Orion Samuelson

Good morning and welcome to my university, or as I got my doctorate the easy way, an honorary one, and it was actually my first college degree, and I got it at age 67. Now, you don't have to do the arithmetic. I'm now 72, but as you will learn, I am Norwegian and at age 72 I figure I'm half done, so I plan on, plan on being around for a while.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some personal prejudices, biases and opinions with you this morning. I can assure I will not talk science. That would be foolhardy on my part to do that surrounded by, I would guess if I said is there a doctor in the house, I'd probably see two hundred hands go up. So I'm not going to get into that. And I might also add to the background that you just heard. I grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin, and getting up at five o'clock in the morning to milk cows, and by the time I was nineteen or twenty I decided I was not going to spend the rest of my life getting up at five o'clock in the morning to milk cows. Didn't like to work that hard. Still don't. So I left and became an agricultural broadcaster and ever since I have been getting up at three o'clock in the morning to do a program for people who get up at five o'clock to milk cows. This doesn't say much. The University of Illinois may want to take that doctorate back, I'm not sure, because it does not say much about what's happening upstairs here. But I will say that sitting in a warm studio on a cold winter morning is a lot better than sitting in a dairy barn and milking cows and getting wrapped around the neck with a tail that's been in the gutter all night. That's one of the reasons I'd get on the school bus in the morning and the kids would move as far away from me as they could get, because that just never left you.

I want to spend some time today, as I said, not talking science but talking about the challenge of change. Dean Easter talked a great deal about change, and I want to continue on that theme and analyze it; share and amplify just a little bit more because every event, every agricultural meeting that I attend these days, there is one word I hear more than any other. It's not a four-letter word. It is the word change. This is what everybody is talking about. Change and how it seems to be increasing in speed and volume, and as people involved in the agricultural industry today, we need to be aware of the change, and we need to do something about it.

One of my concerns over the years is the fact that, generally, we let change lead us in agriculture, and we have paid some rather heavy penalties over the years for letting that change lead us. I'm pleased to see that we are beginning now to lead the change more than we have over the past several decades, but we need to be more proactive in leading the change, and one of the challenges that I want to leave with you today is the need for you, as people in science, to help me as a communicator relate to the people who benefit from the work you do, the consumers of this country and the world, to help them understand what it is you do, and why it's important to all of us. I very often challenge people in science before I do a radio or a television interview; you've got to use words that I can understand, because I think if I can understand it, then my audience can understand. Don't talk scientific terms. That's going to lose people. It's important in your community, but that's one of the challenges that I lay out at the very beginning: To be able to communicate in layman's language, because it is important that we be able to talk to specialists and scientists like you to help us understand the change and what it means, but we have to be able to share it in understandable language.

Well, let me talk about how difficult change can be. As I mentioned, I grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin, in the hills of Western Wisconsin, and I'll talk a little about the change in that dairy farm. But I grew up in a community where if you were Norwegian you were Lutheran and if you were German-Irish you were Catholic, and in those young days for me, never the twain shall meet. That's changed, and I'm grateful for that. But the town of Westby, Wisconsin where my family now lives, after selling the farm, is so Norwegian dogs bark in Norwegian in that community, and of course in Scandinavian humor we have Ollie and Lena and Lars and Sven. Only lived in Westby, Wisconsin, worked hard and then got transferred to a town in Northern Wisconsin that was all German and all Catholic back in the days that Catholics observed meatless Friday. First Friday that Ollie's in this northern town, he's out in the backyard grilling steaks on the barbecue. His Catholic neighbors are out in the back yard smelling this aroma and wondering what has happened to the community. The next Friday its pork chops, the next Friday its hamburgers, and finally his Catholic neighbors said we have to do something about this. So they said we'll meet with Ollie, and they said, "Ollie you have to understand you're now in a Catholic community. We cannot eat meat on Friday. We

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cannot have you in the backyard tempting us with those meat aromas on Friday, and we figure the way to handle the situation is for you to become a Catholic." Good-natured Ollie said, "fine." Sunday at mass, the priest calls Ollie up to the alter, and he stands there, and he said, "Ollie you were born a Lutheran, you were raised a Lutheran. Now you're a Catholic." The neighbors figure that takes care of it. The next Friday they're out in the backyard in the evening and what do they smell coming over the fence from Ollie's backyard? Venison steak. They look over the fence and here's Ollie with a salt shaker saying, "You were born a deer, you were raised a deer. Now you're a halibut."

Change is difficult, very difficult, but where would we be today in our life without change? Several years ago a viewer in Iowa, and I know you can't see this from back there but I want to share it with you, a viewer from Iowa sent me a full-page ad that appeared in a farm magazine that is no longer with us, but one that I enjoyed as a youngster growing up, *The Country Gentleman*, because it had a mixture of fiction and agriculture. This full-page ad reads "one man cultivates two rows at a time with the Moline Universal Tractor. It solves the farm help problem." And then the small cartoons say "one man cultivates twelve to twenty acres in ten hours." "One man can plow five to eight acres in ten hours." And "one man harvests fifteen to twenty-five acres of grain in ten hours." When you think the ad appeared in the April edition, 1923, a little over eighty years ago, that this ad appeared on behalf of the Moline Universal Tractor that solves the farm help problem. Now think where we would be today in producing food and doing everything else we do on the farms and ranches of the country had that change not accelerated and continued to the point today where we're looking at 32 row planters and harvesting machines that do up to twelve rows at a time. Change is good. I looked, and you might do this too, look at the change that has occurred in your lifetime. Back to that two hundred acre farm, we didn't get electricity until 1948. It took the Rural Electric Co-op that long to find us after the Second World War. So for the first fourteen years of my life, it was kerosene lanterns and Aladdin lamps to do your studying. No refrigerator, no electric irons, no electric milking machines, and we had thirty cows to milk by hand, and I want you to know that I am the five-time Illinois State Fair Cow Milking Champion. Don't mess with these hands, friends. They know what to do. And I proved that again last Saturday morning at a June Dairy Month breakfast on a farm in Northern Illinois. They were letting city folks come up to milk cows, and I said I'll show you how, and boy, it's like riding a bike. You never, ever forget. But that was life on the farm. No telephone, my kids could never imagine how you grew up without a telephone. And without electricity, it was a battery radio. Now I might tell you a story. In World War II, powered by D batteries that were rationed, my dad said "you can't listen to Captain Midnight, Superman or Tom Mix. We're going to listen to Gabriel Heater and H. B. Kaltenborn and Fulton Lewis to get news on the war," but by the end of 1944, the D batteries had died. We had no radio communication, and in April of 1955, at the end of winter, the snow beginning to melt, it was a foggy day, and our neighbor who lived about a little over a quarter of a mile away across the valley, I could barely see across the valley, but I heard Carmen Simonsen pounding on metal, and I looked across the valley, and I could see that he was standing by the windmill hitting the bottom of a washtub with a hammer, and when he saw that he had my attention, he shouted across the valley, and he said, "Orion, tell your folks the president died today." That was April of 1945. I learned about the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, shouted across the valley, by a neighbor. Little did I know that less than 20 years later I would be standing on a stage in Atlanta at a meeting of the American Soybean Association, along side a screen like this, and moderating a program that went an hour and a half with a soybean buyer in Tokyo, a soybean producer in Brazil and a soybean buyer in London appearing instantly on the stage, responding to questions immediately. And as I finished that session, I couldn't help but think in a relatively short time I had gone from news shouted across the valley, to technology that allowed me to not only talk to and listen to, but see people around the world. Talk about change.

Now, listening to Dean Easter talk about specialization today in livestock production, on our farm we had two hundred chickens, six sows, thirty milk cows, a dozen calves, a dog and thirteen cats. And that was the livestock on the farm, and it was enough to make a comfortable living. We certainly weren't wealthy, but we had clothes on our back and food on the table for my mother, my father, my sister and me. And I remember the day that 1939 Farmall F-20 was delivered to our farm, and that meant the team of black horses would soon enjoy life in the pasture. Talk about change. Well, in the mid-sixties that farm was purchased by two brothers who farmed next door. They have since bought two more farms, increasing their acreage to about eight hundred and fifty, and they're contiguous, so they're all on this ridge where I grew up, and I drove out there, back in May, just to take a look at the old farmstead, because I was born in the house on that farm, and the one building that is still there is the dairy barn, the hip-roofed dairy barn, that I helped my dad build with the help of the neighbors back in 1948, but that farm now milks one hundred and eight cows and produces enough feed for all of the dairy animals on the farm, still operated by the two brothers and their family, and it's still a family farm but indeed it has changed. And I think for the better from the standpoint of making a living for the family and providing food for the world.

We fight change, particularly the aging process, or as I like to call it, the maturing process. Old is not a viable word in my vocabulary. I'm maturing faster than I want to, but we tend to fight that and wish we could, but that's wasted energy. We need to concentrate on what we can do in the future. And think what the world population would be like today if we hadn't been genetically modifying plants for a century, because hybrid corn was probably one of the first modifications that we see, and then to the point where we are today. I was talking earlier with some-

one about how I moved from the northern suburbs of Chicago. I still work in downtown Chicago at Tribune Tower where the WGN studios are located, but I moved out to Huntley Illinois, which is half way between Chicago and Rockford, half a mile from a cornfield. And my wife and I moved into the house May 24 and from that day until August 31 we had three quarters of an inch of rain. Lawns died, they just didn't go to sleep. They died, and our reinvestment in sod was costly. But I was a half mile from a cornfield that, by the first week of August, had stopped growing and it came up to my waist. By the end of August, it was totally fired, brown from the ground up. I was talking to the farmer, and I said, "you know, with the cost of energy today, why run a combine through this field?" And he said "I agree with you, but crop insurance people say I need to do it, so I know what my loss is." So he did and after he finished I saw him about a week later and I said, "Well?" He said, "I can't believe it and you probably won't either." He said, "I got ninety bushels to the acre off that field." I said, "No." Looking at it I would have guessed ten, fifteen. Well, as I told him, it takes a challenging year before you really understand what we have done with biotechnology, because it was in a year like last year that genetics really showed up.

Change. But yet there's that resistance to it. There is resistance to what you do, and I certainly hear about that because when we talk agriculture in Chicago, and I've been there since 1960, on the air every day, when we talk to about three quarters of a million people on the fifty thousand watt WGN radio station, and about one hundred and twenty thousand of those people are city people with perhaps a childhood tie to the farm, but in many cases no tie at all to the farm, they think, and I try to remind them of that, about every other day, when I go on the air and just remind them if you eat, you're involved in agriculture, and that doesn't leave many of us out of the picture. But it has been interesting hearing from our city listeners and hearing their concerns, because in agriculture and agribusiness and agricultural biotechnology, we deal with these terms every day. We deal with what's changing every day, and it becomes part of our daily life, but for people who don't deal with it every day, they have questions. Some of them are laughable. But I learned early on, you never laugh at a question that to you is a dumb question, because the person asking the question is really asking for information. And questions like "how long can I keep beef in the freezer before it's not usable anymore," or the question from a lady listener who wanted to know where she could buy brown shelled eggs, and I said, "Well I'm curious to know why you want brown shelled eggs," and she said, "Well Mr. Samuelson, you should know there's more nutrition in a brown shelled egg than there is in a white shelled egg." I said, "No I did not realize that. Thank you for telling me." I said. "I think when the chicken puts the whites and the yolk in the shell she doesn't really care what color the shell is," but that was as smart alecky as I got with her because it was a serious question. And then a question from a listener quite a few years ago who said, "Mr. Samuelson, I have these little green bugs on my philodendron plant in the living room and I want to know what kind they are and how do I get rid of them," and I said, "We cannot diagnose over the phone." I said, "So I'm afraid, you know, I can't help you." Three days later an envelope comes with squashed, little green bugs in the envelope. And while we laugh at these questions, they are serious questions.

Now, let me take you through some of the questions and some of the responses that we've had to deal with over the last ten or fifteen years in your industry. Foot and mouth disease in England. We sent Max Armstrong over there with a television crew to cover that story and to look more at the heartbreak for the livestock producer in the United Kingdom and the challenges that they had such as being quarantined and having to get their kids into town with relatives so they could continue school because they couldn't leave the farm because of the foot and mouth disease. We got a lot of coverage in this country, and so I got calls that year; one caller said "we have had this trip planned to Germany for four years, and we have our tickets for it. Do we dare go?" And I said, "You dare to go. Foot and mouth disease is not going to affect you." Another caller, from a mother, whose son was in a high school band that had been booked to tour Europe. Her question was "shall I pack enough food for him so that he will have food from this country to eat for the ten days that they're in Europe." No you don't have to do that. But a lot of media that has no relation on a daily basis to agriculture or the challenges that we face in agriculture tend to play it totally out of proportion, and the Dean and I were talking about turning out more agricultural communicators, which I think we need to do. We need to have people from our industry involved in this kind of education in communications, but they blow the story out of proportion, which leads me to the next one, which is the biggest non-story in agriculture in my opinion. Mad cow disease. Every time there's a finding of a mad cow disease it is on the television network news; it's on the front page of the paper. We're finally beginning to back off on it, but calls start coming in. "Well, you know, I'm not going to eat beef anymore because I don't want to get this Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease," and on and on and on. I point out to them that at best we have counted one hundred and fifty-six people on the planet who have died from the human variant, and maybe somebody in this room can answer my question because I have talked to doctors at the Center for Disease Control, and I cannot get a doctor yet to say one hundred percent that the Mad Cow Disease does directly transmit to humans. I had one doctor say, "yeah, I'm eighty percent sure it happens," but I've not had anybody say a hundred percent, so if you can say that today, then fine, but media just runs with it. And people call. And we say, "well, if you eat the muscle part of the beef animal you're not going to have a problem. If you get into some of the ethnic foods, then maybe, but it's not going to keep me from eating beef." But the first case of Mad Cow in this country, the cow that killed Christmas. December 23, I remember it well. Closed borders all over the world to American beef, and when that came out, people called and emailed and

wrote saying, "not eating beef anymore." "Can't take that chance." I tended to respond by saying you'd better not get in an automobile, because a lot more of you are going to die in an automobile than you are from Mad Cow. But the borders stayed closed. It took away about a two and a half billion-dollar market in Japan. And again this week I just did another "Samuelson Says" on the Japanese government having more reasons to keep American beef out of the country than oil companies have to explain that their huge profits are not coming on the backs of the American motorists or farmers. Because now, if you saw a week or two ago, Japanese government said, "well we have completed our meetings with industry and consumers, and while there is still concern on the part of consumers in Japan about the safety of American beef, we feel that criteria has been met, so now we will begin to send teams to America to inspect those beef plants that are cleared to export to Japan." Talking to Jay Truitt at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association last Friday, he said, "you know, that's going to take another three or four months, and for what?" Well, to delay the opening of that market again to American beef. I don't know what we do to overcome it, but talking to Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johans, and our trade representative, the question that I keep asking and the thing that I hope will come out of the WGO on agriculture policy with some teeth in it, is to follow science and not emotion. Why should five cows in North America allow countries to close borders all over the world when there's no scientific backing to do that? And the message that I delivered to the consumers of Japan who are concerned about the safety of American beef, I'd be a whole lot more concerned about the safety of Japanese beef if you're concerned about Mad Cow because you have five times as many cases as we do in this county. This is where we need science. This is where we need you people to communicate in an understandable language, and if big city media doesn't call you, call them, particularly if you see a story that you know is not accurate. I spend a fair amount of time writing letters to the producers of network news or to the editors of newspapers when I see stories on television or when I see stories in the newspaper concerning agriculture and this challenge of disease, and you can't write and say, you dummy, you're stupid, because I do get a few letters like that and, you know, right away I know the writer has lousy judgment if he calls me stupid, and so you don't insult them, but what you say is the story I read wasn't fully told, and I would like to help you tell, as my friend Paul says, the rest of the story, so that we're proactive on communicating what is happening. And of course now the latest is Avian Influenza. "Mr. Samuelson, not going to eat chicken anymore because it'll kill me." And have we yet found a case where it was directly transmitted from human to human? I haven't seen any reports on that yet. And we have said over and over and over again, cook your chicken to the proper temperature and you don't have to worry about Avian Influenza, and I will probably regret saying this, but I've said it on the air now, and when I'm on my death bed dying of Bird Flu, I will probably look back and say I'm sorry I said this, but I think the Bird Flu epidemic or pandemic is another Y2K of the year 2000, but I may regret that as I say my last words with Bird Fu. But again it takes a sense of reason backed by science. I get really bothered when we make decisions based on emotion, but you've all heard the fact that perception becomes reality, and so we need to deal with that, and as a communicator, I will take all the help I can get in doing that.

Let me share with some of the students in this room for a moment the need for you to continue your education and the need for you to become involved and become communicators. You can be the world's greatest inventor and if you can't tell somebody what you've invented, then nothing happens. You can be the world's greatest researcher and if you can't let people know what it is that you've researched and the results of that research, nothing happens, and so you need to become communicators, which is back to the challenge that I issued at the very beginning. I want to spend a moment talking about funding for research as well. Dean Easter talked about that and, yes, after several years now I can say the College of Agricultural Consumer and Environmental Sciences. That change was very difficult for me because I just want to call you the College of Ag. You know, that's what I grew up with, but there is change and, in that case, I resisted that change, but I finally come around to it. Back in the 90's when federal budgets for education, land grant colleges, and extension work were severely cut, Illinois took a major cut in federal funding, and then about that time every state in the country ran into budget problems, and so they started to cut funding for education, for agriculture and for extension programs. And so I became involved with the late Senator Paul Simon in chairing a task force to try to restore funding at the University level and for extension. And ever since, I spend one day a year as a lobbyist going down to the state legislature to talk to the leaders and try to get them to understand the importance to folks in downtown Chicago and the importance to folks in McLean County or Champaign County on the farm why funding is an investment. We've made some progress, then we take some steps back and then we make some progress. This year we did succeed to get a little additional money for extension. But once legislators understand how money for this kind of work affects all of their constituents, I said many, many times that I think extension makes direct contact with more constituents than any other branch of a university or of government. Hands on, whether its nutrition needs for senior citizens in housing projects in Chicago or helping a 4-Her learning how to better groom that calf for showing at the county or state fair. Through Extension in the university, extension touches the lives of all of us. And once they understand that, and here I go again saying this is one of the things you need to do, is to get involved and lobby. I've been fortunate to travel to forty-three countries with my television crew over the years and spend most of our time talking to farmers and people in agricultural education in those countries, and the thing that I hear over and over again, if they don't have a program similar to what we have in extension in the United States, that's one of their first goals. That's what they want, because they

have seen the success that we have had in this country. So that brings the question of funding for research and for taking that research to the people who need it and to the people who can use it. And I'll tell you, we're not at all bashful about using 4-H kids to go visit their legislators and impress upon them "..this is what funding is doing for me," because the 4-H program is something that most people in the legislature are familiar with, and we do the same with FFA. I don't know how many of you are aware of it but the largest FFA chapter in the Unites States is inside the city limits of Chicago. The Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, patterned after the first one of its kind in Philadelphia, and I think today there are thirty cities that have urban FFA chapters. Once again proving that agriculture is everywhere, and they help us in the funding because for some reason legislators listen to young people when they have a good message and a strong message. This comes back to communication, indeed it does. And to those of you who are determining your careers, probably still at the crossroads, something in animal science or maybe not, but think of all of these opportunities and then think of all of the ways that you can help to communicate the story.

Somebody sent me, a couple of days ago by email, you may have seen this, but it was very timely, because it talks about change. On the fourth of July we'll celebrate the two hundred and thirtieth birthday of this democracy called the United States of America. Well, this change goes back one century. Doesn't go back two hundred and thirty years, but makes you think. Going back a century, 1906, a little farther than that tractor ad, and let me share again the change that we have seen and the role that you in education and agriculture have played. The average life expectancy a hundred years ago in this country was 47 years. Only fourteen percent of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub. Only eight percent of the homes had a telephone. There were only eight thousand cars in the U.S. Now I could go back to that very easily, if I was one of the eight thousand. There were only eight thousand cars in the U.S., and only a hundred and forty-four miles of paved roads a hundred years ago, and the maximum speed limit in most cities was ten miles an hour. Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California. With a mere 1.4 million people, California was only the twenty-first most popular state in the union one hundred years ago. The average wage in the United States was twenty-two cents an hour. The average U.S. Worker made between two hundred and four hundred dollars a year, but if you were educated, a competent accountant could expect to earn two thousand dollars a year. A dentist, twenty-five hundred dollars a year, a veterinarian between fifteen hundred and four thousand dollars a year, and a mechanical engineer about five thousand dollars per year. More than ninety-five percent of all births in the United States took place in the home. Ninety percent of all U.S. doctors had no degree, no college, a hundred years ago. Instead they attended so-called medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press. And when it comes to prices, four cents for a pound sugar, fourteen cents for a dozen eggs, fifteen cents for a pound coffee. Two out of every ten adults couldn't read or write, and only six percent of all Americans had graduated from high school. That's not two hundred and thirty years ago, friends, that's a hundred years ago. Talk about change. And the need to be flexible, and as a college student getting ready to go into the career world, you do need to be flexible. I turn to Ollie and Lena for the need to be flexible. It happened this past New Year's Eve in this little town up in Wisconsin. Ollie and Lena went to a New Year's Eve party and it was close enough that they could walk from their home to the home where the party was being held. They celebrated at midnight with champagne and the toasts and all of that, and about 12:30 Ollie and Lena started to walk home. Halfway home, Lena collapses, falls to the ground, unconscious. Ollie is beside himself, nearly hysterical, but he is able to dial 911 on the cell phone. Something we didn't have a few years ago. He dials 911, and the operator comes on and says, yes, can I help you? And Ollie says, "Lena collapsed. She's fallen to the ground. She's unconscious. I don't know if she's alive. I need help. I need help now." And the operator said, "Ollie, just calm down. First of all tell me where you are," and Ollie says, "We're on Eucalyptus Street." And the operator says, "Ollie can you spell that for me, please?" And the phone goes dead. Well, at least there was nobody talking on the phone, but she could hear heavy breathing on the phone, and she kept saying, "Ollie talk to me, talk to me," and about two minutes later Ollie came back on the phone and he said, "I just dragged Lena to Oak Street. That's O-A-K." So, you need to be flexible. You need to be flexible.

Finally, and I again thank you for the opportunity to be here, and it'll give me content for our television show this weekend, so if you watch RFD-TV and get This Week in Agribusiness, I'll be talking about some of the work that you folks do and that sort of thing. But as we look to the future, and that's the way we must look, remember that we must lead the change and not let change lead us. And even though it may be distasteful at times, we need to accept change because history generally shows that it was beneficial. In the area of science and biotechnology, again, I challenge you to become communicators along with the science that you understand and learn so that when I talk to you on the air, I understand what you're saying and what it means and the people who listen understand what you're saying and what it means to them. And then, finally, and I hope this one stays with you because it again emphasizes the importance of change. A friend of mine on the speaker circuit uses this line frequently. "Remember, what made you successful yesterday will not make you successful tomorrow." And that means change. And one thing that hasn't changed in my life, and I get asked this question often: "How do you get up at three o'clock every morning and get on the air at ten minutes to five and sound so happy and cheerful?" There are some mornings I'm lying. I'm not that happy and cheerful, but years ago my country pastor gave me this, and it helps me. First of all, it starts the night before when you go to bed. Set the clock radio, hopefully soldered to WGN if

you’re in our area. Set the clock radio for the time you have to get up. You know a lot of people who set it or maybe move the clock so that when it goes off they know it’s got, you know, another ten minutes before you really have to get up. Well don’t fool yourself. You’ve got to get up at five, set it for five, and then when the clock radio comes on, get up, put both feet firmly on the floor, take a deep breath and say, “Good morning, God,” instead of, “Good God, morning.” The way that you say those words can affect your entire day. Have a successful conference and the best to you, the work that you do or the work, if you’re a student, that you’re going to do. Thank you all, very, very much.