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by Larry A. Quinn



WILDFIRES SCORCH OKLAHOMA AND KANSAS AGAIN – “During the past two years, the border between Oklahoma and Kansas has burned uncontrollably in the spring,” reports **Ron Hays** (Radio Oklahoma Network, Oklahoma City, OK). Two years ago, it was the Anderson Creek fires where a few cattle were lost, but several thousand acres burned, and control was slow in coming. Last year, a fire that started in Beaver County in the Oklahoma Panhandle spread eastward just south of the Kansas Line and then into Clark County, KS, where a huge percentage of the county was scorched. “Last March, we did extensive coverage on our radio network, on our website and in our daily email. Between the Oklahoma Cattlemen’s and Kansas Livestock Foundations, several farm broadcasters were key voices in helping get the word out and helping raise several million dollars for those ranchers.” Then along came April 2018. “The National Weather Service and the Oklahoma Forestry Services were talking about the most dangerous fire conditions they could describe and April 12 was predicted to be the worse of the worse. Multiple fires were reported that day and extended into April 13 and then into the weekend.” Ron continued, “Two of the

fires, the 34 Complex Fire and the Rhea Fire, quickly got out of hand and were true fire storms. Our coverage included getting the word out on our radio stations in the area. A couple of our very best Radio Oklahoma Ag Network affiliates are in the footprint of those fires, and they were broadcasting wall-to-wall disaster reports taking in reports of fires that were breaking out and giving folks in the line of fire as much heads up as they could get.” The difference in these



fires of 2018 versus 2017 was that it was a more populated area compared to the fires that burned in Oklahoma and Kansas last March. “More houses, barns, outbuildings, farm equipment, stock tanks, fences and cattle were in harm’s way. Families got little notice and faced personal harm as they raced to cut fences to allow cattle to escape. Fires in some cases were moving at 50 miles per hour. The rains of last summer had allowed a lot of grass to grow and forage left from an extremely dry winter amounted to a huge amount of dry fuel for fires to burn uncontrollably,” Ron said. “Add in hundreds of eastern red cedar trees that will explode when they catch on fire, and it made incredible videos and other visuals that came out of the destruction. By April 16, we knew we were talking several hundred thousand acres.” Ron and his team had already identified the most urgent needs and were sending the call out via radio, web

and social media that hay and milk replacer was desperately needed. One of the County Extension Educators took on the job of taking the calls of both those that needed hay for cattle that escaped and those who were willing to donate hay or to transport it. “I was asked to offer a play-by-play account of what was going on in northwest Oklahoma, and we talked with fellow farm broadcasters, individual stations, networks and two daily ag talk shows that reached a national farm audience. We talked about the destruction. We talked about the needs for hay and longer term needs for fencing supplies and cash to help these farm families who faced hardship because of the fires that had taken out a land mass half the size of Rhode Island.” Since the initial fires that broke out April 12, a little bit of rainfall has helped the small army of firefighters to reduce hundreds of hot spots down to none. 350,000 acres were burned along the way. “The next thing we were reporting was the first of what will be many producer meetings to allow folks to begin to get the information they need to tap into government and private resources that will help them rebuild their lives and their farm or ranch operations. The country that burned was mostly ranch land and those ranchers are now disposing of cattle carcasses, doctoring animals that were in harm’s way and survived, and making sure those livestock that



are alive are getting fed through the generosity of farmers from across the U.S. who have sent hay again to those hit by wildfire in Oklahoma.” USDA’s **Bill Northey** traveled to western



Oklahoma to get a first-hand view of the fire’s path and was escorted around by former House Ag Committee Chair **Frank Lucas**. Ron’s broadcast associate **Carson Horn** had a chance to report on that visit from DC. About reporting on the wildfires, Ron added, “This story has been a non-stop part of our news cycle for two weeks, and it’s likely that stories that are tied to the wildfires will be in our mix of daily reports for farmers and ranchers in our country for some time to come. For our broadcast colleagues who have helped get the word out about helping fellow ag producers, we say thank you.” He asks broadcasters to mention the Oklahoma Cattlemen’s website www.okcattlemen.org on air or in emails or web stories.

“Any help you can give to these ranch families in need will be much appreciated,” Ron said.

MISSOURI BROADCASTER JOINS KANSAS NETWORK

A lifelong passion for agriculture has brought a Missouri native farm broadcaster to Kansas. **Sara Miles** joins the Kansas Farm and Ranch Radio team as the Farm Director. **Sacha Sanguinetti**, General Manager and Vice President of Radio for Rocking M Media, said, "We are constantly looking for new and better ways to pass along the vital information producers need. Sara is an innovative, self-driven, natural-born leader who brings a fresh approach to ag media." She grew up on a family farm in northeast Missouri which spans five generations where she developed a passion for agriculture. Sara's fondest memories on the farm include taking naps with bottle calves and making bedding hog huts a competition. Before coming to Kansas Farm and Ranch Radio



(Colby, KS), Sara served as a farm broadcaster and production director for KMZU (Carrollton, MO). Sara received an Associate of Arts degree from North Central Missouri College and a Bachelor of Science degree from Northwest Missouri State University in agricultural business with an emphasis in agricultural communications. Sara was an active member of 4-H, FFA, and Post-Secondary Agricultural Students Organization which she served in numerous leadership positions. Sara said, "I never thought I would be a farm broadcaster. After getting involved, I knew it was a perfect fit and there was no looking back." Sara can be reached by calling the Kansas Farm and Ranch Radio home office in Colby at (785) 462-3305 or by e-mail at smiles@kansasfarmandranchradio.com.

DIXON WILLIAMS IS NETWORK FARM DIRECTOR – When **John Winfield** fully retired in July 2017, **Dixon Williams** became the fulltime farm director for Telesouth Communications/Supertalk (Jackson, MS). "My interest in radio started while I was in high school at Provine High in Jackson, MS. I went on to get a broadcast journalism degree at the University of Southern Mississippi. His first job in broadcasting was at WAPF-AM/WCCA (McComb, MS) in 1982. "I was the morning announcer and sports director for five years. Then, I joined the campus station at Mississippi College and from there I came to the Mississippi Network as the Sports Director in 1989. Since then, my duties were expanded to back-up for John Winfield doing the ag reports. I still do some sports and my hope is to finish my career at what is now Telesouth Communications/SuperTalk."

MISSOURI FFA RECOGNIZES ANDREW McCREA –

The Missouri FFA Association is recognizing **Andrew McCrea** (Farm Journal Media, Maysville, MO) with their Distinguished Service Award this year for his service to agricultural education and the Missouri FFA. They are extending a special thank you to him for his many years of service. Andrew is an award-winning radio and TV broadcaster, a nationally recognized speaker, and a farmer and rancher. He hosts the nationally-broadcast radio feature, *The American Countryside*, a program that has won five Oscars for rural and agricultural broadcasting. He



has interviewed hall of fame sports stars, Emmy and Grammy winners and even been body slammed by professional wrestlers! His broadcasting work has taken him to all 50 states and six continents to interview thousands of guests for his program. *The American Countryside* is unique in broadcasting because all the interviews are done on location. His broadcasts are heard daily on nearly 100 radio stations and Sirius XM satellite radio. The television version of the show is a regular feature on *U.S. Farm Report*. In addition to McCrea's broadcasting duties, he continues to own and manage the farm and ranch where he was born and raised. McCrea Farms operates nearly 4,000 acres of crop and pastureland in northwest Missouri raising corn, soybeans and beef cattle. A past chairman of the Missouri Beef Industry Council and representative to the U.S. Meat Export Federation, McCrea remains active in a number of agricultural groups, both as a participant and as a frequent speaker. McCrea's past is rooted in Missouri FFA, beginning with the King City FFA Chapter in the late 1980s. He served as the 1991-92 Missouri State FFA President and 1993-94 National FFA Secretary. He also worked as a trainer for National FFA from 1995-2005 and continues to assist the organization with national officer training and behind-the-scenes work at National FFA Convention. Since 1996, McCrea has conducted Missouri FFA State Officer Training, in addition to working with state officers in Illinois and Arizona. He is the Missouri State FFA Convention manager and is the director of both Area Officer Institute and Public Speaking Institute. McCrea has received the chapter, state and American Honorary FFA Degrees. McCrea and wife, Paula, along with children Luke and Allison, reside near Maysville, MO, where they are the fifth and sixth generations to operate the family farm.



LOUISIANA HALL OF DISTINCTION INDUCTEES – The 5th annual *Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Distinction* has honored **Margie Jenkins** and the late **Pierre "Pete" Lanaux** as its 2018 inductees, reports **Don Molino** (Louisiana Farm Bureau Agri-News Radio Network, Baton Rouge, LA). Both were recognized for their extraordinary contributions to Louisiana agriculture. Jenkins is the first woman inducted into the hall and is recognized nationally for her expertise in the nursery and landscape business. (She is 96½ years old). The late Lanaux was one of the state's most successful sugarcane farmers. He passed away just a few weeks before the induction ceremonies. **Don Molino (left) Senior Farm Broadcaster, Voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network, is pictured with Margie Jenkins and Peter Lanaux, who received the award for his father.**

SPRING PLANTING IS LATE IN MICHIGAN – **Richard Shields** (WKZO, Kalamazoo, MI) reports, "Temperatures here in the Kalamazoo area of southwest Michigan have been consistently 15 to 20 degrees below normal in early to mid-April with highs in the low 60s and freezes each night. Soil temperatures were running far below the low 50s we'd like for corn planting. Even with moderation in air temperatures there's, for sure, going to be little or no early planted rows this year. Given several dry days in a row and readings in the mid-60s for many of April's closing days, we may be in better shape come May. The extended outlook calls for a cool May – hopefully, not as cold. We're running about two weeks behind on heat units at this point." Richard adds, "Temps have been consistent and that's good news for our fruit growers right now. The 'green tip' stage in apples is running behind, so no freeze worries yet. Fruit growers are hoping for a

smooth transition into the growing season. A big challenge has been getting the word out to a lot of listeners in town concerned about what they'll find or not find at the local farmers' market or roadside stand. Extension folks tell me growers at spring meetings ask them 'why are we talking about planting with snow coming down?'"



PAST NAFB PRESIDENT RETIRES – March 6 marked **Pam Fretwell's** last day at *Farm Journal* as she is now retired and will be doing some contract work for *Farm Journal* and others through her own company Fretwell Communications. Pam never thought she would be involved in agriculture. Growing up in a suburb of Kansas City, she was the daughter of a jeweler and entrepreneur, and although her mother and father both came from rural roots, agriculture was probably the last thing she thought about growing up. Athletics were her passion and she set out to become a coach and physical education major at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. But then during her sophomore year, she met her husband, got married at the age of 20, and it changed her whole life. Finishing a college career at Culver Stockton College, Pam got her BS degree in education but found that she

loved driving a tractor more and was fascinated by all that farmers had to know to be successful. Gradually, she became an integral part of the family's row crop and registered Angus cattle operation and was always eager to learn more about how to farm the right way with all its challenges. For 26 years she lived the country life, raised three children and became a part of the community and lived the life she learned to love. It seemed that farming was a part of her DNA after all and that it was where she was meant to spend her life. But the dynamics changed drastically in 1998 when she found herself divorced, living in a nearby city of Quincy, IL, with nothing related to agriculture but a love to farm. In 1999 she was asked by WTAD (Quincy, IL) to become their fulltime farm director and to talk to famers. She expanded her programming in 2004 at WKAN to over 32 radio segments a day. With no training in broadcast journalism and no knowledge of how to write a story, she emulated others from NAFB in making sure that she was up to date on what was going on, not only locally, but nationally. She concentrated on what she knew was of importance to farmers, because she had been one herself. Agronomy, weather, markets along with sales filled her days for almost 13 years in broadcasting until she left after

finishing her year (2007) as NAFB president and moved back for a short time to the Kansas City area. She worked as a public relations director for an agricultural company until 2010, but returned to radio and created her own syndicated radio show called *Consumer AG Connection*, a show that was designed to help people understand more about agriculture and why farmers were to be admired for what they did and why they did it. In 2010, *Farm Journal* hired Pam as their Director of Industry Relations and bought her radio show. For 7½ years, Pam again showed her passion for agriculture on a daily basis as she became



involved with *the Farm Journal Plot* program, produced podcasts for three of the major publications of *Farm Journal*, and helped emcee many of their national meetings. Pam never dreamed that her life would be all about agriculture. “It just turned out that way,” she says. But as she looks forward to the next adventure, traveling across the countryside in a Class A motorhome, she hopes to visit the farms of the thousands of farmers she has met over the years, talking with them about their successes and challenges and, yes, even riding in the cab of their tractors and combines in hopes that they will ask her, would you like to drive?

Pam’s new contact information is: Fretwell Communications, fretwellcom@gmail.com, 217-440-1270.

FARM AND POWER EQUIPMENT SHOW CHANGES OWNERSHIP – *Hoosier Ag Today*, Indiana’s premier agricultural radio network, and *Farm World*, one of the oldest and largest weekly farm newspapers in the Eastern Corn Belt, have jointly purchased the Indiana-Illinois Farm and Outdoor Power Equipment Show from **Richard Sherman**, who has operated the show the past 39 years. The show will be held December 11 – 13, 2018, at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. Sherman announced in March that he no longer intended to operate the show. “When *Farm World* newspaper and *Hoosier Ag Today* heard about this decision, we were both disappointed,” said **Gary Thoe**, President of *Farm World*. “We felt the show was an important marketplace for farmers, agricultural professionals, agricultural companies, and agricultural educators in Indiana and the surrounding states.” The show is a tradition that thousands of Indiana farmers and businesses count on. “We felt it was important to see that tradition continue,” said **Gary Truitt**, President of *Hoosier Ag Today*. “There is a lot of uncertainty right now about the farm economy, so we felt it was important to make a bold statement about the future of Indiana agriculture and the future of Indiana farm families. We believe the future of agriculture is strong and sustainable and that this show will help growers and their suppliers to be productive and profitable in that future.” That future will be driven in large part by technology and innovation. Thus, the show will

focus a great deal on new technology and product innovation in farm equipment, seed genetics, precision agriculture, bio-science, robotics, sensors, big data, artificial intelligence, and more. “This is not a gathering of geeks, but a practical showcase of the latest technology and innovation that farmers can take home and put to work in their operations,” said Truitt. To reflect this, the name of the show has been changed to ***The Indiana Farm Equipment and Technology Expo***. The show will be interactive, with daily live demonstrations of new products and technology as well as an expanded series of educational seminars. One tradition will not change. Admission to the show is free. **Toni Hodson** of *Farm World* has been designated Show Manager and will work with exhibitors to help them secure the best locations in what is expected to be a sold-out show. For details on exhibit space, contact 1-800-876-5133, ext. 280 or thodson@farmworldonline.com. The combined media resources of *Hoosier Ag Today* and *Farm World* will be used to promote the event across the Eastern Corn Belt. A wide variety of Indiana farm organizations have been invited to participate in the event. A special show website that will keep farmers and exhibitors updated on the latest developments surrounding the show will be launched soon.

WE WANT YOUR NEWS – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact me at larryaquinn@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***.