

A CAREER BUILT ON COMMITMENT:

Celebrating Pork Month with Brad Kelley

For nearly five decades, **Brad Kelley** has seen the swine industry evolve in remarkable ways. Family operations have grown into large-scale production systems, customer needs have shifted, and technology has transformed nearly every aspect of animal agriculture. But through it all, one thing has remained constant: his commitment to the producers he serves.

As the industry celebrates Pork Month, it's also an opportunity to recognize professionals like Kelley, whose career has been defined by service, relationships, and a passion for helping customers succeed. After 47 years in animal health, his impact reaches far beyond the products he sold. It lives on in the trust he built with customers and colleagues alike. Interestingly, animal agriculture was never part of Kelley's original plan. "I was a young man, just out of high school in 1979," Kelley said, "I had a family, and I needed a job." That opportunity came at Iowa Veterinary Supply (now known as Ivesco) where he began working in the warehouse and making deliveries.

One of the biggest influences early on was his mentor, Tom Dougan. "I spent many nights sitting on the curb after work, visiting with Tom, who was my boss at the time," Kelley recalled. "He was really my mentor in the business." Those conversations helped shape his outlook, as did Brad's own determination to learn. "Without a college degree, I just learned everything I could by handling products, reading labels, and most of all, getting to know people." After Ivesco was sold in 2009, Kelley joined Lextron, which later acquired Walco and was then renamed Animal Health International.



“Joining Animal Health International and all the merged colleagues – who were once competitors – really taught me how to do business,” Kelley said. “This was the ultimate education for me.” Kelley also spoke about how the bigger scope of business highlighted how key teamwork is in this industry. “There was a huge amount of talent from the warehouse to accounts receivable and everywhere in between. I can’t emphasize enough how all departments play a vital role in our success.”

Over the years, Kelley watched the swine industry transform dramatically. Independent operations gave way to larger, more specialized production systems, and customers’ businesses evolved along with them. Those changes also reshaped his own career. Early on, Kelley called on feed mills, veterinary clinics, dairy farms, retail dealers, and producers across multiple species. As the industry became more specialized, he discovered where his passion truly belonged. “I decided what species I liked the best,” he said. “It was swine and poultry.” His daily approach has centered on understanding what customers experience every day and being available whenever they need help. “They’re in the business to raise animals, and the animals don’t stop living on weekends,” Kelley said. “My customers always knew that they could call me anytime. Any day of the week, if they have a problem, a question, or something that I can help them with, I do that. I think like the customer, and that helps develop a relationship that’s hard to break.”

Throughout his career, Kelley became known as a trusted resource within the company, sharing knowledge with teammates while continuing to learn from others. He believes the willingness to ask questions and continue learning has been one of the keys to a successful career. “I learned early on that you can make it in this business if you just grab ahold of the information that’s offered to you and figure out how to use it,” Kelley said. “And for the next generation, I’d say don’t be bashful about asking questions, getting input, and sharing what you know. It makes everybody better. Better at their jobs, and also just better in life in general.”

Although Kelley is transitioning into retirement, he admits stepping away will not be easy. “I’ll miss being able to share what I know. And the relationships that I built over the years. It’s really difficult to think about shutting that off.” As the pork industry looks toward the future, professionals like Brad Kelley serve as a reminder that while production methods, technologies, and operations may continue to evolve, success will always be built on something more enduring: a commitment to customers, a willingness to keep learning, and relationships strong enough to last a lifetime.

