also will be featured. A panel of ag lenders and a university economist will discuss how agriculture will look in a post-COVID-19 world. RRFN is making special accommodations for social distancing during its forums. For those people who don't feel comfortable traveling to this event, RRFN is making the program available online.

PETERSEN RECEIVES SPORTS OFFICIATING AWARD — Andy Petersen (Big Show Radio, WHO, Des Moines, Iowa) was recognized with an award from the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IAHSAA) for 15 years as an active official. The award was presented April 25, 2020.

"It's been a pleasure to serve the high-school and collegiate coaches and athletes of Iowa and the Midwest," Peterson said. "Officiating high school and college basketball certainly has been a passion of mine for a long time. It is a way to give back and help athletes experience the same joy, enthusiasm, and camaraderie that I was lucky to experience while playing basketball when I was growing up."



"I have had a lot of long drives and late nights; but seeing the pure enjoyment this sport brings to those who play it, makes it all worth it."



"Congratulations, Andy! Thanks for all you do for the young people who take the court! The Board of Control and the staff of the Iowa High School Athletic Association expressed appreciation for Petersen's time, commitment, and cooperation provided for their sports programs," said IAHSAA Executive Director **Tom Keating**.

WE WANT YOUR NEWS — Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact Larry Quinn at larryaquinn@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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