



Volume 2, Number 2, February 3, 2014

by Larry A. Quinn

JUST HOW COLD WAS IT?...While the media has talked a lot about the cold weather, "Minnesotans take it in stride," reports Farm Director **Jerry Groskreutz** (KDHL, Faribault, MN). "It gets cold in Minnesota, has happened before, and it will again! We actually look at the 'bright' side. While it has been cold, we have seen only average snowfall. In addition, most of the snow has been light, just a couple of inches at a time," he said.



When Jerry snapped this photo of Farbo Foods, it was 15 degrees below zero with a wind chill of 40 degrees below zero. The food company processes products like beans, soups, pasta and vegetables and even though it is cold in Minnesota during the winter, they continue to operate.

"We have seen winters with record snowfall and blizzards. That creates real issues with getting livestock and milk to processing plants and feed to farm sites. We actually feel fortunate that we have not had all the snow and ice storms like the eastern United States," he said. "The cold does add some stress for livestock producers to make sure stock waters do not freeze up, getting tractors, trucks and skid steers started. As far as the livestock, this winter is why we have them in barns and not outside," Jerry explains.

PROPANE SHORTAGE..."Our biggest concern right now is the propane shortage," Jerry said. "I filled my propane tank for corn drying last summer for \$1.60 a gallon." Needing one more "fill" to finish what he had not contracted, it was \$2.20 a gallon. "Today (January 29), I heard over \$6.00 a gallon and you pay cash! That puts a real hardship on rural homeowners and livestock producers that need propane." Many farmers did contract propane for this winter, however, local retailers cannot get propane from their suppliers at the contracted price. Jerry said trucks are heading all the way to south Texas to get loads of propane to bring back to Minnesota. Just the freight adds a dollar a gallon to the price. The Governor of Minnesota declared an emergency to suspend rules to let drivers spend more time on the road. States are working together the Governor of Minnesota called the Governor of Texas so that trucks could go to Texas, even though they were not licensed to haul in Texas. The solution was to worry about rules later, get the trucks on the road, and do whatever possible to get propane to Minnesota.



GROWING UP...on a crop and dairy farm in southern Minnesota, Jerry graduated from the University of Minnesota with a BS in Agricultural Education. After graduation, he returned to operate the family farm consisting of 600 acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, sweet corn, peas and 100 dairy cows. In the fall of 1995, after 18 years of farming, he traded the milking parlor for a radio microphone and became a farm broadcaster, but he still gets up at 3:30 a.m. every day. In addition to his coverage of farm news, weather, markets, meetings, county fairs and FFA conventions, he continues to farm.

THE COLD AND NORTH DAKOTA CATTLE...**Ken Morgan**(Interstate Farm Network, Emerado, ND) talked with three livestock specialists at a winter workshop titled "Humane Handling-Humane Behavior," featuring nationally known expert, **Dr. Temple Grandin**. The mid-January workshop was presented by the Morton County Soil Conservation District. Ken asked the specialists how cattle were faring during recent cold weather in North Dakota. **Gerry Stokka**, a livestock stewardship specialist from NDSU in Fargo, said he "...continue(s) to be amazed at the flexibility of cattle almost no matter where they are. But they only do that if we feed them and care for them properly. It's amazing what a little wind break, a little bedding, some type of shelter will do to an animal that really comes built in with a pot belly stove inside its belly. Keeps those hooves warm, keeps the ears warm, I still marvel at it. I don't know how it works completely, but it's an amazing thing. Our cattle do extremely well if they're fed and cared for properly." **Larry Schnell**, managing partner of Stockmen's Livestock Exchange in Dickinson, said the cold has "really not been a problem. It was a short enough period of time, and as long as you keep feed and water in front of them, and they are in good shape, that's not a problem." **Scott Ressler**, North Dakota Stockmen's Association in Bismarck, said, "The cattle handle it well in North Dakota. We have adequate feed sources and they stayed dry. These northern plains cattle have hardy hair coats. They are hardy animals...eastern United States cattle don't have the hair coat and can't handle the weather we have, and so it's really not a big issue. We didn't lose many cattle to those type of conditions in North Dakota."



RADIO EXPERIENCE...for **Ken Morgan** began in high school in 1971, producing a weekly program focused on school activities and events. He spent three months at Thief River Falls Area Vocational Technical School to learn broadcasting and then began an internship that taught him about radio. Ken's resume includes work in radio since the early '70s in most music formats, news talk and sports broadcasting. As a farm Broadcaster, Ken spent five years working with Red River Farm Network (Grand Forks, ND) and two years covering ag related news for KNOX (Grand Forks, ND).

Interstate Farm Network (Emerado, ND)has been on the air with programming since August 2011 and is owned and operated by Ken Morgan (Duane Hagen) and his wife, **Kerri Hagen**. In the past six months, they have developed four unique programming formats that fit specific geographic areas within northeastern North Dakota, parts of southern Manitoba, Canada, and northwestern Minnesota. Interstate Farm Network started with the idea that there should be news about agriculture on the radio for weekend listeners. Ken said, "There is plenty of information that there is not time to use during the week, and an expanded program that allows stations to show their personality is essential. Out In the Country is the program we developed to fit that." Out In the Country is a two-hour program that includes each station's local news, weather and sports information that the individual station provides. Interstate Farm Network (IFN) fills the rest of the time with ag news, markets, weather and feature stories.

COLDER THAN USUAL IN TEXAS..."While it has been colder than usual in Texas," **Tony Purcell** (Texas State Networks, Dallas, TX) said, "It is nothing compared to what it has been like to the north of us. Fortunately, the cotton, sorghum and corn was pretty much all harvested before the cold air moved in. There may be some damage to the wheat crop due to the lack of snow cover, but we won't know how much, if any, until it comes out of dormancy in the spring." He added, "Livestock producers did a good job preparing for winter. Most had an ample supply of hay, and there have been few problems reported."

TEXAS DROUGHT CONTINUES..."It was good news/bad news that the cold air that we have is dry," Tony said. "The good news is transportation problems have been minimal. The bad news is that the drought continues. State Climatologist **John Neilson-Gammon** says we are 3 ½ years into a 5-year drought. Lakes and stock tanks are at historically low levels. Lake Lavon, where my rural water district gets its water, is at 38 percent of capacity. Stage 3 water restrictions have been in effect for several months." In South Texas, the Lower Colorado River Authority plans to further restrict water available to downstream rice growers. Farmers who get irrigation water from the Edwards Aquifer have been told they will be restricted to one irrigation cycle this growing season.

TEXAS STATE NETWORK AG DIRECTOR...**Tony Purcell** brings together a farm and ranch background with 45 years of broadcast experience. In the course of his journalistic career, he has interviewed five presidents and traveled abroad with three secretaries of agriculture. Tony has earned three Oscars in Agriculture Awards. The first was for a series on the farm credit crisis and the second was for his coverage of the 1998 Texas drought and its effects. The most recent was in 2004 for his coverage of Mad Cow disease and its effect on Texas cattle producers. He has been honored by NAFB as the Southern Region Farm Broadcaster of the Year; by the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association as their Broadcaster of the Year; and has received the Texas Farm Bureau President's Award for Excellence in Agriculture. Tony also hosts the informative and entertaining program Shoot the Bull, with the Texas Commissioner of Agriculture. The Lone Star Farm and Ranch report is the most listened to farm broadcast in Texas. It has been named the best farm broadcast in America four times in the last five years. It was named the best overall newscast by the National Association of State Networks. Tony won both the Best Newscast and Best Marketcast awards in 2013 from NAFB. With some staff reductions and the addition of new programs, Tony's workload has increased dramatically. Tony said, "We added several Ag Minute's per day for affiliates to use in their general news programming. They have been well received, but take a lot of time to produce. In addition to that, I have taken on added responsibilities on the News network. In addition to the Ag Programming, I am now generating more stories and doing more newscasts for TSN."



COLD IS KILLING BAD BUGS IN LOUISIANA...As far as effects of cold weather on row crops (cotton, soybeans, rice), **Don Molino** (LFB Agri-News Radio Network, Baton Rouge, LA) said, "The colder the better because the cold tends to kill off bad bugs which means fewer chemical applications during planting and the growing season." He explains, "The colder the winters, the better for farmers as far as overwintering bugs are concerned...kills more of 'em!" He reports that the winter wheat isn't really hurt because "it just doesn't get that cold this far south to do any damage." He adds, "The sugarcane also seems to enjoy some cold weather from time to time, but, again, where sugarcane is grown in south Louisiana it just doesn't get cold enough to hurt the crop. That's the primary reason 'cane isn't grown past the central part of the state." Don said the biggest concern is to livestock, keeping them fed and as dry and warm as possible. Cattle producers have to use much more hay when it gets this cold. Overall, about all the cold weather did was shut down south Louisiana, he said. "No major problems, just lots of ice." In fact, the interstate was closed from Baton Rouge to New Orleans and from Mississippi to Texas during the cold spell. Don concluded, "But crops haven't been affected and the farmers are loving it 'cause it's killing a lot of bad bugs. Just hope this cold snap doesn't hurt the crawfish too terribly much! THAT would be a disaster!!"



SNOW IN THE CAROLINAS...The entire state of North Carolina and most of South Carolina received some snow, in places up to six inches, reports **Rhonda Garrison** (Southern Farm Network, Raleigh, NC). Many areas haven't seen snow in more than 10 years. Temperatures have broken both record lows and record low minimums. "As far as effects from the cold/snow, it's a bit early to tell," she said. But Rhonda expects that the green industry got the worst with greenhouses full of plant material getting geared up for spring. "Strawberries are also a big deal here, but the growers are prepared with row covers. They've fared the first two arctic events well, with little damage."

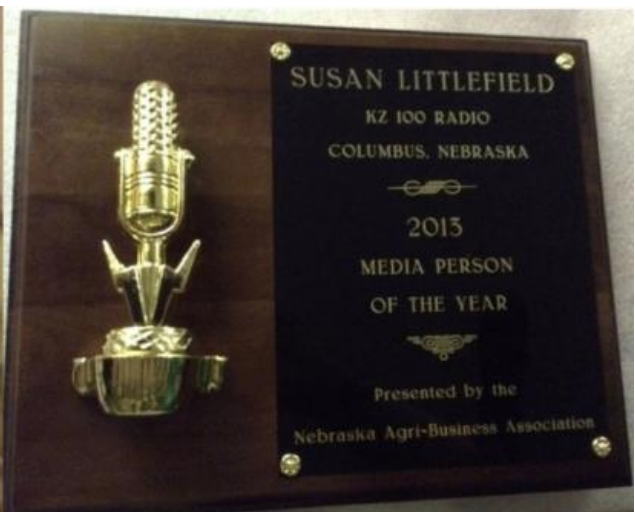
PROPANE SHORTAGE EFFECTS...Rhonda spoke with the NC Propane Gas Association and was told that the Dixie pipeline hub in Apex, NC (suburb of Raleigh) has been put on 'allocation,' which means that unless one has been a regular customer in the past year, it's closed (basically shutting down everybody that's not local). Rhonda explained, "They did it to keep the big midwestern distributors from coming down here and draining our reserves." She predicted that the hog and poultry farmers are going to have to get very creative in their conservation methods with heat. "Hogs can take a certain amount of cold, poultry can't. There's also the green industry that heats greenhouses with propane, as well as tobacco houses (that) are seeded for the most part, and they, too, are heated with propane."



A native of the Texas Panhandle, **Rhonda Garrison** was born and raised on a cotton farm where she saw cotton farming evolve from ditch irrigation to center pivot and harvest trailers to modules. After graduating from Texas Tech University, she got her start in radio with KGNC (Amarillo, TX). Rhonda joined Southern Farm Network in July of 2007 as Director and became an immediate "old timer." Seems the Carolinas and Texas agribusiness community needs are much the same. Rhonda received an Excellence in Ag Reporting Award from NAFB in 2009 for news stories on salmonella in peanut processing.

"Biofuels: Man versus Beast" netted Rhonda a first place from the Radio Television and Digital News Association of the Carolinas in 2012, and in December 2013, Rhonda received the 2013 Communications Award from North Carolina Farm Bureau.

NORTHWEST AGRICULTURE RECOGNITION... **Greg Martin** (Northwest AG Information Network, Kennewick, WA) was honored January 23 for his many contributions to the Northwest Ag Industry at the Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame Awards Banquet. Formed in 2000, the Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame recognizes and honors distinguished individuals within the agriculture community who have made significant contributions to the region's farming and ranching community. Greg is Vice President of Programming for Allen Media and is responsible for overseeing production of 12 daily radio programs that air on 76 affiliate stations throughout Oregon, Washington, and Idaho on the NW Ag Information Radio Network. Greg produces and hosts the Line on Agriculture program, Northwest Report, Fruit Grower Report and the Agribusiness Minute. Greg's passion about researching and testing the latest audio gathering and production technology ensures that Allen Media's reporters have the ability to capture the agriculture newsmakers' sound bites and quickly get the information out to their listening audience. On behalf of Allen Media, Greg has also been called upon to coach ag industry leaders on how to be more confident and effective in disseminating information during a press conference. Greg is well known as a speaker and host, appearing at various commodity conventions over the years. Also, Greg is currently a spokesperson for the U.S. Potato Board.



MEDIA PERSON OF THE YEAR... was presented January 27, to **Susan Littlefield** (KZ 100 Radio, Columbus, NE) by **Bob Anderson**, President of the Nebraska Agri-Business Association. The recipient is chosen from nominations from across the state. "They did rib me a bit because I was doing interviews leading up to the start of the reception," Susan said. The Nebraska Agri-Business Association has been in existence since 1955 representing the industry. The Association was originally formed as the Nebraska Fertilizer Institute, then merging with the Nebraska Ag-Chemical Association in 1979, and then changing its name to the Nebraska Agri-Business Association.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU... so we can share your stories of service to listeners. Contact me at larryaquinn@verizon.net or call me at 703-819-6532.

NAFB
P.O. Box 500
Platte City, MO 64079
(816) 431-4032

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