

# FORTY YEARS OF RADIO EXCELLENCE

Our story goes like this.

In 1975 George Atkins, then a Canadian farm radio broadcaster with CBC, was travelling down a rural road in Zambia.

The group he was with included a number of African broadcasters, there as part of a workshop for farm broadcasters George organized.

George, ever curious, asked about their latest radio shows.

One of the broadcasters on the bus, a man named Abdul from Sierra Leone, said his latest show was on the correct use of spark plugs for tractors.

George was surprised. As he tells it, the conversation went like this:

"How many farmers in Sierra Leone have tractors?" George asked.

"Well, one in 80,000," Abdul responded.

"And how big an audience do you have?"

"I've got a big audience," said the broadcaster. "Around 800,000"

George quickly did the mental math.

"You mean you're talking to ten farmers out of 800,000 farmers," he said.

According to the broadcasters, they didn't have access to the information relevant to the majority of their listening audience.

George proposed writing scripts which featured low cost agricultural tips — things like using manure for fertilizer, or raising oxen for plowing — and sending them to the broadcasters.

George turned to his colleagues on the bus: "If I were to write that stuff and make it available to you, would you use it?" he asked. They said "Yes."

"That's where the idea of the Farm Radio network came into focus in my mind," said George.

On May 1, 1979, George and his wife Janet put together the first package of scripts at their family home in Oakville, Ontario. Thirty-four broadcasters in 26 countries received the scripts.

The Developing Countries Farm Radio Network (DCFRN), since renamed Farm Radio International, was born.

Broadcasters would get the scripts, translate them into local languages and transmit the information over the airwaves to their listeners.

George compiled a team of people, including scientists and agricultural

experts from the University of Guelph, his alma mater, and journalists around the world to learn about compelling, easy-to-use farming techniques.

The team would design documents explaining the techniques, and send them out to other broadcasters

Today, we continue the work that George began so long ago. We still send scripts to broadcasters — along with how to guides, backgrounders and a weekly news wire service — though now we do it over the internet.

While George passed away late in 2009, we'd like to think that we are still living up to his legacy, now 40 years since its humble start.

On our 30th anniversary, George recalled the way the organization had grown over the years.

"I just have to pinch myself a little bit now when I think of the people who are helped by this service that is available to them just by turning on their radio."



**Watch George tell the story of how it all began:**

[farmradio.org/our-history/](http://farmradio.org/our-history/)

# FARM RADIO

## LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

From the desk of: **Kevin Perkins**, our Executive Director.

Since our humble beginnings in 1979, Farm Radio International has grown to become a dynamic, bustling Canadian charity that punches way above its weight in terms of impact and outreach.

From our conception 40 years ago, our vision and hard work have touched the lives of so many across Africa. Just look at what's been accomplished:



We've grown from 34 partner radio stations to 880 stations across the continent.



Millions of farmers in 40 countries can now benefit from our award-winning broadcasts.



Because of advances in technology, we've combined radio with mobile phone technology to make radio more interactive than ever.

George Atkins knew from his own career as a Canadian farmer and farm broadcaster that reaping a good harvest was as dependent on good information on the radio as it was on good seeds or timely weeding. A day or week without a good farm radio show was like a summer without sunshine.

Since George's start, we've come a long way.

Technology has changed the way we do business. Now broadcasters click online to get scripts within seconds. We've also developed broadcasting training materials, improved our measurement of how we reach and impact listeners. We can now use mobile phones to bring more interactive and engaging radio programs to the air.

Our scripts are available in more languages than ever before — English, French, Hausa, Swahili and Amharic.

And we're still innovating.

Our ambition is to offer all African rural citizens with access to dependable, reliable, high quality radio shows, week after week, year after year. We are getting closer, but there are still farmers who do not have access to the information they need.

So, what will Farm Radio International be like in the next 40 years?

Climate change, which is happening right now, will mean that rural Africans will need new information to make their farms as productive as possible in the face of unprecedented weather patterns and changing growing conditions. They will continue to need to talk to each other through on-air forums. And they will turn to radio to help them anticipate, survive, and recover from extreme weather events like the floods that recently devastated Mozambique.

No matter how technology evolves, I know that radio will continue to be part of the mix of getting and receiving information.

The most profound constant for me is that we humans are a communicating species. We need to ask questions and share our experiences — this is how we learn and evolve and overcome the challenges that face us.

This involves a lot of people talking and listening to each other. It necessitates accurate and unbiased information.

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### George Atkins's vision remains relevant and attainable.

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As an organization we believe in the right of rural Africans to accurate and unbiased information to guide their decision making. Donations from individual Canadians allow us the freedom to search out and deliver information from a variety of sources through a medium that is used and trusted by nearly everyone.

We will continue to protect that right and pursue our dream of reaching all family farmers throughout Africa.





## A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO LLOYD ROBERTSON



The work we do at Farm Radio would not be the same without the many journalists around the world who have volunteered their time and expertise. Certainly not the least of those is Lloyd Robertson, formerly the chief news anchor and senior editor for the CTV National News.

"Farm Radio International has always appealed to me because it combines three passions of mine: journalism, broadcasting and giving something back," he says.

Lloyd began his broadcasting career in

radio, starting in 1952 at CJCS radio in his hometown of Stratford. Though he moved to television two years later, his support for journalists and broadcasters around the world has been unwavering.

More than 30 years ago, George Atkins, our founder, brought Lloyd into the Farm Radio network.

"I'm so glad that George Atkins signed me up as a volunteer supporter when he did," Lloyd says. "As a journalist, I appreciate the critical importance of Farm Radio International's services for

African broadcasters."

Lloyd's support of Farm Radio International has been invaluable, and his belief in the power of story and information to change lives helps carry us forward.

"To be able to share what we've learned through the power of this very personal communications medium is what inspired our friend and colleague George Atkins to launch this innovative project 40 years ago," he says.

Thank you Lloyd.

## SHARING THE VOICES OF RURAL WOMEN

On Saturday evenings at 6 p.m., if you tune to Voice of Kigezi on the airwaves in southwestern Uganda, you can hear a farming program called B'Omuigaiga.

But it's not just farming advice that is discussed in this program. The production team also touches on topics that are major issues for at least half the population in their region: women.

B'Omuigaiga, which means "Get rich through farming," was recently announced the winner of the first ever **Liz Hughes Award for Her Farm Radio**, a new Farm Radio award recognizing radio programs that address gender equality and create opportunities to share the voices of rural women.

Brenda Mugwisagye is one of the producers and presenters on the show.

"Personally, I am so elated," she told Farm Radio after receiving the award.

"Recognition of my skills in reporting, production, and presentation gives me confidence to carry on doing a great job serving my community and pursuing areas of gender equality and rights."

The show discusses topics like women's limited participation in agriculture, how men can support women in farming tasks, and how any gender can make farming a business. The goal, according to the producers, is to provide a platform for small-scale farmers, "irrespective of their gender, to voice out their issues and get solutions."

The award was named in memory of Farm Radio International's former board member and journalist

Liz Hughes, a woman who championed journalists around the world, supporting them to be the best they can could be.



Photo: Brenda Mugwisagye interviews a farmer for her radio program, B'Omuigaiga



**Listen to the program:**  
[bit.ly/2019LizHughesAward](http://bit.ly/2019LizHughesAward)



## 40 POTLUCKS

### FOR FARM RADIO

Farm Radio International is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year — so we're cooking up something big across Canada!

We're looking for 40 Champions to help spread the news by organizing a potluck! Nothing unites us and sparks conversation like food and the love of community. Whether your potluck ends up being a casual conversation for two over a cup of coffee, an intimate dinner with a few friends, or a community dinner at your local town hall, we're here to help.

We're hoping to **raise \$40,000 for our 40th anniversary** this year, and we hope you can be part of the action. If your potluck

raises more than \$400, we'll supply a new solar/crank powered radio to a listening group in Africa on behalf of your event, ensuring another rural community can tune in and become better informed.

**If you're interested, please contact Jeff Larocque:**

1-888-773-7717 x 3659;

[jlarcocque@farmradio.org](mailto:jlarcocque@farmradio.org)

**Or learn more at:**

[farmradio.org/potluck/](http://farmradio.org/potluck/)

## 'SMALL BUT MIGHTY'

### FARM RADIO CELEBRATED AT CANADIAN SENATE

Canadian Senator Ratna Omidvar honoured Farm Radio International during a session of the Senate of Canada on April 3.

"It might be small, but it is really mighty," said the senator, who is herself an internationally recognized voice on migration, diversity and inclusion.

During her speech from the chamber, Sen. Omidvar discussed the work Farm Radio does across sub-Saharan Africa.

One of its secrets is its creativity about its programming. Its impact goes well beyond the dos and don'ts of farming," she said.

"It is my hope that our work here in the Senate can allow organizations like Farm Radio, not only to simply exist, but to thrive and to succeed," said Sen. Omidvar.

"In the meantime, please join me in applauding this fantastic work they do on behalf not just of Canadians, but all global citizens. Thank you."



**See the full speech at:**

[bit.ly/FRIsenate](http://bit.ly/FRIsenate)

#### MONEYSENSE NAMES FARM RADIO

### ONE OF TOP TEN CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL CHARITIES

We've been named one of the top 10 Canadian charities in the International sector by MoneySense Magazine and Charity Intelligence!

We work hard to make all donations go as far as they possibly can. You can help us reach millions of African farmers over the airwaves.



**Find out more:**

[bit.ly/farmradiomoneysense](http://bit.ly/farmradiomoneysense)



**Supporting broadcasters in developing countries to strengthen small-scale farming and rural communities.**

#### Farm Radio International

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#### Donate online at [farmradio.org](http://farmradio.org)

Tax receipts are issued for all donations of \$10 or more.

Charitable Registration Number (BN)

11888 4808 RR0001

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