

Kyle Bauer – 2, KFRM

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

"It's hard to farm while listening to your radio station," a listener said. "Why is that?" came the question. "Because I don't like it when I have to step out of the tractor and miss something," the listener said. In backhanded fashion, that is high praise for a rural Kansas radio station which has become a leader in agricultural broadcasting. It's now known as the Voice of the Plains. This is today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we met Kyle Bauer, owner and general manager of Clay Center's KCLY FM radio station. He is also owner and general manager of KFRM radio, which is 550 on the AM dial.

Kyle was a farmer and businessman in the Clay Center area, farming 4,000 acres near the rural community of Morganville, population 192 people. Now, that's rural.

He bought into ownership of KCLY at Clay Center in 1994. After growing that business, his next venture in radio was to buy KFRM. This station had been founded back in 1947 but it was at a low point when Kyle bought it in 1996.

"We had zero employees and not a single customer," Kyle said. He started working on building the business. "We were able to double sales for twenty straight months," Kyle said with a smile.

As general manager, Kyle instituted a new approach to advertising. "We want long-term relationships," Kyle said. "Our ads are not glitzy. We don't set out to win awards. We're not about selling ads, we're about selling the people's products," he said.

KFRM became a fulltime farm talk format. The owners upgraded technology and equipment and put a strong emphasis on agricultural news, markets, and weather.

"Farmers may listen to the radio for hours, in the tractor, the pickup, or the shop," Kyle said. "If we're going to be on that long, we need to provide quality content and be entertaining and not annoying," he said.

"A farmer's most valuable asset is his time," Kyle said. "We can save him time by covering state news, national news, markets and market analysis while he's working during the day," Kyle said. Every market day, KFRM provides more than 20 livestock and commodity reports. Weather is covered twice each hour.

One day when a radio program ran short, Kyle's broadcaster hollered down the hall: "Hey, I've got seven minutes to fill." Kyle came to the studio and visited on-air about things that were going on that day. It proved to be so popular that this became an ongoing feature on KFRM. Now Kyle and fellow broadcaster Duane Toews have a fun and informative daily dialogue on a program called Plain Talk.

KFRM serves a strong agricultural region centered on western Kansas and beyond. The station's signal covers 120,000 square miles, 149 counties, and parts of three states.

Kyle considers both of his radio stations to be community stations, broadly defined. For KCLY, the community is Clay Center and the towns that surround it. For KFRM, the community is the community of people involved in agriculture. That is not confined to any city limits or county lines, but covers the entire signal area.

“One of our philosophies is to be a part of something bigger,” Kyle said. He partners with others such as the Kansas Ag Network or the High Plains Journal on various projects.

He also believes that the agricultural topics should have broad applicability and not be parochial to a particular place. “We want to be as relevant in Liberal as in Emporia,” Kyle said.

For more information, see www.kfrm.com.

One day Kyle was at a farm trade show and he got a surprising comment from a farmer. “It’s hard to farm while listening to your radio station,” a listener said. “Why is that?” Kyle asked. “Because I don’t like it when I have to step out of the tractor and miss something,” the listener said. Kyle took that as high praise that listeners were so attached to his radio station. We commend Kyle Bauer and all those involved with KFRM radio for making a difference with such extensive agricultural coverage. It is good that the plains have this voice.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.