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by Larry A. Quinn

PUBLIC SPEAKING LED LEAL TO FARM BROADCASTING — Born and raised in the agriculture-rich community of Tulare, California, **Danielle Leal** (AgNet West) learned to appreciate the industry early in life. Her commute to grammar school was surrounded by fruit and nut orchards, corn fields, vineyards, and dairies. As a member of the Tulare Western High School FFA, she showed pigs at the Tulare County Fair, was an active part of the soils judging team, and served in a leadership position on her Greenhand officer team. Leal fell in love with public speaking after her FFA teacher and mentor, **Kevin Koelewyn**, encouraged her to compete in the Creed speaking contest. She came in second at her state competition, just missing the mark to



take her to the National FFA Convention in 2007. Koelewyn instilled in her the confidence to use her voice as an advocate for all things she felt passionately for, including her love of Jesus, social issues, and agriculture. Little did she know that would be the beginning of her speaking career.



***Danielle Leal**, husband **Jordan**, and son **Jude** ride a tractor to travel from family alfalfa fields to their dairy farm in Tulare, California*

Leal went on to study broadcast journalism at Fresno State. While there, she was a key part of the Fresno State Focus broadcast team. Her dream was to anchor the local morning show and be in the homes of family and friends each morning with good news. After interning at KMPH Fox 26, she knew broadcasting was a perfect fit. She wasn't quite ready, however, to gather her experience out of state and away from her family. So, she headed back to her roots to write for a hometown newspaper, *The Visalia Times-Delta*, where she covered several beats including business, local events, and agriculture.

Print journalism was a little out of her comfort zone, but knowing it wasn't the end-all be-all (and her first full-time paying job), Leal kept at it. In 2018, she was on assignment covering the World Ag Expo in the backyard of her small town. After making her rounds and most likely washing down the famous Sundale ribeye sandwich smothered in BBQ sauce and caramelized onions with a Diet Dr. Pepper, she found herself networking with other journalists. Among those journalists were **Taylor Hillman** and **Brian German** of AgNet West Radio Network. A few short months later, she was able to call AgNet West family and tie all of her passions of speaking, agriculture, and good news into one career as a farm broadcaster.

Leal now hosts AgNet West Radio Network's Farm City Newsday program. It's an hour-long morning show on 14 stations, spanning 90 percent of the state of California. She primarily covers state-wide and national headlines as well as ag business. For those not tuning in as the sun rises, the morning show also is converted into a podcast, which recently hit a major milestone of 1,000 episodes.

AgNet West is part of AgNet Media, which also operates farm news networks in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. AgNet West Radio Network has been covering news in the Golden State for nine years. Collectively the team covers farm and ranch headlines, specialty crop news, ag technology, statewide events, industry trends, and much more.

Though Leal wasn't born into an agricultural family, she did fall in love with a farmer. Her husband **Jordan's** family runs a diversified farming operation where they grow almonds and pistachios as well as alfalfa, corn, and wheat for their third-generation, 1,300-head Holstein dairy. When she isn't reporting the news, Leal is busy chasing her 2-year-old son, **Jude**. With another baby on the way, that can be quite the calorie burner. Jude loves all the moving parts of their family's ranch and can nearly always be found digging in a pile of dirt with his fleet of miniature John Deere tractors.

Leal is a member of the California Women for Agriculture organization. Also, she recently was nominated to serve on the board of directors for a non-profit organization called Tulare County Family Services. The group helps survivors of human trafficking and sexual assault with the county's only domestic violence shelter, called Karen's House. It also provides legal counseling and support services to prevent further violence.

If every day were a vacation, Leal would spend it tent camping in the Sierra National Forest filled with Jeep rides on old logging trails, creek fishing, and early morning coffee by the campfire. Since it's not, she'll also take a round of golf at the local course, a day deep sea fishing, attending a Los Angeles Dodgers game, or skeet shooting out on the ranch. Either way she loves spending time with family and friends and is extremely eager to get back to normalcy.

She is looking forward to in-person reporting in the field, at expos and conferences, including the 2021 NAFB Convention.



SPORTS INTERVIEW STEERED PFEIFFER TO BROADCAST OPPORTUNITY — From a high school weekend DJ job to vice president of news for Hoosier Ag Today (HAT; Zanesville, Indiana) and Michigan Ag Today, **Eric Pfeiffer’s** path to farm radio was a winding and unexpected one.

It all started in 2003 when Pfeiffer was playing high-school baseball in Logansport, Indiana. The local radio station, WSAL, carried every Logansport Berries baseball game and conducted a “spotlight interview” prior to each game with one of the players. Pfeiffer’s interview was heard by WSAL General Manager **Andy Eubank**, who requested to meet with him about a part-time job opening.

“He must have liked what he heard,” says Pfeiffer. “I went in later that week for the interview, and he offered me a part-time job. It was a lot better than washing dishes or flipping burgers.”

Pfeiffer took the job and started running the board for high-school football and basketball games. One Friday night, the junior varsity basketball game went into double overtime, delaying the start of the varsity game to be aired. Pfeiffer took to the microphone for the very first time to let the audience know about the delayed start and introduced Tom Cochrane’s “Life is a Highway.”

“That was the moment I fell in love with radio,” Pfeiffer reminisced. “I knew right then that being behind a microphone is where I belonged.”

Over the course of the next few years, Pfeiffer stuck around and became the morning show host on WSAL’s sister station, WLHM. He then became the morning show host on WSAL hosting the daily talk show, “Talk of the Town.” Pfeiffer then became news director for WSAL and WLHM at age 20.

Later that year, Pfeiffer left full-time radio to work in retail. While he was a store manager for AT&T, he still did radio part-time as the play-by-play voice of Lewis Cass High School football and basketball on WLHM.

After spending about eight years working retail, Pfeiffer wanted to spend more time with family and transitioned to Purdue University, where he worked in information technology. While at Purdue, Pfeiffer still had the itch for radio and became the play-by-play voice of the new collegiate summer baseball team in Lafayette, the Aviators.

“Still having the opportunity to do radio was a blessing, but I really missed doing it full-time. I knew I would need to find the perfect situation to leave a pretty good job at Purdue if I wanted to get back to doing radio as a career,” Pfeiffer said.

A few years later, HAT was looking to expand, and Pfeiffer heard from his old boss, Andy Eubank, about potentially joining the team and getting back into radio full-time. He jumped at the opportunity to work with Eubank again along with longtime farm broadcaster **Gary Truitt**.



***Eric Pfeiffer** interviews Kyle Albertson, this year's Purdue University's Tyler Trent Courage and Resilience Award winner*

Over the past few years, Pfeiffer has cultivated relationships with agriculture leaders and farmers across the state to help continue HAT's reputation as the most listened to and trusted

farm radio network in Indiana. He currently oversees the news operation for both Hoosier Ag Today and Michigan Ag Today. Pfeiffer, Truitt, Eubank, **Ashley Davenport**, and Meteorologist **Ryan Martin** are heard on nearly 90 stations across Indiana and Michigan, bringing the latest farm news, markets, and weather.

Pfeiffer is blessed with a wonderful family, including his wife, **Aubrey**, and their three children **Andrew**, **Cecilia**, and **Dominic**. He spends his spare time coaching the kids in baseball and basketball. He resides in West Lafayette, Indiana, just minutes away from agriculture news hub Purdue University.



ZIMMERMAN JOINS MIDWEST FARM REPORT — Aaron Zimmerman

recently joined the Midwest Farm Report (Madison, Wisconsin) radio network team as a farm broadcaster. Zimmerman is a native of central Wisconsin, growing up in rural Spencer. He and his fiancé, **Leeah**, now reside in Blanchardville, in southwest Wisconsin.

Currently, the couple owns and operates Zimmerman Livestock Enterprises, based on Aaron's grandparents' farm, where they have a 30-head Simmental and SimAngus cow-calf operation, a growing show

pig operation, and a few goats and poultry. Leeah is also the agriculture education instructor and FFA advisor at Edgerton High School.

Zimmerman has been immersed in agriculture his entire life. Both his parents grew up on farms and both work in agriculture through the FFA organization. At a young age, he was given the opportunity by his grandpa to show a beef heifer; and from there, he was hooked. He was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA, where he was able to grow and participate in anything he could. He had a wide array of involvement in those organizations from speaking competitions to livestock judging and everything in between. He was the 2012 Wisconsin FFA State Star Farmer, a National FFA Agricultural Communications Proficiency winner, and an American Star in Agribusiness National Finalist. He also served as a Wisconsin FFA State Vice President in

2012-2013 right after graduating from high school. After high school, Zimmerman attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, studying animal science.



Throughout Zimmerman's involvement in FFA and agriculture, he was able to interact with many farm broadcasters such as **Pam Jahnke, Bob Bosold, Mike Austin, Bob Meyer**, and more. Never did he imagine that he would be on the opposite side of the mic. But now that he is, Zimmerman has hit the ground running helping to tell the story of Wisconsin agriculture.

"It has been an exciting and intense first few weeks, and I'm excited for all of the adventures to come," Zimmerman said. He enjoys being able to look at every aspect of agriculture, from dairy and livestock, to strawberries and honey, to turf-grass management and ethanol production, and everything in between.

“Agriculture has always been a passion of mine, and it’s a dream come true to advocate for and share this industry that we all love.”

Zimmerman looks forward to connecting with new and familiar agriculturists and ag broadcasters from across the state and the Midwest on this new experience.



STANGLER LEARNS THROUGH NAFB FOUNDATION INTERNSHIP GRANT — Michelle Stangler joined Midwest Farm Report (Madison, Wisconsin) through the 2021 NAFB Internship Grant Program.

“While going into my first year of college at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls during a pandemic was challenging, I was optimistic for in-person opportunities,” Stangler said. “While looking for something to do was difficult in fall 2020 with COVID-19 guidelines, I bumped into the WRFW Radio Club while starting my own radio show, ‘Share the Positivity.’ When planning for summer, I knew it was a great opportunity to join the Midwest Farm Report Team as a farm assistant and intern interviewing and creating content sharing the positive story of agriculture.”

“The first few weeks have been rewarding and challenging at the same time,” she added. “I have learned the importance of communicating and telling it how it is. After writing several English papers in college, I realized that I need to be more direct when writing news articles to make it as entertaining and informational as possible. On the other side, I try to become more conversational through interviews and have tried to balance between the two. Throughout the first few weeks, I have interviewed a wide range of people within the different sectors of agriculture. I interviewed agriculturalists from Community Supported Agriculture, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and University of Wisconsin Extension.

“Another highlight to my internship is knowing the work I am doing is making a difference outside of the agricultural community. I can connect it to farmers and citizens who don’t know as much about agriculture and want to learn more through listening to our network stations. Not only do I appreciate who I am sharing the message with, but the supportive team that helps me when needed at the office. I appreciate how I can be trusted to generate content by reaching out to people personally and with the flexibility of creating unique stories. This internship has made me realize this is a setting that I want to continue to be a part of.”



FAMILY RACEHORSE FARM STARTED SCHWAB'S AG EXPERIENCE — **Andy Schwab** (Northern Ag Network, Billings, Montana) grew up in Powell, Wyoming, on a small farm that produced racehorses. He learned to ride horses, hunt, fish, and take pack trips to the backcountry at a very young age and has yet to lose the passion. Through his high school years at Powell, Schwab competed in sports and FFA, and he started his own farrow-to-finish hog business. He would add many hats to wear after graduation as he jumped right into the work force, oftentimes holding two to three jobs at once.

For nearly 10 years, his main vocation was working in the retail world for a local co-op and farm and ranch store.

During that time, he would also add job experiences from the Wyoming Game and Fish as a technician and the U.S. Forest Service as a backcountry trail crew foreman, spending three seasons with each department. He also became a bartender for a local steakhouse in Cody, Wyoming, for three summers to prevent any boredom from setting in. But probably his favorite hat he put on was that from an auction business he started on his own and continues to operate after self-teaching himself how to be an auctioneer.

“It’s the one job that has taught me how to use my voice properly and opened a lot of new doors, including the door to Northern Ag Network and sports broadcasting,” Schwab said.

In May 2019, Schwab joined the Northern Ag Network as an ag broadcaster. One of his first interviews on-air was with the governor of Wyoming, **Mark Gordon**, while attending a mid-year conference held by Wyoming Stock Growers Association.





Pictured from left: Ronnie Anderson, Jackie Loewer, John Gay, and Don Molino, Voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network.

NEW MEMBERS ADDED TO LOUISIANA AGRICULTURE HALL OF DISTINCTION — The Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Distinction recently inducted its newest members, bringing the number of agriculture industry leaders residing in the hall to 25.

Longtime Louisiana Farm Bureau President **Ronnie Anderson**, former USA Rice Federation Chairman **Jackie Loewer**, and fifth-generation sugarcane farmer **John Gay** were inducted during socially distanced ceremonies in Baton Rouge.

Don Molino, NAFB Broadcast Council member, said the Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Distinction is a joint effort of the Louisiana Radio Network, Louisiana State University AgCenter, Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

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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