



LET'S TALK,

FARM TALK

From space shuttle to smart phone. A former astronaut spoke at an event last year and asked everyone with a cell phone to raise his or her hand. He went on to say that in one cell phone, there is more intelligence than in an entire space shuttle.

Jim Stewart, farm broadcaster for AM-580 in Lubbock, Texas, told this story to help put into perspective how much technology has changed over the years. He could relate to this story as he described how this change has affected farm broadcasters. When he began broadcasting, he did not have a cell phone. He only used a small tape recorder. Now for Stewart and others, the cell phone has become a major component of farm broadcasting.

The agriculture industry, like technology, is ever changing. Stewart said it is important that people within the industry stay up-to-date on current issues and technology. This applies to farm broadcasters and the radio industry as well.

"You cannot sit still in this business or you will get passed up," Stewart said.

Ron Hays, farm broadcaster for Radio Oklahoma, said technology has changed his day-to-day duties throughout his 40 years as a farm broadcaster.

"Technology has changed the world of media," Hays said. "I started with a rather large cassette recorder in the field and used reel-to-reel recorders in the studio and spent lots of editing time to build a broadcast. Today, we are on the computer and use digital recorders in the field with SD cards and can use my iPhone to record interviews as well."

Advances in technology have also changed how farm television programs are produced. Clinton Griffiths,



executive producer and host of AgDay, compared producing a show three-and-a-half years ago to today. He said that production time has decreased, and it is even possible to produce a program completely from the road.

"Timeliness and turnaround is the biggest advantage the digital age brings us, and I believe that immediacy helps better inform our viewers," Griffiths said.

When their audience voiced they were not always in the right place at the right time to listen to traditional radio broadcasts, Hays said him and his team at Radio Oklahoma began making information more accessible on their website, as well as initiated a daily email.

"After the email started, it grew organically," Hays said. "With good feedback, resulting

in other farmers, ranchers or those in agribusiness wanting to know how they could sign up."

While technology has provided advancement, Hays said traditional radio is still important. In the same breath, utilizing multiple platforms helps in increasing the reach of information for broadcasters.

Griffiths said the Internet has changed the way people receive information in general.

While traditional forms of media are still important, social media is now in the mix. This

allows for a stronger connection between broadcasters and their listeners.

"It's helping us stay connected to the audience and have a more open dialogue about what's happening. Right now, I believe the ag industry is in a very good place within itself," Griffiths said. "However, social media has led to a lot of misinformation by consumers outside of agriculture. That's a challenge this industry will be addressing in a more active way in the future."

"It's not an either or situation, it's about more"

While social media and technology have brought more opportunities, Stewart said there are less full-time radio broadcasters today than there were when he began 40 years ago. However, he said people will continue to trust information obtained from a personable source over information obtained from the Internet.

“Just because it is on the internet doesn’t mean that

it is true. Some people tend to think that,” Stewart said. “I think we lend credibility to it as long as we don’t lie to them. It doesn’t take them long to figure out if I am lying. I have never lied about not being a farmer. Be honest with them up front.”

Although technology has drastically changed how farm broadcasters do their job, the passion farm broadcasters have for their work has not lessened.

“I find work as a farm broadcaster very rewarding. We still have an extremely engaged audience, one that desires to be informed and educated,” Griffiths said. “Knowing that the work you do may help a producer make a decision that impacts them or even our own ability to eat is powerful,” Griffiths said.

In order to be a farm broadcaster, Hays said a person needs two things, a love of broadcasting and journalism and a love for the agriculture industry.

“I have been blessed to have worked in the industries I love and to interact and meet the best people in the world. You can’t ask for much more than that,” Hays said.

The notion that cell phones now contain the technology that older model space shuttles used to contain helps put into context how important it is to stay current with new technology. Hays said that radio broadcasters must continually work to learn new technology and figure out how to make it work for them.

“Farming and ranching are embracing technology, and that means I have had to continue to learn the industry over and over,” Hays said.

The agriculture industry is constantly changing. Whether it is a new farm policy, a new farming practice, or a new issue facing the agriculture industry, it is important that farm broadcasters know and are able to communicate the topic or issues to their listeners. Griffiths said that no matter the form of media, the quality of the broadcast content will remain the most important aspect of farm broadcasting.

As the number of young people returning home to the farm is increasing, Griffiths said the importance of embracing new mobile technology and social media is rising as well.

“It’s not an either or situation, it’s about more,” Griffiths said. 📻

FARM BROADCASTING AND TECHNOLOGY 1921-2014

- 1921** The first daily radio program expressly for farmers was started. It transmitted USDA market reports on air.
- 1922** The first farm radio commercial was broadcast on the Farmers NoonHour on KFBB in Montana.
- 1923** The first vocal broadcast was transmitted by the University of Wisconsin.
- 1923** The first full-time farm broadcaster, Frank Mullin, of KDKA in Pittsburg took the air.
- 1933** Edwin Armstrong invents FM radio.
- 1933** The USDA reported that 36 stations had been licensed by the Commerce Department, and 35 had been approved to broadcast USDA Markets.
- 1951** In September, the first regular farm TV show began in Memphis, Tn.
- 1990** Virtually every network and syndicated radio program (from talk to music) had mirrored to satellite delivery.
- 1993** The first internet broadcasts began when the Internet Multicasting Service was set up.
- 2002** Social Media takes off.
- 2004** Podcasting begins.
- 2006** Howard Stern ditches terrestrial radio for Sirius satellite radio.
- 2011** Spotify adds radio to its repertoire.

Information from The Sonos Blog and NAFB Harvesting the Power of Farm Broadcasting
Created by Jayci Cave

Jayci Cave
ACKERLY, TEXAS