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by Larry A. Quinn



Brownfield Reporter Covers Both Ag and Consumer News. Julie Harker (Brownfield Ag News, Jefferson City, MO) has been covering agriculture and consumer news for Brownfield since 2007. This has included events in her home state of Missouri and beyond – from Washington, DC, to Germany. Also, she produces a daily, 90-second consumer education program, *Healthy Living*, aimed at informing consumers about food and nutrition, striving to dispel commonly held misconceptions about them. Some of her most meaningful interviews, she says, are the stories of heartache and resilience directly from farmers and ranchers going through tremendous challenges. She has worked in the news division of Brownfield’s parent company, Learfield Communications, for 25 years and is a voice listeners rely on. She was raised mostly in rural Missouri, and her father was editor of *The Ozark Mountaineer* magazine. His column “Adventures in the Ozarks” led Julie as a youngster to many cultural festivals, hikes and backroads. She majored in electronic media and communications at Southwest Missouri State University. Prior to joining Learfield Communications as a reporter for the MissouriNet, she worked for several local radio stations in Arkansas and Missouri. She said one of the most memorable series she produced for Brownfield was about returning veterans and veterans going into farming for the first time. She featured several veterans who were either developing organic or commercial operations. She realizes that much of her work is “airing on the side of agriculture,” but as a journalist, she works to cover all sides of the story. Her mentors in farm broadcasting are **Cyndi Young** and **Tom Steever** and the Brownfield Ag News team. Cyndi hired her eight years ago to focus on agriculture and consumer information, and

Tom is one of the extensive team of Brownfield agricultural reporters with whom she enjoys sharing her farm broadcasting profession. Moving into farm broadcasting was both a career-enhancing and life-enhancing experience for her. Julie is the recipient of the National Farmers Union's **Milt Hakel** Award for Excellence in Ag Journalism and several awards for ag news and market reporting from NAFB. Beyond farm broadcasting, she aspires to another goal. "One of my goals in life is to become a Master Gardener. I have a small backyard vegetable garden and I'm chairman of our church's community garden, which helps feed our neighbors." **(Julie Harker interviews Senator Brian Munzlinger, Chairman of the Missouri Senate Agriculture Committee.)**



STUDENT JOB LED TO FARM BROADCASTING CAREER...While a Texas A&M University student, **Don Atkinson** (*First Oklahoma Ag, Voice of Southwest Agriculture (VSA) and Yancey Ag Network*, Oklahoma City, OK) had nearly 10 years of broadcasting experience under his belt when the on-campus office of the Extension Service hired him. Previously, he had worked as a disc jockey, news writer, copy writer and producer. Working in the Texas A&M radio-television unit, Don helped write and produce a weekly agricultural radio show for two years. (A few years before Don's tenure at Texas A&M in the late '80s, this editor was the radio-TV specialist who created that weekly radio service in the early '70s.) In 1992, **Roddy Peeples** (Emeritus Member, Dallas, TX) hired Don for a job at the VSA Radio Network in San Angelo, TX. Starting as the market director, Don worked his way up to hosting the *Midday Farm and Ranch Report* in 1995. **(Don Atkinson interviews Kansas Senator Pat Roberts.)** In 2001, he was promoted to network anchor and moved from San Angelo to Oklahoma City. A voting member of NAFB since 1992, Don served as South Region Vice-President from 2000-2002. As a farm broadcaster, Don has a strong background. While not raised on a farm, he grew up around agriculture. His grandfather and two uncles were Texas cotton and peanut farmers, another grandfather started a butcher shop and turned it into the biggest meat processing and distribution company in Bryan, TX. Trained as a journalist and mentored by **Roddy Peeples** and **Mike Dain** (*First Oklahoma Ag, Oklahoma City, OK*), Don was named 2003 South Region Farm Broadcaster of the Year. Don believes that coming into farm broadcasting as an "outsider" has helped him ask better questions about agriculture because he didn't already know the answers. Don is among those broadcasters who started editing radio stories on ¼-inch audio tape with a

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razor blade and white grease pencil. About the weather in Oklahoma, Don reports that April and May rains have made the soil so saturated that current rains are running off and causing flooding. Besides being one of the wettest Aprils since 1895, the state's temperatures are warmer than normal, too.



NEW FARM BROADCASTER AT WGFA...When her father established the radio station in 1961, General Manager **Stacey Smith** said the call letters were chosen as an abbreviation for World's Greatest Farming Area (WGFA). "We have always strived to bring quality ag news and information to our listeners," she said. "**Ken Root** joined our team in 2010, replacing **Colleen Callahan** who went on to head USDA's Rural Development in Illinois. As Ken planned his retirement in April 2015, WGFA knew that having an NAFB farm broadcaster is important to the local ag communities. With Ken's help, we are proud to introduce **John Gooding** as WGFA's new NAFB Farm

Broadcaster, a familiar name to many residents of the Illiana area." John Gooding is a lifelong resident of Iroquois County. He graduated from Sheldon High School and the University of Illinois with a B.S. in agriculture. He was in the banking business for many years and graduated from the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin. John and his family continue to operate their "centennial" grain and livestock farm. John now resides in Watseka, IL, with his wife, **Tina**, and is the father of four and grandfather of two. About John, Stacey said, "John is passionate about agriculture and is excited to share his passion with WGFA listeners. He will offer a blend of national, regional and local information with stories from many people you know. With his quick wit and humor, John is sure to entertain listeners as well as inform them on various topics related to agriculture." John looks forward to meeting his NAFB colleagues this fall in Kansas City.

FLOODING THREATENS RADIO TRANSMITTER...at KSIR (Fort Morgan, CO). **Lorrie Boyer**, Farm Director and Morning Show Host, said water came to within inches of their station's transmitter. "We were shutting it (transmitter) off at night as a safety precaution, but did not have to turn it off during the day." She said they contracted out with an FM frequency to have KSIR simulcast on it in case they have to turn it off. She added, "We got over 15 inches of rain in the month of May, which is what we average in a summer. We continue to



have scattered showers and expect more to come. The South Platte, which is the river next to the transmitter, is running extremely high and is expected to run high for the next two weeks, keeping us on our toes." Localized flooding continues with isolated flood warnings on the east and west end of Morgan County. Basements have flooded that have never flooded before. Many county roads have been damaged and a portion of State Highway 71 remains closed as the river has completely taken out the highway pavement. Corn planting is behind. According to the Colorado Ag Statistics Service, state corn planting is 66 percent complete, compared with 92% this time last year and 90% on average for this time of the year. In good news, Lorrie received an "Honorary Brush (CO) FFA Chapter" award for helping promote the FFA and giving them real-life radio experiences by letting them co-host her *Morning Show* on a monthly basis. She serves as NAFB's South Region Vice President.

HEAVY RAINFALL CREATES CHALLENGES FOR TEXAS AGRICULTURE... Tom Nicolette (Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network, Waco, TX) reports that in the first 27 days of May, it rained on 21 of them in certain regions



of Texas. Wet conditions have washed out livestock fences, and cattle are losing weight from energy expended in trudging through muddy pastures or pens. Some wheat farmers will not be able to

harvest a crop. Cotton planting is behind schedule in south Texas and the Texas Panhandle. In the Coastal Bend area, grain sorghum planting is behind schedule. Tom said, "Wet weather is making it tough for Texas farmers and ranchers in both crop and livestock operations. Corn fields are inundated and many corn plants are literally drowning. In the Winter Garden region and the Rio Grande Valley, onions are rotting in the fields due to the very wet conditions." The *Houston Chronicle* reports that Texas has never had a wetter month than this one. According to State Climatologist **John Nielsen-Gammon**, Texas has so far received an average of 7.54 inches of rain in May, which smashes the previous record of 6.66 inches, set in June 2004. Texas rain records go back 120 years, and it comes just four years after 2011, the worst one-year drought experienced by the state. Tom did not grow up in agriculture, but he came from Chicago, IL, to Waco, TX, where he majored in communications at Baylor University and earned a degree in editorial journalism and radio, television and film. While attending Baylor, he worked at the campus radio station as a disk jockey and as a news and sports reporter. During his college days, Tom also began working for KWTX-TV (Waco, TX) in their news department—first beginning as a news photographer and later becoming a TV producer. He was executive news producer just before he joined the Texas Farm Bureau to do public relations work. Initially, he was involved in TV production and other media. He started doing radio production in 2005, and since 2008, he's been focusing mainly on radio news for their statewide network as TFB Network producer. The TFB Radio Network has 68 station affiliates across Texas. The Network produces several daily programs and one weekly show covering agricultural and consumer news, weather, markets, wildlife and veterinary issues. He works with **Curt Lancaster** (1994 NAFB President), **Gene Hall** and **Gary Joiner**. *(Tom Nicolette interviews J.B. Stewart, Chairman of National Sorghum Producers at 2015 Washington Watch.)*

DROUGHT DOCUMENTARY... Erica Irlbeck (Allied Industry member, Lubbock, TX) and a group of college students are working with the National Ranching Heritage Center to produce a mini documentary on the 2011 drought and the impact it had on the agricultural industry. Erica is an



assistant professor of agricultural communications at Texas Tech University. She is teaching two courses this summer: video production and advanced imaging and design. During the regular term, she teaches three courses: Video Production in Agriculture, Agricultural Communications Campaigns and Professional Development. Her research interests are risk and crisis communications, agriculture in television media and agricultural communications campaigns. Erica started her duties in September 2009 after earning her Doctor of Education degree in agricultural education from Texas Tech. Prior to her academic career, she worked in agricultural television news for *AgDay* Television and KLBK-TV (Lubbock, TX), farm radio for Clear Channel Networks, public relations and advertising. She received her B.S. in agricultural communications from Oklahoma State University in 1998 and her M.S. in agricultural communications from Texas Tech in 2007. Erica is married to Scott, who farms wheat and grain sorghum in the Texas Panhandle. They have one son, Jett. They enjoy cheering for the Red Raiders, gardening and traveling. This spring her husband started farming full-time with his dad outside Tulia, TX. Within one week, his wheat was “hailed out.” Erica added, “We have had incredible rainfall this year with more than 11 inches falling in May alone. It’s wonderful to have, but it has delayed planting grain sorghum, corn and cotton.”

HEART CAMPAIGN...NAFB Executive Director **Tom Brand** and his wife, **Beth**, became involved with the American Heart Association (AHA) following Tom’s heart attack and bypass surgery in 2013. Tom personally set a goal to raise \$2,500 at the Heart Walk recently in St. Joseph, MO, and currently his effort has raised \$2,300. “The thing we liked about AHA was the way they work with the public and the medical community – providing training, education and research. We can see how each of those areas helped save my life. The team that performed CPR was trained and educated about the procedure through the Heart Association; AHA continues to research the technology and educate the medical community that went into my defibrillator/pacemaker. We appreciate how the Heart Association continues to educate the public on CPR and continues to make it a goal to get as many trained in CPR as possible.” People can still make donations at <http://heartwalk.kintera.org/faf/donorReg/donorPledge.asp?ievent=1112414&lis=1&kntae1112414=8E0BFC12D19C491593AA4C72F4D55944&supId=413917284>. **The campaign runs through June 16.** Tom added, “I appreciate all those who have donated and invite others to join as we continue to fight the #1 killer in America (370,000+ died of heart disease last year...735,000+ had heart attacks—of those, 525,000 had a heart attack for the first time).”



The National Association of Farm Broadcasting Foundation is accepting applications for three **\$5,000** scholarships for college students studying agriculture communications. Application deadline is **June 6, 2015**.

The NAFB Foundation has been investing in the future of farm broadcasting by providing financial support for students pursuing careers in agriculture communications by awarding college scholarships since 1975. The three **\$5,000** scholarships are named after farm broadcasting pioneers:

Glenn Kummerow Memorial Scholarship. Glenn dedicated himself to the farm broadcasting industry, and was a respected authority in ag radio. He was a true friend and loyal supporter of the Association.

George Logan Scholarship. George was the first NAFB Executive Director, a longtime farm broadcaster and television manager. He was a mentor to many broadcasters during their careers.

Orion Samuelson Scholarship. Orion is the most recognized radio and television farm broadcaster in history. Orion along with George Logan started the NAFB Foundation in 1975.

Eligible applicants are in-coming college juniors, seniors or graduate students currently enrolled in a college or university agriculture communications program and pursuing careers in agriculture communications. Scholarship recipients will also receive an expense-paid trip to the NAFB Convention in Kansas City, MO, November 11-13, 2015.

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 larryaquinn@verizon.net or call me at 703-819-6532.

Airing on the Side of Agriculture is included in the blog section of NAFB.com. [Click here for all the *Airing on the Side of Agriculture* articles](#) or [for a PDF click here](#).