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by Larry A. Quinn

**LARRY STECKLINE: A HALF-CENTURY AS THE VOICE OF KANSAS AGRICULTURE...** is the title of a new book chronicling the life and broadcast career of this farm broadcaster. Written by his current wife, **Carla Stovall Steckline**, former Kansas Attorney General, she also shares her professional life, their courtship and her exit from politics. The book offers a comprehensive look at challenges Larry overcame and achievements he attained in his 50 years of farm broadcasting in Kansas. The book cover says about Larry, "He grew up using an outhouse, became an ag broadcasting powerhouse, was an invited guest at the White House, and now lives in a penthouse – this is the story of **Larry Steckline**, the 'farmer's friend.'" Carla said, "We are selling this book on [www.larrysteckline.com](http://www.larrysteckline.com) on behalf of local Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters. The entire \$20 purchase price is being donated to FFA because Larry wants to give back to the agricultural community that made him – personally and professionally – the man he is."



**Larry** grew up on a tiny 200-acre leased farm in western Kansas, where he and his parents raised wheat and milked 20 cows twice daily for their income. Seeing no future in this, he enrolled at the Wichita Business College to become a bookkeeper and obtained a job at the Wichita Union Stockyards. After a promotion to PR Director, he presented the live noon TV markets. A radio entrepreneur spotted him and lured him from the stockyards to become a salesman and farm director.



Larry worked with KFRM-AM (Clay Center, KS) for several years, tripling its sales revenue, until he was fired one morning after his boss finalized plans to sell his stations. With a wife, three children and mortgages on a farm and home, Larry fretted about how to make a living. He created the Mid America Ag Network (Wichita, KS) and sold his farm reports to regional radio stations, eventually reaching into four states. He built an FM station in 1974 in Hays, KS, before

FM could be heard in many homes or cars. He thought it was the future of radio, although he struggled initially to get advertisers. Larry continued to build or buy stations and owned 27 over his career. Throughout his career, Larry continued delivering his farm reports on television and radio for 50 years and can now be found on the Internet at [www.larrysteckline.com](http://www.larrysteckline.com). He still broadcasts agri-business issues daily on KWLS-107.9 FM (Winfield, KS), the only station he owns today. To promote his stations, Larry hosted country music concerts. He hired **Roy Clark, Reba McEntire, Tanya Tucker, Charlie Pride, T.G. Shepherd, Ronnie Milsap, The Oakridge Boys, the Bellamy Brothers** and many more. He and his first wife, **Wah-leeta**, led Kansas farmers on tours around the world to Russia, China, Australia, and South America. Sadly, she was killed in a farming accident in 2000, a few months shy of their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

**About their life together**, Carla said, "Larry and I met years before our first date when he interviewed me about the Republican River lawsuit I had filed, as Kansas Attorney General, against Nebraska. We argued for the entire three-minute interview so we both had to be convinced by our mutual friend to go to dinner together. We were married nine months later! That was nearly 13 years ago." About writing the book, Carla said, "After Larry and I married, he shared many stories with me of his childhood and career that I found remarkable. I knew I was hearing things his children were unaware of and that, certainly, his grandchildren had never heard. I began to jot down these stories to preserve them for the family and then my project went on 'steroids.' I began researching his family history and learned many of his German ancestors moved to Russia at the behest of Catherine the Great in the 1700s and then to America in the 1800s, becoming some of the first Volga-Germans to settle in western Kansas. I am so proud of my husband and relished telling the stories of his struggles and failures followed, ultimately, by his many successes."



**What does Larry say in response?** "I've had a great ride, that's all I can say. Although as a child I couldn't have a nickel candy bar unless the cream had been exceptionally thick that week, I wouldn't change a thing. I learned to work hard and to appreciate what I have. I subscribe to the philosophy Roy Clark shared with me: I'm lucky and I spell luck, w-o-r-k. Farmers and ranchers made my success, and I'm happy that we are donating 100 percent

of the purchase price of our book to local chapters of Kansas FFA. That was important to me. We need young people today to appreciate the impact of agri-business on our national economy."

**FROM CALIFORNIA TO THE MIDWEST...Sabrina Hill** (AgNet West Radio Network, Sanger, CA) traveled to the Midwest for two weeks to experience June Dairy Month in Wisconsin and follow up on dairy stories in South Dakota. There she sat down with the governor for an in-depth interview and also talked with several other agriculture leaders. She toured parts of Minnesota and North Dakota and learned more about agriculture in those states. During her two-week tour, she also represented California agriculture and was featured on radio stations in Wisconsin and South Dakota, where she talked about the struggles California producers are having with the drought. “I’ve worked in news for a long time, but I’ve never found the camaraderie among colleagues like there is within farm broadcasting. A few weeks ago, I traveled from California to the upper Midwest to follow several dairy stories and share the story of California agriculture. The two-week visit was a success due largely to the help and enthusiasm of fellow farm broadcasters in the areas I visited.” NAFB President-Elect **Brian Winnekins** (WRDN, Durand, WI) was Sabrina’s main point of contact in Wisconsin, where the trip started. **(Congressman Ron Kind, left, Sabrina Hill, and Brian Winnekins.)** She spent several days there, visiting various dairy operations and being on the air with Brian, talking about California agriculture and sharing information about the drought. “Brian made sure I learned about more than just Wisconsin cheese. He set up tours at a hops farm and a cranberry farm, two crops we don’t grow in California. We also went on a private tour of a sand mining operation and, of course, a cheese factory.” Sabrina enjoys ribbing Brian about dairy production; California is number one in the nation, Wisconsin is second. Sabrina said, “Brian and I attended a dairy breakfast at a lovely family dairy farm. It was my first dairy breakfast, as



they don’t seem to be as popular in California as they are in Wisconsin. While at the breakfast Brian made sure to introduce me to **Congressman Ron Kind.**” There, I met farm broadcaster **Bob Bosold** (WAYY/WAXX, Altoona, WI).” After Sabrina’s teasing Bob about his picture being on the side of a station van, Bob asked her for an interview. “I’m used to being on the other end of the recorder, but who can turn down Bob Bosold? He asked me thoughtful questions about the California drought and how farmers are making it through. We also talked about the differences between California and Wisconsin in dairy production and the dairy breakfast we were attending.” **(Sabrina Hill and Bob Bosold)**



Sabrina did an interview with the Congressman on changes he would have made to the farm bill, ag trade and its importance in California, Trade Promotion Authority and other ag topics. While Sabrina was in Wisconsin, NAFB member **Bill Zortman** (KELO, Sioux Falls, SD) invited her to call in and be on the air with him. “We discussed my trip, what I had done so far in Wisconsin, the California drought, and my plans for talking with South Dakota agricultural leaders the following week.” Bill had Sabrina on air with him earlier in April to talk about California’s dairy industry and South Dakota’s push to get dairies to consider starting up businesses in that state. She said the professional highlight of her South Dakota visit was the opportunity to do an interview with **South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard**. (**Rusty Halvorson, American Ag**



**Network, Fargo, ND accompanied Sabrina on her visit with Governor Daugaard.**) Her discussion with Governor Daugaard went in-depth on why South Dakota is looking to California for new dairy businesses, the differences between the two states, and what South Dakota can offer Californians who are willing to set up shop there. “As a Californian, I was surprised when they referred to zero degrees as simply ‘cold’ and anything lower as ‘very cold’. Yes, I knew South Dakota winters were brutal. Still, having the local farm broadcaster there to make a point of explaining it was quite helpful.” To read more and hear Sabrina’s interviews from her trip, go to: <http://agnetwest.com/2015/07/19/from-california-to-the-midwest-sharing-agricultures-story/>.

Before returning to California, Sabrina went to North Dakota, where she spent time visiting fellow farm broadcaster **Jody Heemstra** (Red River Farm Network, Grand Forks, ND). The personal highlight of Sabrina’s trip was something completely different. Her family started out as cattle ranchers in the very areas she visited. “I had never seen where my family was from, so it was moving experience for me.” The story, along with pictures and some Native American flute music, can be found here: <http://fromthegoldenwest.com/2015/07/19/digging-up-roots/>.

Sabrina concludes, “While working in general news, I never experienced the sense of teamwork like I did during this trip. All these other farm broadcasters wanted to help me get the stories told, and I wanted to help them get California’s story told. We worked together to help each other be successful, despite being with different companies. It was a refreshing perspective on what we do.” **A good example of farm broadcasters helping each other “air on the side of agriculture.”**

**AGNET WEST INTERN ALLISON ROSA...**AgNet West Radio Network in California is one of the recipients of an NAFB Foundation internship grant. College senior

**Allison Rosa** is joining the team for the 2015 fall semester. Rosa grew up on a small, but popular, dairy farm in Hanford, CA, and is attending Fresno Pacific University and majoring in communications.

“Agriculture has been a huge part of my life, not only through my family but also with my participation in FFA, 4-H, and serving as a Kings County Dairy Princess through the California Milk Advisory Board,” she said.

“Along with my passion for the agricultural industry, I have an appreciation for news and media. After graduation, I plan on starting a career within the agricultural industry focusing on either radio or print media.” Rosa is working closely with AgNet

West news director **Sabrina Hill**. “I’m excited to have Allison interning with us this semester,” Sabrina said. “She will be learning about what we do each day, gaining interviewing skills, coming along to events we cover and building skills to start a broadcast career. I’m also thankful for the internship grant and that Allison will be able to come with us to convention in November.” The NAFB Foundation is funding Rosa’s trip to the NAFB annual convention in Kansas City as part of its effort to give her and the other internship grant recipients a fuller farm broadcasting experience. “Working for AgNet West is a new and exciting experience that is constantly providing me with learning opportunities through farm broadcasting,” Allison said.



**RRFN REPORTS FROM FRANCE...**While many were preparing for a long holiday July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, Red River Farm Network farm broadcaster **Mike Hergert** (Grand Forks, ND) spent the last week of June in central France on a Limagrain press trip. Founded in 1965, and managed by more than 2,000 French farmers, the Limagrain co-op is the leading French seed manufacturer and the fourth-largest seed company worldwide. It is vertically integrated, from wheat and corn breeding, crop production, to milling and baking. A 26-member media delegation

from nine countries participated in an exclusive Limagrain tour with Mike being the only U.S. journalist on the trip. **Francois Viallet**, who is with Limagrain Cereals Ingredients, says that integration provides valuable feedback to breeders. “Information goes transparently through all sectors so we are better positioned to give feedback to the breeders.” Viallet told Mike that Limagrain’s future plans include developing international sales, targeting what he calls second

transformation, which could involve a partnership with a wheat mill. Limagrain owns Jacquet, the leading industrial baker in France, which has more than a 50 percent market share. Limagrain operates more than 100 breeding stations all over the world, which includes Limagrain Cereal Seeds in the U.S. The French-based, farmer-owned cooperative creates almost 500 new varieties every year. During Mike's visit to central France, the temperature reached 104 degrees. **Jean Yves Foucault**, Limagrain board chairman, said something happens every year. "The yield here isn't as high as it is in other parts of France. Farmers here go for quality wheat with high protein and baking quality. High protein is between 12.5 and 16, depending on the variety. In the north where the soil is deeper, yields are 7.5 to 8 tons per hectare. In the south where I live, we're half a ton per hectare less." Converting that to bushels per acre, that's about 104 to 119 bushels per acre for wheat. **(Mike Hergert interviews Limagrain's chairman of the board, Jean Yves Foucault, right, with interpreter David House.)**



Of Limagrain's 9,000 employees worldwide, there are only 26 in the U.S. working on wheat variety development with Limagrain Cereal Seeds. Foucault is very optimistic about Limagrain's future growth in the U.S. "For the moment, we are only 7 or 8 percent in what is an enormous market. With all the money we're investing in research I can only think that we will end up with 10 to 15 percent of the market, particularly because innovation is a true value in the United States." While optimistic about the future, Foucault is concerned about the European Union (EU) abandoning the Common Agricultural Policy, while the U.S. maintains its farm bill support. The Limagrain leader is also very concerned about TTIP, the proposed free trade agreement between the U.S. and EU.

**ON THE MOVE...**After 17 years in radio, farm broadcaster **Jody Heemstra** is changing careers. She is returning to her home state to become Public Affairs Manager for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) headed by Secretary of Agriculture **Lucas Lentsch**. Jody worked in radio in South Dakota for more than 15 years, before joining the Red River Farm Network (Grand Forks, ND) in August 2013. "I've had the chance to work with several great broadcasters and journalists during my radio career. I'm looking forward to coming home and working with them, and many more, in my new role. Agriculture is South Dakota's number one industry. I'm excited for the opportunity to help spread the word about what the South Dakota Department of Agriculture is doing to encourage, protect and develop agriculture in our state. I'm looking forward to working with farmers and ranchers, media, government officials, legislators and the agriculture groups to see how we can make agriculture even better in South Dakota." Secretary of Agriculture Lentsch said, "I'm very excited to have





Jody as part of my team at SDDA. She brings with her a wealth of knowledge about the communication world, specifically in agriculture. Jody is an incredible addition to the department.” Jody grew up on her family’s crop and dairy farm in southeast South Dakota. She earned her bachelor’s degree in agricultural journalism from South Dakota State University in May 1998 and is a Class V graduate of the South Dakota Agricultural and Rural Leadership program. As an active member of NAFB, she has served on the Board of Directors as the West Region Vice President. Jody has been recognized for her agricultural communication work by a number of commodity organizations as well as groups such as the South Dakota State FFA Association and county 4-H Extension offices. She will be based in Pierre, SD.



**KATIE JOHNSON IS KICD INTERN...**Katie Johnson, this year’s summer intern at KICD Radio in northwest Iowa, took the station by storm, reports **Dan Skelton**. The Iowa State University senior enthusiastically responded to a wide variety of projects and work assignments. “Specifically, Katie learned to quote market information live, on-air, in an exact two-minute time frame. She also learned to write and edit local news and farm news for broadcast within time limitations. Katie conducted interviews in various formats. She learned to quiz

traders on why markets were trading the way they were. She conducted long-form interviews on a variety of topics. Perhaps her favorite activity was interviewing 4-H youth at more than eight county fairs. A special project was a series of reports for broadcast on the H5N2 Avian Influenza (bird flu) and its impact on the poultry industry in Iowa.” Dan continued, “Katie came to her internship with a desire to work public relations for a commodity organization, but she says her experience at KICD has her thinking now about a career in ag broadcasting. Katie is an Ag Communications major at Iowa State University, and she really has been a strong intern. Her last day with us is August 7.” Katie grew up in Northwest Iowa and graduated from Okoboji High School where she was very involved in 4-H, FFA and numerous speech and debate-related activities. She lived on a row crop and feedlot operation farm where she showed cattle, primarily black Angus steers. “My experiences on the farm instilled in me a passion for agriculture, which led me to attend Iowa State University. The first time I learned of the ag communications major, I knew it was the perfect fit for me. I will be graduating in December and plan to stay in agriculture, communicating its importance to the public. Where that may be yet, I’m not sure, but I know my skills and experiences gained this summer at KICD will take me far.”

(Katie Johnson posing with **The Peterson Brothers** following an interview at the Boone County Fair in Iowa. Peterson Brothers from Kansas produce YouTube videos with farming parodies.)



**DESTRUCTIVE FERAL HOGS IN LOUISIANA...** Don Molino (Louisiana Farm Bureau Agri-News Radio Network, Baton Rouge, LA) reports that feral hogs have caused at least \$30 million in damages to crops on Louisiana farms just in the past two years, according to a study by the Louisiana State University AgCenter. **Shaun Tanger**, LSU AgCenter economist, has been gathering data for more



than a year from Louisiana farmers about hog activity and damage, which ranges from rooting up and eating crops to damaging farm equipment. Don adds, "Feral hogs can also spread fatal diseases to wildlife and livestock." The 2013 Louisiana soybean crop suffered more than \$9 million in hog damage, hay producers lost about \$7 million, while the rice and corn industries

both saw about \$5 million in damage. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are about 6 million feral hogs living in at least 41 states with California, Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas having some of the largest populations. Louisiana's feral hog population has been estimated at 500,000 with hotspots in the south central and northeastern parts of the state. Tanger says up to 75 percent of feral hogs would have to be eliminated just to maintain the current population. Don emphasizes, "If feral hog populations continue to grow so rapidly, they are likely to move into suburban areas and that will lead to dangerous human-hog encounters. The most effective way to control feral hogs is trapping and killing them." He adds that LSU AgCenter scientists have been studying alternatives, including sodium nitrite-based bait that would kill their reproductive system and provide birth control for feral hogs. Adult feral hogs can weigh several hundred pounds.

**WE WANT YOUR NEWS...** 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](mailto:larryaquinn@verizon.net) or call me at 703-819-6532.

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