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by Larry A. Quinn

WESTERN WATER WOES ARE SEVERE AND COSTLY...reports **Patrick Cavanaugh** (California Ag Today Radio Network, Clovis, CA). "Throughout the vast farming areas of California's Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, intense concern and anxiety are growing over the lack of water for the critical irrigation of permanent crops such as almonds, walnuts, pistachios, tree fruit and citrus,"



he said. Patrick speaks with farmers every day about what looks like a slow-moving crisis on the farm. California is in its fourth year of drought with the last two years being extremely tough on growers in many areas of California that depend on promised Federal surface water deliveries to their farms. Instead of flowing southward to help farms and cities, excess water is being diverted from the Sacramento Delta area to the Pacific Ocean to protect the Delta Smelt, a three-inch fish listed by the Endangered Species Act. *(At left, sitting idle is an irrigation turnout in Westlands Water District, in western Fresno County, severely impacted by zero water deliveries.)* "Low rain and snowfall last year triggered an unprecedented zero water allocation for nearly one-third of the productive farmland in the San Joaquin Valley, forcing growers to rely solely on groundwater pumping. And this year, on February 27, the Bureau of Reclamation repeated its tragic announcement—another zero surface water year," he said. "In 2014, farmers were forced to fallow nearly one-half million acres of productive farmland on which they have grown tomatoes, garlic, melons, lettuce, and other nutritious crops." Also last year, he said, "About \$2.2 billion in crop revenue was lost, and more than 17,000 farmworkers lost their jobs. Food lines in troubled communities grow longer by the week. Yes, food lines," Cavanaugh emphasized, "provide food for the dedicated farmworkers who have worked hard to harvest our food." He noted that this calendar year is expected to be even worse.

Recently, Patrick spoke to **David Jackson** (*shown at right*), who owns Family Tree Farms in Reedley, CA, southeast of Fresno. The operation farms a wide variety of tree fruit and blueberries. Jackson said, “Last year, in terms of quality, fruit and profitability, was among our best years. However, this year, there is no water in the system. There is no snowpack, no water in the reservoirs, and we have already depleted a lot of underground water. I just lost a million-dollar well in western Fresno County,” Jackson added. “Surface water, if it’s available, costs \$2,000 an acre-foot. It takes four-acre-feet to produce a crop,” he said. “I’m three months out for a well driller to get to my farm to drill another well. The big question is: Can we save our trees or just let them go because it’s just not worth it?” Patrick concludes, “All farmers in Federal water districts will be making tough decisions this year. Should they push out part of their permanent crops and triage what water they muster-up to go to the higher production trees? The water year, which started in October 2014, certainly looked like the end of the drought. More than average rain and snow fell in November and December; however, January 2015 was the driest on record,” he explained. “More rain and snow came in February, but then



a warm storm from the south melted much of the snow in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, which was so dry, the ground soaked it up instead of allowing the water to flow into streams and rivers. This alone is making 2015 the worst runoff year in California’s history. And the last hope for a miracle March of rain or snow yielded nothing,” he said.

(Signs like this, at left, are on display throughout the productive San Joaquin Valley.)

FROM COMMODITY ANALYST TO FARM BROADCASTER...

Katie Miller joined American Ag Network (Fargo, ND) in May 2013 as farm broadcaster working with **Rusty Halvorson**. “I’ve worked in commodities markets and brokerage for several years. In fact, I still own a market advisory service. Through that, I’d done several radio interviews and market commentaries, especially for **Terry Loomis** (KQLX, Fargo, ND).” In fact, when she took her job with American Ag Network, she was working in the same building as Terry’s studio. “I really enjoyed doing the commentary work, so soon Terry asked if I’d fill in for him in the mornings when he went on vacation or off to a trade show. Eventually Terry told me that American Ag Network was looking for a farm broadcaster.” Katie was very active in both 4-H



and FFA showing and raising beef cattle in southern Minnesota. She served in county-level 4-H offices and as president of her FFA chapter. She participated extensively on meat and livestock judging teams as well as competing in the “livestock knowledge bowl” in 4-H. Also, she milked cows for about six years for her farmer neighbors. Katie graduated from North Dakota State University with a degree in agricultural economics with an emphasis on farm management and animal science.

What is the role of the farm broadcaster? “I think the farm broadcaster is in a very unique position. The job offers an opportunity to keep both producers and agribusinesses in the loop as far as political and technological developments that can aid (or hinder) their businesses. Farmers are busy people with a lot of jobs to do, and they don’t have time to sit down and keep track of all that’s going on out there. That’s a responsibility that we have as farm broadcasters.

“On the flip side, it also offers the opportunity to help educate the general population about how modern agriculture truly operates. As populations have become more and more urban in nature and people become less and less attached, it’s easy for them to lose touch with how important agriculture really is and the challenges that producers face to provide them with affordable, abundant food. Too often in agriculture, I think, we preach to the choir on things like animal welfare, GMO’s, and food safety. Farm broadcasters have the opportunity to reach a whole different audience that really needs to hear the message on agriculture.”

How do you "air on the side of agriculture?" “Personally, I try to find stories that I know will challenge the way people look at things or stories that will spark conversations. There’s a lot of news, and a lot of perspectives out there, and I think it’s important that we present all sides of the story, even if it’s not something that we agree with or necessarily want to hear.” She concludes, “Keeping yourself in the box is only closer to the hole you stick your head in.”



GROWING INTO AG DIRECTOR ROLE...Cody Glaser (KKOW, Pittsburg, KS) has been in radio for over six years and in that time, he’s done “a little bit of everything around the station jumping in and helping out wherever needed.” He explained, “I’ve been our production manager, traffic assistant, on-air personality, and now Ag Director.” In describing himself, he said, “I have a general love for broadcasting regardless of what the subject line may be...agriculture, news, music, or weather. I enjoy gathering and delivering the information that our listeners depend on.” He feels that nothing is more exciting than a listener calling to say, “Letting us know about that storm update really helped out,” or “Our farm depends on your market numbers every day.

“Personally, as far as agriculture goes, I always say you can’t live in southeast Kansas your entire life without picking up a little bit about farming. My family owned a cattle farm when I was growing up, but since then I haven’t really had a whole lot of agriculture experience. With that

being said, in the past month I've had the opportunity to learn so much. It's amazing how being part of the agriculture community is a lot like being in a big family, which has been the best part about this job so far. I really don't consider myself as being a broadcaster...just someone who gets up every morning and has a conversation with friends telling them what I've learned, who I've talked to, what the market numbers look like for the day, and events coming up that could be a help around the farm."

LINDER TRIO TOGETHER FOR 16 YEARS...The Linder Farm Network began in 1976 with four Linder family-owned radio stations in Minnesota. Network Farm Director **Lynn Ketelsen** came in from KMA (Shenandoah, IA) radio to establish the initial farm programming and set up the network. **Linda Brekke** has been with the network for 16 years, and **Jeff Stewart** has been there for 18 years. "We are one of the few farm networks in the country to feature two 30-minute farm programs to run on our affiliates, which gives us the opportunity to broadcast on-location from major ag events live- on-the-air, and the time to devote to in-depth interviews and analysis." The Linder Farm Network currently is on 30 radio stations across Minnesota, and is the top-rated radio network in Minnesota. *(At right, Lynn interviews Minnesota Representative Collin Peterson.)* Lynn has earned national agricultural communicator awards from National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association, National Agricultural Marketing Association, and Mid-America Dairymen. Also, he was named Farm Broadcaster of the Year in 2005 by NAFB. He served as NAFB National President in 1990, and he had a day commemorated in his name by the Governor of Minnesota. In addition to his duties with the Linder Farm Network, Lynn is a regular contributor to *This Week in Agribusiness* with **Orion Samuelson** and **Max Armstrong**, and the *RFD Evening News* with **Mark Oppold**. Also, he is Farm Director for KEYC-TV (Mankato, MN).



Growing up on a south central Minnesota farm, **Linda Brekke** worked at stations in Albert Lea and Redwood Falls, MN, before joining Linder Network. *(At right, Linda speaks at Minnesota Ag Expo.)* Coming out of winter, she reports that Minnesota State Department of Natural Resources Climatologist **Pete Boulay** says most of Minnesota remains in the moderate drought category, except for southeast Minnesota. This is due to a long-term moisture deficit that goes back to October. Areas in south central and southeastern



Minnesota received from 5 to 10 inches of snow March 22-23, which will help replenish the soil before spring planting, she said. Linda also reports that Minnesota now has three confirmed cases of H5N2 avian influenza. USDA confirmed detection of the disease on a turkey farm in Lac Qui Parle County and on a turkey farm in Stearns County. Minnesota Turkey Growers Association Executive Director **Steve Olson** spoke with Linder Farm Network about the influenza and said the Minnesota Board of Animal Health is conducting an investigation on each case, and there is no linkage in equipment going back and forth between the three case farms or business ownership. There are a lot of miles between each farm, which leads them to believe the cause is from migration of wild birds up the Mississippi Flyway. He stressed this is not a food safety concern. The first case was in early March in Pope County. Also this week, the network is featuring comments from "Machinery Pete," **Greg Peterson**. He notes interesting changes in used farm equipment sales. He is starting to see the large, newer-used equipment experience more pressure, and the nice-condition smaller or older equipment is holding strong.

Jeff Stewart has been in farm broadcasting for 32 years, spending time in New York and South Dakota before joining Linder Farm Network. Jeff is regional marketing specialist for the network, but he continues to do interviews from meetings and events around the country. *(At right, Jeff interviews **Brandon Schafer**, former president of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association.)*



AGVIEW.NET MARKS FIRST YEAR...On February 1, 2014, **Ken Rahjes** launched agview.net as a way to have flexibility "to be there for his parents as they were going through some medical challenges," but also to "take a leap" and focus on delivering agricultural and rural information to the "next" generation of production agriculture and those who have a real interest in rural issues. In October 2014, Ken launched *AgView Radio* and currently has an expanding network of affiliates in Nebraska and Kansas, which carry daily programming that consists of three 2-minute ag business updates and three 2-minute market updates. The updates "tell them what is going on, rather than quotes," with the idea the affiliate station has an opportunity to give quotes relevant to their area. **Ryan Martin** from Allendale delivers the market reports. "One month ago, we started a nightly 90-second version of *AgView* on KOTA-TV (Rapid City, SD) Evening News. It airs during both newscasts, and it gives us an opportunity to help tell the story



to a very broad audience." He adds, "On top of that, we are working with companies to help them broaden their reach with a new generation of consumers." Ken still does emcee work and speaks about rural America and why it is important to be engaged every day. *(At left, **Ken Rahjes** interviews **Greg Ibach**, Nebraska Director of Agriculture.)*

“We are always looking for an opportunity to help with the next generation of advocates for agriculture so we have just launched the ‘Ask an Aggie’ program for seniors in high school who will be studying agriculture after graduation.” Ken explains, “The idea is to go to the community in which they live and surface questions people have about food or agriculture production and get it on video using the student's smart phone. We will use social media to see which ones connect with people, and the winner will receive \$500 from AgView. The idea came from our college intern who has done the work on the project. Ken concludes, “So much of the time, we talk and talk about making the connection with consumers in bigger cities, when in fact there is just as much misinformation in our small farming communities. Our goal is twofold: One, to raise awareness of how we need to connect to our neighbors, and second, how anyone can be an advocate for agriculture.”

BROWNFIELD AG NEWS FOR AMERICA ADDS TWO ANCHOR/REPORTERS...On March 27, **Cyndi Young**, Ag Operations Director for Brownfield, announced the additions of farm broadcasters **Nicole Heslip** and **Mark Dorenkamp** beginning this week to the Brownfield agriculture network team. Nicole is the Anchor/Reporter of Michigan Brownfield, the former Michigan Farm Radio Network. Nicole lives in Michigan and is providing on-the-ground coverage of Michigan agriculture. Mark is Anchor/Reporter of Minnesota Brownfield, which replaces former Minnesota Farm Network programming this week. Both will be backed by an award-winning team of 10 agricultural journalists, all Broadcast Council members of NAFB, along with an ag meteorologist, Washington, DC policy analyst and two market analysts.



NICOLE HESLIP...“We are excited to have Nicole heading up Brownfield’s coverage of Michigan agriculture,” Cyndi said. “She recognizes and embraces the diversity of agriculture in the state. Her passion and knowledge of the industry is inspiring.” Rooted in agriculture, Nicole grew up on her family’s dairy farm in southwest Michigan. She is a graduate of Michigan State University, where she majored in Agriculture and Natural Resources Communications, specializing in Agri-Business Management and Public Relations. Nicole is a past FFA State Officer, former Michigan Dairy Ambassador and National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow officer. Nicole was honored as the 2014 NAFB Horizon Award Winner. She sits on the Michigan Agriculture and Environmental Assurance (MAEAP) Communications Workgroup and blogs for the Michigan Ag Council.



Brownfield has partnerships with 23 affiliate radio stations in Michigan, and 36 affiliate radio stations in Minnesota. The network includes a grand total of more than 380 affiliate radio stations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin, Nebraska, South Dakota and Colorado. In addition to giving more listeners the opportunity to hear Brownfield programs, this increase in coverage area provides even greater marketing opportunities for advertising partners. In addition to the radio network, Brownfield includes BrownfieldAgNews.com,

the free daily e-mail newsletter *Agriculture Today*, and the Brownfield Mobile application.

MARK DORENKAMP...“It is a great pleasure to introduce veteran agricultural communicator **Mark Dorenkamp** as the Anchor/Reporter for Minnesota Brownfield,” Cyndi said. “His uncompromising level of integrity, passion for the agriculture industry and understanding of the people who are the backbone of the industry make him a true asset to the Brownfield team.” Mark grew up in a small town in north central Iowa. The family bin site on the south edge of Rowan is where he spent countless hours tagging along with his Dad, sitting in the cab of their John Deere 4840 pretending to haul a load of corn or soybeans to the scale before unloading. In 2006, Mark became Farm Director at a station in north Iowa, and the love affair he had with farming as a boy started all over again. As a farm broadcaster Mark won Iowa Broadcast News Association awards and in 2012 earned second place in the NAFB Market-cast category. Mark has been honored by Iowa State University Extension for his support of their programs, served on area agribusiness committees and recently served on the Iowa FFA Foundation Board of Directors. Mark and his wife, **Melissa**, and two sons, **Gavin** and **Hudson**, will reside in southern Minnesota.

HALL OF FAME AWARD PRESENTED TO TOM BRAND...Nearly 600 members of the St. Joseph, MO, business community attended the 11th Annual Farm City Breakfast March 20, where **Tom Brand**, NAFB’s Executive Director and former longtime farm broadcaster at KFEQ (St. Joseph, MO) was named the 2015 Hall of Fame Award winner. **Mitch Holthus**, voice of the *Kansas City Chiefs*, was the guest speaker. Holthus was raised on a Kansas farm and traveled to



St. Joseph regularly as a child. He encouraged the attendees to look “beyond the obvious” to have a winning impact in their lives. He encouraged attendees to impact their environment in a winning fashion by planting a seed of hope, fertilizing with relentless energy and unwavering faith and harvesting with a humble and thankful spirit. The Farm-City Breakfast was held in honor of National Ag Day by the Chamber’s Agribusiness Committee. (Above, **Fred Hannah** the 2014 inductee presents Tom’s award.)

NAFB LOSES ITS MOST SENIOR MEMBER...**Russell Pierson** (WKY, Oklahoma City, OK) died March 31, 2015. He was 103. He became farm director at WKY in 1959 and retired in 1980. He was elected NAFB President in 1973 after being named NAFB Farm Broadcaster of the Year in 1972. He was inducted into the NAFB Hall of Fame in 1992.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU...We'd like to hear your stories and receive your photos to share your experiences when *Airing on the Side of Agriculture*. Contact me at larryaguinn@verizon.net or call me at 703-819-6532.

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