

Livestock auctioneer, radio voice retiring

By Frank J. Buchman

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There have been many transformations in the auction and sale barn industries as well.

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Certainly, if there is anyone who would know, it is Col. Johnson, a lifelong stockman.

Johnson started working at the Lindsborg Sale Barn as a teenager, became an auctioneer 44 years ago and, at age 76, is planning retirement from 40 years of employment at Farmers & Ranchers Livestock Commission Company, Inc., Salina.

Retirement recognition is planned at the barn Thursday, March 27, with a special invitation extended to all friends and customers. Refreshments will be served throughout the day.

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small communities had back then."

"Farmers used to feed out their cattle, usually a couple dozen on a typical farm. If they had twice that many, it was considered a big operation. Sale barns would sell a few hundred head of livestock a week and make a good living," Johnson continued. "Now farmers must have hundreds of head to make a go of it, and larger auction barns often sell several thousand cattle in a week."

Not only has Johnson been an auctioneer at the Salina pavilion, he's also served as a fieldman, visiting stockmen over a wide area, providing an approximate weight of their livestock and giving an estimate of what they will sell for at auction.

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Stepping down from his duties at Farmers & Ranchers Livestock won't leave Johnson with too much idle time. "I'll still be in the auction business, and we have quite a few sales lined up this spring," he admitted.

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However, Johnson did later attend the Reisch Auction School in Mason City, Iowa, continued selling at Wilson and was soon asked to conduct farm and household auctions. "One day I came out of the barn, and there waiting for me in a car were two of the owners of Farmers & Ranchers. They'd built this new barn in '64, I

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The Johnsons have lived in Salina since the mid-'50s, raising four sons, and now they have seven grandchildren. "My wife has become the head babysitter," he acknowledged.

"Our boys still had to work on the farm when they were growing up," Johnson insisted. "Larry and Steve started helping me with auctions when they were just 12

years old. I mean they were selling, and they are still in the business with me." Son Ken is in the Air Force, and son Jeff passed away six years ago.

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Also called upon to conduct purebred cattle auctions over a wide area, Johnson declared, "I did sell many purebred sales, actually mostly Herefords, and I did have one horse sale in Missouri. I never worked regularly at any other sale barns, after I started here. I had several opportunities, but I wanted to be loyal to my customers. They'd sometimes insist that I sell

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"Now, calves often wean half again or more than that and sell for well over a dollar, and farmers can't make a living. It's the overhead: the

price of machinery, fuel, fertilizer. Everything's gone sky-high," Johnson figured.

Likewise land values have increased at least tenfold. "I've sold pastures at auction for \$100 an acre, and now they'll sell for \$1,000 or more," compared Johnson, who has conducted a number of sales grossing over a million dollars during his career.

Although there may be a leveling of prices, Johnson pointed out, "They aren't making any more land, so it probably won't go down too far. What worries me the most is if these grain prices, now at a record level, would drop to where they were a few years ago, and the input costs stay up. It really does scare me, makes me shudder."

Johnson commented on problems in horse merchandising. "I've never seen the good horses sell any higher

than they do now," he confirmed. "Yet, the colt and non-trained horse market is under extreme pressure, because slaughter plants are closed, and there isn't a base price. That, along with all of these wild mustangs we taxpayers are feeding. I don't know where it's all going to end up."

Present trends in livestock marketing are forecast by Johnson. "I used to keep a notebook filled with farmer-feeder cattle buyers throughout the Midwest, and I would call them whenever we were going to have certain lots of cattle," he remembered. "Now, there aren't very many farmers who feed cattle. We sell most of our cattle to order buyers.

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ranchers, feeders and order buyers who I've had the opportunity to know and work for. I always tried to get the highest price for whatever I was selling. I never played any favorites," Johnson summarized.

Farmers & Ranchers Livestock is expected to continue prospering and growing, according to Johnson. "It's been a great 40 years, but it's time for me to slow down," he emphasized. "I'll keep busy with conducting auctions and rural real estate sales. I'm not quitting those."

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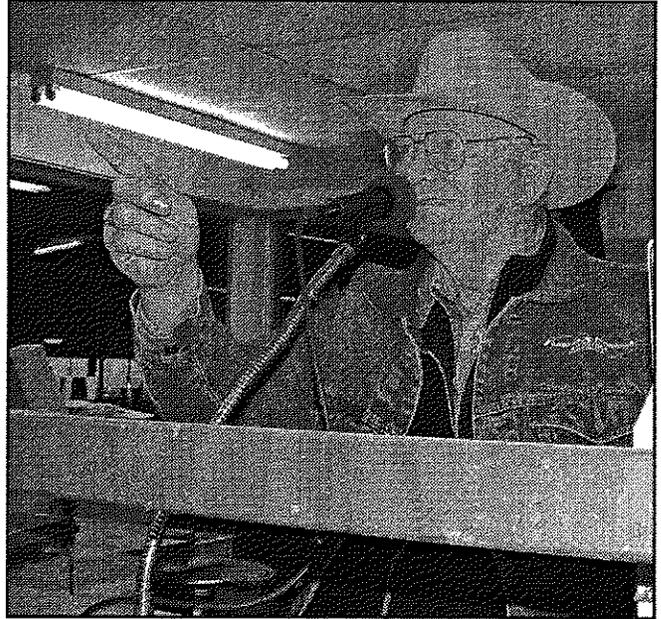
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In the most familiar position anyone knows him: Col. Roger Johnson has been serving as an auctioneer, fieldman and radio market reporter for Farmers & Ranchers Livestock Commission Company, Inc., Salina, for 40 years. Also conducting many farm, household and land auctions over a wide area, Johnson is retiring from the auction barn at the end of the month. Retirement recognition is planned Thursday, March 27, at the sale pavilion.