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by Larry A. Quinn



Fire in California Avocado Orchard

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA THOMAS FIRE HURT AGRICULTURE – The Thomas Fire that burned through Ventura County last December became the largest fire in California’s history, and it led to some major agricultural losses, reports **Patrick Cavanaugh** (California Ag Today, Clovis, CA). “There were 6,603 acres of avocados, 1,800 acres of lemons, and another 540 acres of oranges, as well as another dozen crops that were affected,” said **Henry Gonzales**, the Agricultural Commissioner of Ventura County. “Some orchards will have to be replanted while others suffered some isolated damage. One of the things that we’ve seen is that these orchards actually provided

a buffer between the fire and urban areas,” Gonzales said. “They really saved us quite a bit.” Some of the avocado orchards experienced significant losses. “The very efficient irrigation systems that we have are sadly made of plastic, and so they melted. We are actually looking at two different disasters.” Cavanaugh said they are still suffering from the impacts and effects of the drought. “Everything was very dry, and then we had the Santa Ana winds, which really created the perfect firestorm.” Cattle grazing on the foothills also decreased the fierceness of the fire, by decreasing heavy grass growth, which would have provided more fuel for the fire. Gonzalez said, “The cattlemen and women should be commended for their help in the fire. While there were some losses to fencing, the area agricultural industry is helping with funds to replace the fences. It’s great to see how the ag industry works together during tough times.” Gonzalez’ own home was nearly affected by the fire. “I could see the flames from my kitchen window just on the hill near my home, and fortunately, we are protected by some of the orchards. Also, the wind was blowing in a favorable direction, so we were part of a voluntary evacuation area. We felt very fortunate.”



Burned Citrus Orchard in California

NEW VOICE FOR WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE – Mid-West Family Broadcasting has gained a new voice for Wisconsin agriculture. **Jenna Lee Crayton** is the Assistant Farm Director for the Wisconsin Farm Report Radio Network. Jenna Lee works alongside the “Fabulous Farm Babe,” **Pam Jahnke**, to keep the public informed on Wisconsin agriculture from field to fork.

Jahnke said, “I’m excited to have Jenna as our assistant. Her passion for Wisconsin agriculture is obvious, and I’m looking forward for our audience to connect with her as they hear her every day.”

Jenna Lee was raised on her family’s dairy and crop farm in Oak Creek, WI. Along with cattle, her family also owns a flock of commercial-type show lambs. She was a very active member of the Racine County 4-H program. She served as a junior leader, 4-H ambassador, and the Tucker 4-H Club sheep leader. Along with 4-H, Jenna Lee also was the 2010 Racine County Farm Bureau Ambassador, 2013 Racine County Fairest of the Fair, and a Top 6 candidate for the 70th *Alice in Dairyland* position. Jenna Lee’s passion for agriculture led her to attend the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, where in 2015 she graduated with a BA in communication with a double emphasis in interpersonal organizations and public relations, while minoring in business administration.

Then, she continued her education at Texas Tech University where in May 2017 she obtained her MA in agriculture communications. “Growing up in the urbanized area of Milwaukee County showed me at a young age just how removed a large portion of the population is from the agriculture industry. I took it upon myself to teach those around me about the importance of agriculture and those who work in it. I am so honored and excited to have this opportunity to pursue my passion of telling the story of Wisconsin agriculture,” Jenna Lee said. She started her duties with Mid-West Family Broadcasting and the WI Farm Report August 14, 2017. Her responsibilities include all day-to-day network operations, as well as being in charge of social media interaction and event coordination. Jenna Lee became a new member of NAFB in September and attended her first NAFB annual convention in Kansas City this past fall. “It is an honor to be a part of an organization filled with others who share my passion of agriculture and spreading the many stories within the industry. I look forward to continue meeting fellow farm broadcasters and developing my skills through the interactions and relationships I gain through NAFB,” she emphasized.

Jenna interviews **Janeal Yancey**, founder of the *Mom at the Meat Counter* blog and a meat scientist, at the 2018 Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association Conference.



YOU REALLY SOUND LIKE YOUR DAD – If

Colter Brown (Northern Ag Network, Billings, MT) had a dollar for every time he's heard that, he said, "I wouldn't have to work at all." Even though he's been around farm broadcasting his whole life, if you would have asked him five years ago if he was going to be on the Northern Ag Network, his answer would've been, "Not a chance." He explained, "I think my dad would tell you that he never intended on being in farm broadcasting for his entire career. Dad always planned on going back to the ranch, but the farm economy, life and the Lord intervened. Another thing he probably never intended was becoming the voice for the entire ag industry in Montana, Wyoming and the Western Dakotas, but he sure did. You'd be hard pressed to go to any farming community in the region and find



someone who didn't know **Taylor Brown**. Heck, even though the Montana Chevy Dealers haven't run the ads in well over a decade, everyone still remembers, "Tell 'em Taylor sent ya!" When Colter graduated college from Montana State University with a degree in ag economics, he was unsure where he was going to end up, but he started working with Northwest Farm Credit as a loan officer because he knew he wanted to be involved in agriculture. "Shortly after I started, the cattle industry took its biggest run in history, and there wasn't a bad loan to be made. But it didn't take long for prices to come back to earth and for reality to set in. I had many a tough conversation with customers at the kitchen table as prices that were once at all-time peaks, took all-time drops. Thankfully, we're all still here and I still get to help those same producers, just in a little different capacity," Colter said. "Eventually I realized that I wasn't going to be a banker for the rest of my life and Dad said, 'maybe we should talk.'" After many, many discussions with his parents about what it would be like if he did work at the network, Colter could start to see that maybe there was a future for him in the family business. "Farm broadcasting is a little different than banking. I'd have to say considerably more fun, nearly always free beer anywhere we go. I still have a lot to learn and, thank goodness, we have a great team here to help with that. I was able to see firsthand shortly after I started exactly how we can help farmers and ranchers. Montana was in one of the worst droughts in history when one of the worst fire seasons in history started. We were able to help direct assistance where it was needed and provide just a little bit of hope for those who came close to losing everything," Colter said. "I don't know if there are many jobs as rewarding as this one. I feel truly blessed to be a part of such a great industry and feel fortunate to have the trust of producers to deliver the information they need," he concluded.



RED RIVER FARM NETWORK COVERS KEY MEETINGS – Winter is a busy meeting season. **Don Wick** (Red River Farm Network, Grand Forks, ND) said, “In addition to local and regional events, RRFN has covered the Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, American Farm Bureau Convention in Nashville, Potato Expo in Orlando, American Sugarbeet Growers Association’s Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, and U.S. Custom Harvesters Convention in Grand Island, NE. RRFN also has a special Farm Bill Focus series on the air with additional time in Washington, DC, to interview newsmakers like Senate Ag Committee Chairman **Pat Roberts** (bottom photo), House Ag Committee Chairman **Mike Conaway** (top photo), and Ranking Member **Collin Peterson**. RRFN’s Don Wick also covered the House Ag Committee hearing with Ag Secretary **Sonny Perdue**.



FEEDBACK FROM A HALL OF FAMER – (When NAFB Hall of Famer **Wey Simpson** read **John Winfield**'s career story in the February 2018 issue, he was moved to write the following.) "I was intrigued by John Winfield's note that he always wanted to be in radio. That's exactly what I wanted, too. In the mid-1930s when we were riding into Spokane from our Deer Park, WA, farm I announced to my parents that I wanted to be a radio announcer. That focus never wavered. I even got my first chance to do so while in high school. Our band, some other talent, and some of the student body went to Spokane to a radio studio, and I was asked to announce the numbers that were to be played. I remember being insulted when the band director told me how to pronounce the name of one of the composers. By then, it was World War II and after high school, the draft scooped me up, dumped me in Texas for basic training, gave me a few days at home en route to our departure point for the Pacific Theater. The last months of the war I spent on Luzon in the First Cavalry Division and was half way down the nets on the side of a troop ship preparing for the invasion of Japan when it was announced Japan would surrender. We quickly shipped out and were in Yokohama the day the surrender was signed on the Missouri. We were the first Division into Tokyo, where I spent another year as an occupier of our former enemy. I came home November of 1946 and enrolled in Washington State College the next February and I never looked back. In the fall of 1946, I was in my second semester as a freshman when I walked out of the building where most of the speech classes were held. I overheard a conversation between one of the college radio station announcers and another student. He said announcer auditions would be held at a certain time. My reaction was, 'Well, why not.' So, I signed up for an audition. I remember the professor doing the auditions asking me, 'Where did you learn to read like that?'" There were, of course, no answers. It apparently came naturally. I think this was the first time that a freshman became part of the station's announcing staff. I spent three full years doing that while getting my degree in three and a half years. I'd lost time in the service, and I was in a hurry to get into life. I had a job before I graduated and a long life in broadcasting was under way. Of course, at that point I never dreamed of being a farm broadcaster. But, after nearly 10 years learning and honing my news skills, I was offered the job, and that was it for the next 40-plus years. There were a few road bumps, but there was always something new waiting for me. All these years later, I have no regrets. It was a marvelous ride. I'm now less than 5 months from my 92nd milestone. While nothing is in stone, my health is good for my age, my mind seems to still function, so I'm looking for what joy I can find."

WE WANT YOUR NEWS – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact me at larryquinn@outlook.com or call me at **703-819-6532**. *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*.