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AGRICULTURE: FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT — For the Hancocks, involvement in the agricultural industry is a family tradition. **Tony Hancock**, Missouri Department of Agriculture market news manager, and his daughter, Madison, have grown their bond over a passion for agriculture and FFA.

“I cannot think of a single day that agriculture was not a part of my life,” Tony Hancock said.

Growing up, Tony was deeply rooted in his family farm in Houston, Missouri, where they produced beef cattle and hay. Tony always knew that he wanted to remain a part of the diverse agricultural industry in Missouri but was not exactly sure in what niche he wanted to build a career.



After becoming an FFA state officer, Tony started college at the University of Missouri.

“I jumped from pre-vet to agricultural education then to agricultural business and agricultural sales,” Tony said.

Through connections he made through Missouri FFA and the University of Missouri, Tony landed a job at the Missouri Department of Agriculture in the fall of 2001.



Now, Tony gets to witness firsthand the love his daughter has for agriculture, too. Although Madison did not grow up on a farm, she was exposed to agriculture at a young age through her dad. Madison loves to come to the office with her dad during the summer and even helps with cattle on their family farm.

Madison and her dad made an agreement in high school, she had to take one agriculture class; and if she did not like it, she “never had to do it again.” After she took her first agriculture class, Madison was “hooked.” In the following high school years, she began going to work with her dad and learning more about the industry, competing in speaking contests, and even became the president of the New Bloomfield FFA chapter.

“Because of my dad’s job, he is able to make a difference in our community and is always willing to help out in our small town of New Bloomfield,” said Madison Hancock. “I know that I want to go to college and study agriculture so I continue to learn more.”

WILL RADIO’S ROOTS RUN DEEP — WILL Radio has been one of a kind since 1922 as one of the country’s first radio stations on the air.



A licensee of the University of Illinois, WILL is located on campus, although the university has no direct involvement. The station includes WILL Radio, Television and WILL Online.

The first broadcast WILL produced included an extension program called “Turning Cream into Gold.” It was part of the dairy cattle extension outreach program in 1922. In 1936, WILL Radio began broadcasting the market numbers from the Chicago Board of Trade; it was one of the very first stations to broadcast market numbers.

“There’s a lot of history with [WILL] and because it’s licensed with the University of Illinois and it’s located on campus, it has always been a leader within radio and technology,” **Todd Gleason**, the first WILL farm reporter and a current WILL program host, explained.

WILL Radio has a long history of student workers, many of which found a passion for broadcasting.

“In the fall of 1985, I came onto WILL as a student employee and went on the air for the first time in November,” Gleason noted.

While Gleason was a student employee, agricultural programming was being developed. That programming provided the building blocks for current agricultural services.

“The programming was formulated in such a way that it was supposed to not interfere with commercial farm broadcasters. It was a complementary service that wanted to cover markets, weather and national policy in a way that gave greater context and most local broadcasters would not be doing,” Gleason said.

Being on the air at least once a year since 1985, Gleason was hired as the first farm market reporter just four years later in 1989.

Gleason also wrote the WILL mission statement that is still in use today: “To inform and engage people in Illinois through high-quality journalism.”

“The content was really designed to complement what was happening on local stations and to use resources on campus,” Gleason added.

“Producers are not near as comfortable in marketing their crops,” Gleason said. “It is a difficult prospect and producers are always on the hunt for news and information, whether it’s happening on the markets, weather, or every other thing that happens.”



Gleason now works for the Illinois Extension Service. He currently hosts a daily program called “The Closing Market Report” and a weekly program called “Commodity Week” which both air on WILL Radio.

BROWNFIELD CELEBRATES NEW BLOOMS OF SPRING — It is said April showers bring May flowers. This year, for Brownfield Ag News, it was all about baby showers instead of April showers. The network welcomed three new additions to its extended family.



Brownfield reporter and anchor **Rhiannon Branch** shared she and two colleagues all had children within 16 days of each other during the month of May. Branch added she and the other mothers, **Nicole Heslip**, and **Amie Simpson**, are part of a group of people at Brownfield who “share the same passion and drive” and who “make work fun!”

“I found out I was pregnant at the Farm Progress Show last fall, and soon found out that Nicole and Amie were also pregnant,” Branch said. Branch recalled in the summer of 2021, Brownfield staffers were all at a team retreat together, which was about nine months before the births of their children.

“Now, they all joke that there ‘must’ve been something in the water’ that week,” Branch said.

Branch and her husband, Ian Stroud, welcomed their daughter, Kimber Grace Stroud, at 1:18 p.m., May 12, 2022. She weighed 7 pounds, 1 ounce, and measured 21 inches long.

Nicole Heslip and her husband, Kyle, greeted Rory Thomas Heslip just before 9 a.m., May 25, 2022. He also weighed 7 pounds, 1 ounce, and measured 18-5/8 inches long.

Amie Simpson and her husband, Erick, were blessed with Olivia Michele Simpson at 10:39 a.m., May 28, 2022. She weighed 7 pounds, 9 ounces, and measured 19.5 inches long.



Branch said she knows having three reporters on maternity leave at the same time was not easy on the rest of the team.

“I want to thank our colleagues for embracing the challenge and covering for us so we could spend quality time with our families. I know our listeners also appreciate the extra work they put in to make sure our news coverage remained top-notch,” Branch said.



All three mothers are National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB) Broadcast Council members and attend the NAFB Convention every year.

“Kimber, Rory, and Olivia are all more than two months old now and doing well,” Branch added. “I can’t speak for the other two yet, but I know Kimber has a set of lungs on her, so we very well could be raising the next generation of farm broadcasters! Stay tuned.”

Brownfield’s award-winning team consists of a dozen full-time farm broadcasters with agricultural programming in more than 560 affiliate radio stations across the Midwest and Delta.

ADAMS PURCHASES RURAL STRONG MEDIA — Brent Adams, owner and president of Rural Strong Media and host of the “Tractors and Troubadours” radio show and podcast, closed the purchase of the startup media company from Cape Girardeau, Missouri-based Sotera LLC on July 31, 2022.

Adams said the mission of Rural Strong Media is to provide relevant programming to industry stakeholders while simultaneously telling the story of agriculture to the rest of the community.



“With midterm elections, a presidential election cycle, a new farm bill, and increasing cost, weather, and trade pressures poised to impact American agriculture, there couldn’t be a more important time to have a seat at the table,” said Adams.

“It’s a responsibility we take seriously, and we hope we can be a source for agriculture industry stakeholders and consumers alike when they make important decisions and judgments about the state of the industry and the hard-working men and women who keep it going. This company was created with them in mind,” Adams added.

“There is a lot on the drawing board” regarding the growth and new projects, according to Adams. Rural Strong Media’s flagship projects include Adams’ “Tractors and Troubadours” weekly radio show and podcast, which focuses on agriculture industry newsmakers, hot-button ag industry issues, educational features, and traditional country music.

“We are trying to expand syndication for ‘Tractors and Troubadours’ to be broadcast over as many stations across the country as we can,” Adams stated. “Another show I want to continue to grow is ‘AgWomen Strong.’”

“AgWomen Strong” allows Rural Strong Media to highlight women doing extraordinary things in agriculture. Including additional commodity and agronomy programming is another goal for the network.

Rural Strong Media also is looking to expand beyond podcasts and radio, and the company wants to transition into video projects.

“There has been much discussion over video projects and live-streaming recently. The mission behind the live streaming is to develop engagement amongst GenZ and Millennials,” Adams said. “It is one thing to create content and throw it out there, hoping people will engage with it. Instead, we want to encourage a dialogue.”

Rural Strong Media also has formed a content development and marketing partnership with Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based Dreamlux Media, which is currently developing agriculture-focused content for the Discovery Channel, RFD-TV, and the Sinclair Broadcast Group.

Rural Strong Media’s other projects include the “Rural Strong Live” agriculture and country music live streams, video projects, and Rural Strong Radio, a 24/7 streaming radio station playing agriculture and traditional country music programming. Rural Strong Radio also promotes other shows, such as Robby Lynn’s “Sunday’s Kind of Country,” “The Bottomline Report with Mark Oppold,” “Ag Law and Tax Report with Roger McEowen,” “Market Talk with Jesse Allen,” and “Bushels and Cents with Ray Bohacz.”



KRVN: SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES SINCE DAY ONE — From the dawn of its creation in 1948 to today, KRVN Radio has been a beacon of agricultural trust for Nebraska residents.



“You have to have a trusted voice you can turn to,” said **Tim Marshall**, CEO of Nebraska Rural Radio Association (NRRA). “We watch out for the community; they know who they can turn to.”

KRVN started out as an information source for farmers, producers, and community members covering extreme weather conditions in the late 1940s. The station, a part of the NRRA, consisted of news, weather, farm, and market information.

Marshall explained KRVN maintains success due to its business model, allowing people and groups to purchase memberships without receiving dividends in return. Memberships started out at just \$10 to raise money for radio equipment.

“Well, we’ve grown,” Marshall chuckled.

NRRA now has 14 radio stations in five different markets, along with a long list of partnerships from agriculture commodity groups, the University of Nebraska, and RFD-TV, to name a few. KRVN also offers podcasts and agriculture news video segments for an ABC affiliate.

“We did what any good producer would do: we diversified,” Marshall noted.



Diversification never diluted the simple, yet powerful, mission of KRVN, which is to serve the men and women in agriculture and rural Nebraska. Along with providing relevant and timely news, station representatives completed 78 parades and other community events last year while raffling off a vehicle and donating thousands of dollars.

“We’re able to give back on-air and financially to our neighbors and friends who listen to help them in tough times,” Marshall said. “We have a promo saying KRVN is the best farm station in the nation, and it’s true — period.”

KRVN also has an eye to the future, and Marshall likes to gauge success by determining where the station is behind, ahead or riding the edge. With income reinvesting into the company, he said streaming numbers continue to grow as employees are treated well and new platforms are being utilized.

“I’m excited where we’re at and super excited for where we’re going,” Marshall said. “We’re going to be here for another 70-plus years, trust me.”

WE WANT YOUR NEWS —Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact Erin Nash at erin@nafb.com or phone 816/431-4032, x 107. *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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