

December 27, 2019

## RANDY PRYOR'S LAST NEWS COLUMN

I guess one of my main missions in my Extension career was if I didn't know the answer to a problem or issue that was asked of me, I generally knew people who did. And regardless of who it was or their status in the community, my mission was to deliver third party, land grant research information and help people.

I originally grew up on a farm south of Nemaha, Nebraska in the southeast part of the state. My parents are now gone but I have one older brother, Larry Pryor in Papillion; two older sisters Sharon Pryor, Meridian, Idaho, and Sara Stiers, Shubert; and a younger brother, Alan Pryor, Lincoln. I was raised in the 1960's and 70's in a very small farm house that was built in 1905 and is still being rented.

My parents had a huge garden and raised their own meat and milk. You knew when the pennycress was active in the spring because you could taste it in the separated whole, milk that we drank! My parents, Wyman and Donna, were very active in the community of Nemaha, church, Farm Bureau, 4-H club leaders, Gideons Society and I could go on and on. I was extremely lucky to have supportive and great parents.

I graduated from Southeast Nebraska Consolidated High School in 1976 which was a new school that was to last 50 years. That wonderful facility had to close its doors in 2009. I received a B.S. degree in Mechanized Agriculture in 1980 during a tough time in agriculture. An important teacher and mentor of mine in college was the late professor Jack Schinstock and he challenged me to think ahead all the time. My M.S. degree thesis was comparing soybean oil as a substitute diesel fuel and comparing it to standard fuel and soybean ethyl ester purchased from a laboratory in Ohio for \$50 per gallon. That fuel today is known as soy biodiesel. Another mentor to me was professor Milford Hanna on the biofuels project. Having great teachers on East Campus at UNL made a difference. Jack was the one that suggested looking into Extension as a career.

I ended up as a temporary employee in Saline County in Extension when a very talented and smart county agent by the name of Jim Emal took a one-year leave from his post teaching farmers about microcomputers. Jim knew it would have implications for farm operations in the future. UNL summoned Jim to come to campus and change the various Departments from main frame computing to microcomputers and change Extension offices across Nebraska. That left the Saline County Extension Board with a decision one night to keep this temporary greenhorn or request UNL to bring down a second applicant. I remember board member Leon Meyer from Milligan having a lot of fun over that decision that evening!

Back then you were expected to know everything in horticulture, animal science, crops and community resource development. I really attended a lot of meetings with specialists and would continue to dig for answers. Today, sometimes, those answers come from working with expertise in other land grant universities.



Every five years was a new farm bill and a new challenge to help people make the right decision and get more money into our area. When the CCX climate exchange program came out to pay farmers for no-till farming that added carbon in soils, I was proud of the fact Gage, Jefferson and Saline County Nebraska had the most contracts of any other counties in Nebraska working with David Miller at the Iowa Farm Bureau.

I inherited the idea of no-till farming in Southeast Nebraska that began in 1975 near Tobias. If you wanted to have success hunting in the fall, you went to Tobias. In 1975 there were less than 100 acres no-tilled. With the help of ag dealer Fran Brakhage, Chevron chemical dealer Jerry Adams, and the Lower Big Blue NRD renting out Buffalo planters, it grew to 7,000 acres in 1982. Of significance, this was before the invention of Roundup and we had over 25 farmers successfully no tilling their crops, saving labor, saving topsoil and adding needed moisture in dry years.

With conventional farming, Saline County had a problem of topsoil erosion with low infiltration rate soils. Also, in drought years it would not be unheard of to have a twenty bushel per acre dryland corn yield or even a zero. In 2012, the most extreme year for drought and heat, no-till farmers experienced 70-80 bushels per acre. Seed and genetics of corn have played a role but soil health changes and soil organic matter changes due to no-till farming has benefited agriculture in our area.

I have been blessed with working with some very good people over the years. In the 1980's I worked with Vi Damkroger, Home Economist, and office support personnel in Marilyn Albert and Eleanor Tietjen. Doug Duba was a part-time assistant back then. Then later support people like Judy Bors and Beth Horak. Today, working with Leanne Manning, Extension Educator; Becky Vales, 4-H Secretary; Lou Hajek, Office Manager; Anita Stougard, 4-H Clover Kid program; and Eric Stehlik, Saline County 4-H Assistant, has been a great experience to have as long time co-workers. I will always remember the fun times working with co-workers from other counties including Paul Hay, Larry Germer, Jane Esau, Bob Stritzke, and Barb Schmidt from Gage and Jefferson County.

Saline County was a great place to raise a family and I am very proud of the fact that all of my family is tied to education and has Master's degrees. My wife Michelle, a UNL graduate, was an elementary teacher for 33 years in Beatrice. She commuted to Beatrice and put her heart and soul into teaching, in getting kids off on the right foot and is now retired. She somehow found the energy to hold down the fort at home and kept large quantities of food on the table for three growing boys while I was at meetings all the time. Sons Andrew Pryor is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and basketball coach at Syracuse; Ryan Pryor works in Lincoln at the LPS administration building; and Aaron Pryor is a Health and Physical Education teacher and basketball coach at Elmwood Murdock.



After 37 plus years working in Saline County and surrounding area as a Nebraska Extension Educator, I am proud of my family, I am proud to have represented the University of Nebraska with an office in Saline County, and I am proud of our land-grant University. It has been rewarding working in and around Saline County with you, but it is time to move on to a generation of Extension professionals that have the challenge of keeping up with the latest changes in agricultural technology and the new things that are emerging around the corner to feed a hungry world and growing population in a global marketplace.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County · 306 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 · Fax (402) 821-3398 · e-mail: [randy.pryor@unl.edu](mailto:randy.pryor@unl.edu)