

The Impact of Radio in Rural America

Published on Mar 1, 2021 by Eric Geiger, AFM, AAC



Peoples Company Land Managers travel the countryside working with some of the finest individuals in the agriculture industry. We have news and information in the palm of our hand, but there is still something organic about driving down a gravel road and listening to the local AM news radio. Nebraska Land Manager, Eric Geiger, tells us about his local station and agriculture's connection to the radio.

When I was growing up in central Nebraska, every tractor, pickup, and grain truck was set to 880 Farm Radio, KRVN. Even my grandparents, who did not farm anymore, had the station on in the kitchen and listened every morning. I can still hear the hosts' voices in my mind as they reported the daily news, weather, and commodity markets.

I can vividly remember one program to this day: a sixty-second program called "It's a Point of Law." The station also had its claim to fame with the famous Monogram Money Wheel, where listeners could call in and win \$8.80 if their initials came up. The wheel was only about twelve inches in diameter, but it felt as exciting as being on *The Price is Right*. During summer nights we listened to the Kansas City Royals and Nebraska Husker football as the seasons changed. KRVN has the longest-standing broadcast time of Husker football, with thirty-five consecutive years.

How it all started:

After a 70-degree day in November of 1948, a record-breaking blizzard came through within forty-eight hours. The wind and snow continued for days, with snow bearing down on the region until February and stranding people and livestock across Nebraska. There were sixty inches of snow in some places, with O'Neil, Nebraska, reporting fifty-foot drifts. Millions of cattle were stranded, and 240,000 people were trapped. The US Air Force delivered hay to stranded cattle, military vehicles transported supplies to families, and over 1,600 pieces of heavy equipment opened 115,000 miles of roads.

After that extreme weather event, organizers came together to build a statewide radio station to deliver communication to remote areas of Nebraska. Shares of stock were sold at ten dollars a share to raise needed funds to start the station. In February 1951, KRVN started in an old funeral home in Lexington, Nebraska, with 10,000 watts at 1010 on the AM dial, "It was 1010 for KRVN."

In 1972, the station expanded 40,000 more watts and moved on the dial a little to the left to become 880 and remains there today. Totaling 50,000 watts is unique in that it is the most any station can have, with only 50 stations in the country having that authorization. To avoid conflict with stations in the east during the evening hours, KRVN must change signal direction more westerly, and it is said people in California can hear programming.

The format remains pretty much the same today: news, weather, market report, then repeat, with country music in the evening. KRVN is primarily owned by farmers and ranchers, who also make up the Board of Directors. My dad served for over fifteen years as President of the Board of Directors with one of the longest-running terms.

Today KRVN is known as the Rural Radio Association and covers more than the entire state:

KRVN AM/FM - Lexington, Nebraska
KNEB AM/FM - Scottsbluff, Nebraska
KTIC AM/FM - West Point, Nebraska
KUVR AM - Holdrege, Nebraska
KAMI AM - Cozad, Nebraska

It is safe to say that most of the United States' agricultural regions have their own version of KRVN. Still doing what they do best, serving agriculture with advertising, news, weather, and market reports. Even with technology at our fingertips any hour of the day, there is something about the familiar voice on the radio; a long-standing tradition one can depend on. Rural radio may have formed out of necessity to deliver information in times of emergency, but it has become part of the rich fabric of farm life across the country.

To find more stories about the land and the people who work it, check out AmericanFarmlandOwner.com.