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Hello and welcome to the extension experience podcast with your hosts Josh Bushong Trent Milacek, and Dana Zook. Here you'll find insights into Oklahoma agriculture from West area specialists employed by Oklahoma State University Extension. Their perspectives come from assisting county educators and producers in the areas of agronomy, animal science and economics. Thank you for joining us.

0:34

Welcome back to the extension experience podcast. My name is Trent Milacek, Josh Bushong and I'm Dana Zook. Today we have Rick Nelson with us. He's joining us for another edition of our educator spotlight series. Rick is the Garfield county ag educator and Rick, you have a long story and extension that goes to a place that I'm not usually too fond of up north. We will help you along here... But you kind of want to go over how you got started an extension and kind of your timeline as to how you've gotten to where you are now.

1:08

I'm probably going to tell you things you're going to just be dismayed about. Because I have no orange in my pedigree.

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That's okay. I've got some red dappled around...

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It's really not okay...

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No, I went to Panhandle State University for a four year degree in animal science and ag business, double major kind of thing a 100 years ago, and I didn't have any place to go and there was a district director showed up from Southwest Kansas that interviewed me and offered me a job and I thought what the heck, that's that was closer to home and Goodwill was the home so I took a job in southwest Kansas for 13 years. I was in in Clark County, Ashland, Kansas and and I learned a lot.....

1:57

K State Extension right? Ha ha

2:00

Yes, ma'am.

2:01

You say you've learned a lot. But what types of things did you learn? Well, I was not an agronomist, I will make that clear. And there was some agronomists there that held my hand and taught me a few things. There was an old research station in Mineola. At the time, it's probably waiting for Josh, but there's Southwest Kansas experiment field, and a little old German from North East Kansas. Marvin Lindquist. He was a bachelor, and that's all he did was take care of that 160 acre Research Farm and he kind of held my hand took me under his wing to teach me what he thought I needed to know. So that's where I got my agronomy training Josh. So that's what ruined me right there. He was a corn farmer and a bean farmer and a sorghum farmer and he couldn't understand why he couldn't get everybody in southwest Kansas to do that. Right.

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You got to start somewhere. That's true.

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So is there a lot of irrigation in that area?

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very little, very little, very little We were We were below down off the Arkansas River drainage so now there wasn't much irrigation

3:07

okay you mentioned you're closer to home? Where do you originally call home?

3:12

that's true I I didn't was an okie or I am an okie I grew up in Blaine County, Northern Blaine County. Went public school in Canton, that general area. So that's where I started and then moved west just because they offered to pay a little of my bills. So that's why I went to panhandle state. I made that more attractive.

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Yeah. So what did you hope you were gonna do with that degree? You said you didn't know what you wanted to do,

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but I really didn't. I always craved a feed yard job of some guy who worked for the commercial cattle feeding industry, but it just never came along for me at any particular time.

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So you probably ended up okay.

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I stuck to education.,

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I've drove feed truck for a couple summers. I don't know. It's okay. But it gets kind of old.

4:00

It would.

4:01

But yeah, it's good though. That's what I had dreamed for , didn't materialize.

4:07

So what got you out of Kansas?

4:11

History says that Kansas was has battled budgets and county budgets and they were doing their first round of extension districting putting counties together. And Clark County was a county that had budget

issues they were they struggled with with budgeting. And an opportunity came up and believe it or not another old I call him a mentor. But in beaver County, I was down to the beaver county pig sale in the spring. And John Misko was ag agent and he said he'd just taken the job and he was moving and it was going to be opening Beaver. And I thought, that's further from home. But I've always I always loved the panhandle. I mean, I really enjoyed living there when I went to college. I mean, I went out there and stayed. I never hardly went home.

5:03

So I thought because you didn't want to work on the farm?

5:05

Yeah, that could be. It could be. But so I, I made the effort and made application and eventually got hired on. I mean, it wasn't us the snap move. I mean, I put 13 years in in Kansas. I mean, that was pretty good first step, I thought trent. And in my district director there, he couldn't believe I was moving. And he thought he said, I can find you a better place if you really want to stay in extension . But anyhow, I believe he was too late by the then. I had already told he told the district director down here I'd come this way. So anyway, and 40 years, I've been with Cooperative Extension Service. Just a few months past that right now. In Kansas and in Beaver County. And finally here in Garfield County, I'm just a slow learner to make that big circle to get back to closest I've ever been to home right now.

6:02

Now, say that you first learn agronomy there in Kansas. But I do that know your certified crop advisor? Tell us a little about that.

6:12

Oh, that happened right off the bat when Dr. Gordon Johnson he came out and told us ag educators that we weren't going to be smart enough to pass the CCA test. That was pretty good challenge for a lot of us.

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We can see you would be challenged to prove him wrong.

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Yeah, he and he was right, Josh. I didn't pass the state portion the first time. I did have to take state portion of that twice. But I passed it the second time,

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but I did have to admit that part. Yeah.

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Well, but I he wasn't he wasn't fully right. But he he did offend me when he said he didn't think that there was an educator who be sharp enough to become CCA's and there was a lot of us that did.

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That's probably a lost art of motivation. Isn't it? I don't think you'd get away with doing that to people nowadays.

7:00

It helped you aspire to do more than it did at that point in time? It really did.

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And so tell somebody who doesn't really know what that is, what is that? What does that hit? Well, how did that help you in your extension career?

7:11

I'm not sure?

7:11

Oh, you're not?

7:15

There, there is some knowledge, there's an increase. I did learn a lot. I mean, I learned a lot about more of Oklahoma agriculture. And that that's two phase certification process, a national test, which was very broad and very basic, I guess. And I didn't find that one hard. Some of my co workers found that one

harder than they did the state one, but most of them had worked in Oklahoma all their life and kind of understood Oklahoma agriculture. I didn't know anything about forestry, which was a part of it. Like that, and, and I didn't know I knew what a peanut was, but I didn't know the fertility levels and, and disease issues of peanuts. I mean, I I thought, huh, I think could have been a lot more prepared for this than what I was and I just wasn't ready for it. I don't know when I got in there to take that but now I've enjoyed that certified crop advisor program is really done more by what I consider those in industry the agronomist for the various co ops or consulting firms. But but it's still it's nice to know that, that maybe not quite as up to snuff as they are, but I'm close.

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That's good. Yeah. But you haven't always been like, they we've got a lot of Agronomy going on here. But we haven't you haven't always been focused on the agronomy.

8:36

No, I'm truly truly loving my cows more than I do my crops I left admit to that. I grew up on a cow calf operation and when I was in beaver County, I dabbled a lot with various beef projects, but I enjoyed feeding cattle there from time to time and that was that's where I really realized how much I missed my my first desire was when I was feeding feeding a few cattle off and on at different locations. But I worked at a sale barn on odd days as well and kind of learned a little about that industry as well.

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Going into being well rounded. I know when you came to Garfield county, it probably upped your game on lawns and gardens, my horticulture game. Yeah, that that is now definitely circumvented. Everything that I do know or is the lawns and gardens questions, three questions that is central in Garfield County, and not just from Enid. But this basically that this is the go-to place for homeowners, yard folks. Regardless of your address in Garfield County, I get a lot of them. I remember when I first came, Roger Gribble said by spring he said now you just be prepared. You'll have one in your office you'll have two sitting in the lobby and probably two or three outside waiting to get in to talk to you about their specific their specific problem and he said And the funny thing is, they may all be the same question but you can't get them all in there at the same time.

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They all have a different part of the plant.

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Yes, that's true.

10:22

And and one thing that you have to like better now than then I remember years ago, is man the phone the iPhone has revolutionized the ability to answer questions because I can take a picture of a sick vinca and send that to plant pathology and more times than not have an answer the next day. Where as before iPhones and pictures. I mean, those kind of things took two weeks. And you have a lot of times you'd send the plant and you know they'd have to look at it maybe culture or something. It doesn't work that way always but a lot of times you can get an answer for for a customer the next day.

11:05

That brings up an interesting topic, um, how Extension has changed you. You walked right into that one. Yes, I did here for a long time.

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But I do want to point out one thing and this this goes back to Kansas Trent. When and you guys are all gonna probably roll here with laughter. I remember when fax machines were introduced to county extension. (laughing)

11:30

Yeah, okay. But it my district director at the time, said, oh, they're never going to have a place. We're never going to use them. You know, and it wasn't within five years. We were working on computers. But I'd never forgot that when my district director said, Oh, yeah, you don't need to worry about that. There's never going to be a place for a fax machine.

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He wasn't quite a visionary was he?

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Yeah, he was not. A great guy, but he missed that call for sure.

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That is the hard part you you're never going to predict exactly what's going to happen it's how you adapt once you get into the middle of it that really tells you how the organization is going to evolve and and succeed but I'm just curious what era of extension Have you enjoyed the most?

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In enjoyment? I mean, I have yet you know, I know I get grumpy from time to time

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just a little bit...

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senior itis.

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Yeah, it could be but you know, I don't know. I stay and I continue because I still continue to learn a few things and I enjoy helping people. Like said some people are seems like people now are so much more intense that, you know, you talked I talked about having one day answers and that they're still not happy with that. So I mean, the intensity is more than what I really enjoy, but I still enjoy the when you get to help someone and answer a question. And they're very appreciative and very thankful, man that makes my day. I mean that just, you know, I've done what I'm paid to do and left with happy customers, I guess or clients, I really want to describe folks,

13:13

I hope you can take like, I think some of us probably can attest to that. But I hope that you take those cool, great opportunities home with you at the end of the day, every day because I think sometimes I focus in on those bad ones. You might have four good, good experiences with clients and then that one that you didn't make so happy. You take that one home with you that night. I don't know.

13:35

But I think that's human nature. I mean, I've I can recount those and I find myself doing that for all my career where where I was, the ones that that I'm ashamed about and stick my head down is I'll think of one of those like he just described but where I really slipped up and didn't get it right. And but there's been I don't know it more than I could ever recall that were great experiences, but the ones I tend to mostly reboring back are those that I failed at?

14:05

Well, it's a it's a service sort of job, right? And not all services, we provide you know, to that to that level.

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That's good advice for new educators though is you're going to do things wrong, you're going to do things well. Knowing who to call on having a peer group that you can rely on is probably been very important in your past in terms of getting those questions answered. Absolutely. Man, without a doubt my problem now is I'm about to run out of those.

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You've become that for other people.

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I've become that and I do get a few calls from others and then I I enjoy that and I appreciate that that I am looked at as someone that can help them answer your question from time to time. We strive an extension it we all do, I mean, if we have been added more than five years, I think we're all there to help people. That's what we're there for. And we believe we can and we keep trying, how's that? And if we miss a step in the way, and we'd like to think, man, I'm gonna get that right next time. So that's, that's why I keep coming back and keep doing it year after year.

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Now, I know you can dabble in everything and expect to be kind of a jack of all trades and sometimes you specialize more and you have more answers in those certain topics but also bouncing the different clientele from the cow calf operator, crop producer to the homeowner with his garden issues to 4Hers. How do you balance all the different facets?

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Wow, the balance is, is you have to make them all feel like when they all come in the same day you have to make them all feel like they're the one. That's a fact, in my opinion. I don't have as much 4H responsibility here in Garfield county that I've had previously. But I do have quite a bit of interaction with 4H and FFA members through the livestock shows.

16:00

At the county and district level, so I want to just say it's evolved in such a way here, whether it's a Master Gardener or a homeowner, or a crop producer or livestock producer, you have to make them feel like when they come in that you have to focus. I mean, I can't be and I catch myself, you know, you know, you need to go do a nitrate test on this stock of Sudan, but they want to tell a story. And I'm wanting to go do that, but you just have to stop, let them tell their story and then go do what they want. And if you do that for everybody, it makes me feel like I'm more relating to them. But at the same time, I know from some people's standpoints, it makes you think he sure inefficient. It takes him longer to do that, than what it should. But but at the same time, there is kind of a balance that you have to find that lets you meet the people's needs as well as you get your job done.

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I found it's useful when people start telling stories, I start thinking about how I'm going to answer what they really want to know.

17:01

Yeah, yeah

17:02

Then sometimes I get accused of not paying attention because I'm probably not listening to what they're saying their story trying to think about how I'm going to answer their their actual question the reason they came in

17:13

Yeah

17:14

But Rick, you haven't talked very much about your, probably your passion, which is your cow herd. Oh, oh you and I seem to ever talk about oh, we're we're talking about Yeah, I when I was in Beaver one of my last escapades there when I don't know how that worked out, but one of my dabblings. Because Dana is always intrigued by that comment that I acquired at the at the local livestock auction. 13 Half Blood and Holstein heifers as 300 pound calves one day. with the intent, you know, I'm on my cows out of them. I don't know what I'm gonna do with them. But I'm going to do that. And so that was the beginning of, what I always promoted to those that knew me, as my Dairy Queens. It was quite a I had not been in the cow calf business for 20 years. I mean I had when I was in that Kansas I fed a few cattle and and in so man it was just kind of an interesting occupation but to take those Half Blood holstein heifers and they were also half polled hereford so they looked like a black baldy or a red baldy. And, and

they were out of season of course, they were July or August calves and so I didn't have them big enough to breed one year so I carry them over another year. And man, they've been an integral part of my beef cow experience because I kept them around, grew them up, got him bred, and I sent him to my son who has a farm ranch in Harper County. And they spent four or five, six years there, maybe more, maybe eight. And then when when I had the opportunity or the situation arose, not took over some of some Blaine County land where where my father operated. I brought him down there. So my cow herd is basically 110 cows and I'll bet I'll bet half of them are Dairy Queen influenced and it's made a real difference in observations in the in most people cringe at a milk cow base, but I've never had any of those production issues udder issues with the dairy queens. I had one early on that did have milk fever, and I did not save her because she was just too productive. That was a long time ago. But one thing I noticed now is Dana had an unfortunate episode this summer where I lost some cows. And I thought what am I going to do? I got four orphan calves out on this 40 headed cows now. And the interesting thing was, I can't I know which calves they are because they are all ear tagged. They were off first calf heifers. But you can't tell it by looking at him because these cows came from the Dairy Queen influence, when they stop, they may have three calves nursing them, they don't care what calf nurses them. They just kind of stand let it all happen. So you can't find my orphans because they they're just as fat as all the rest of them.

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That's great. So you and I have talked a lot about what Dave Lalman talks about cow size, and how much influence we've put on milking ability. So have you seen? Do you feel like you have cows that just really consume more feed? I mean, I don't think you do. I don't think you've seen those high maintenance type cows from that situation, but you would expect, right?

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I would say that the original half bloods were, they were they were definitely higher maintenance, but I tended to use a real moderate being being one that liked feed cattle. I wanted moderate frame a lot of muscle and a lot of shape and milk and an issue so every time I saved a daughter or granddaughter, great granddaughter now they don't have any higher requirements.

21:00

I think they might but they still have that temperament. And they still seem to have, I hate to say that because that gets us in trouble above average milk production ability, which at times is not good but there's times like this season on that one particular pasture cows I've really appreciated that fact that I was able to do that and not have to figure out what I was going to do.

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But you are very successful on a lot of love grass.

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Yeah, I tried to do some intense management on that and I don't know it seems to work but I could do better. I will put it that way. There's incorporating farm ground into beef cow operation and, and only depended on Mother Nature's rain supplement is difficult because even this year, you we were getting up to a point of time before the rain season hit that I was within two weeks of going into drought management and having to sell some some stock whether it been cows or calves in June and I, I didn't want to do it, but I was I was making the plan to get it done. Then it started to rain.

22:10

You also do burning.

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Yes.

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You do alot of burning - using that management tool if you want to talk just a little bit about that. True. It's springtime, burning love grass. And when I was in the panhandle, we would burn a lot of old bluestem. And so it didn't feel unnatural to me. to burn lovegrass. Love grasses is very coarse fibrous grass, that takes a really good set of teeth for a cow to eat. So old cows and young cows don't don't do well on it, but you burn it. A little fertilizer and a little weed control and the weed control is probably the least necessary. And man if you can get on it and stay on it and graze it. You're great. I've rotated off into a more I've made hay out of it once and then then put the cows back on it. I have to say it's not working as well, because because grass is getting too tough, I'm gonna have to go back and graze it early. And if I have to hay it later, I may have to hay it later. But I haven't got that sorted out yet for a final answer,

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That just goes back to that we are constantly learning.

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Yes

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You always have more to say than you think you do.

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We have a lot of experience in our organization and encourage younger educators or producers that have other questions just to reach out to their county educators.

23:28

But, Rick, that's been a wrap for us. That's airing we've gotten a lot out of here. I think we've learned a lot about you. And I'm sure we'll have you back again soon to talk about some other items. But with that, we really appreciate our audience for joining us and we'll see you next time.

23:49

We hope you've enjoyed what you've heard. If you'd like to hear more or follow up on the discussed topics, please reach out to your local county extension agent. OSU has a presence in all seventy seven counties with educators eager to assist you. Also, please consider checking the description for links to our social media pages and further information pertinent to the conversation. Thanks again and we'll talk to you soon

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