

Success of Georgia Extension PSAs

by Joe Courson

Evaluation! We hear the term more and more in extension service work and it's no different with radio programming.

In Georgia, we wanted to know if the resources spent on agricultural public service announcements (PSAs) for radio were worth it.

The state's only radio news network, along with 18 other stations, broadcast 60- and 30-second agricultural announcements each week. Usage data came directly from the network's program log sheet, while station information came from telephone calls every two months.

The Georgia Extension Service received an estimated \$304,800 worth of airtime during 18 months.

Since the number of U.S. agricultural radio networks jumped 300 percent from 1974 to 1986, opportunities exist for states to benefit from radio Public Service Announcements.

Picture this: Your boss comes in and says that he has a few hundred thousand dollars for you with which to buy radio time. Instead of having to beg for airtime, now you have the chance to be quite selective as to stations and when announcements are broadcast.

It hasn't happened here in Georgia, but the next best thing has.

The Georgia Extension Service has received an estimated \$304,880 worth of radio airtime with a minimal investment of time and production costs during the past 18 months. We call them Agricultural Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and they have become quite popular.

Georgia has one radio network, the Georgia Radio News Service, and it includes an agricultural news service with six daily reports on 40 stations. When the network didn't have a commercial announcement, it would run any public service announcement to fill time. For example, it was not unusual to hear a story on the tobacco crop followed by an announcement about the U.S. Postal Service. The network lacked continuity. With agricultural public service announcements, the network has been able to maintain the agricultural perspective through each of the 5-minute broadcasts.

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For the past five years, the Georgia Extension Service has been able to fulfill the need for farm announcements with a minimal investment.

It takes Information Specialist John Harrell about two days to find and write five 60- and five 30-second announcements. Four announcements deal with subject matter, such as farm safety, heat stress, etc. The fifth announcement "sells" local county extension service offices as having the most accurate information for farmers. Alternating with the county agent message is an announcement about experiment station research that assures farmers that agricultural research is ongoing to solve their problems.

Individual "Tags" Help

In addition to the Georgia Radio News Service broadcast of the PSAs, 18 stations get the announcements, too. They also get individual announcement tags for their station which sound as if the Georgia Extension Service provided an announcement specifically for that station. The secret is that, although the announcement stays the same for all stations, the closings are changed.

It takes about 30 minutes to voice the scripts, and Harrell spends another day-and-a-half electronically editing the specific tags for each station.

We monitor usage monthly since the network sends us a program schedule sheet similar to the one it sends its affiliates. The network charges \$150 for a 60-second announcement and \$120 for a 30-second commercial, so the value in "free" time quickly adds up for the Georgia Extension Service.

Individual stations get a call from Harrell every two months to track usage, as well as get comments about the service. At the end of the year, we check on advertising rates to determine the amount of airtime we have received from each station.

Unlike networks, individual station usage remains constant, probably because the stations air the announcements throughout the many hours of their broadcast day, unlike the network which allocates a total of 30 minutes of agricultural program time per day.

Preference: 30 Seconds

We have found that most stations prefer the 30-second versions of the announcements, probably because of the versatility of the PSAs. If the stations sell part of the 60-second break to a local advertiser, a 30-second agricultural PSA can fill the remaining time.

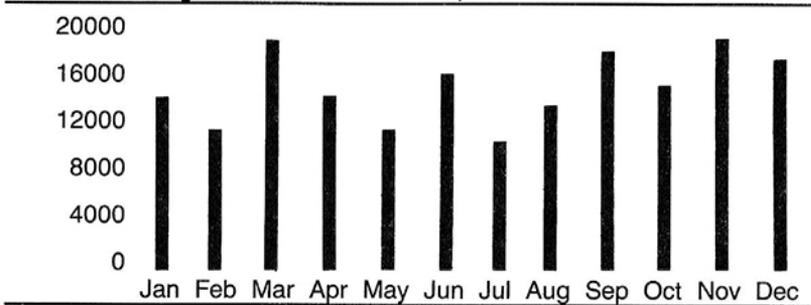
The amount of airtime varies. Based on past performance, the network "gives" the Georgia Extension Service an estimated value of \$4,000 in airtime per week from mid-September to

early March, and about \$1,000 per week for the rest of the year. The network sells as much as \$9,000 of commercial time per week, during planting, growing and harvesting periods, to seed and chemical companies. Often, this reduces its available PSA time by 75%. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

While the state's radio network and several other stations received recorded announcements, the written scripts go to each of Georgia's county extension offices for information and use. Some agents take the scripts and record local announcements.

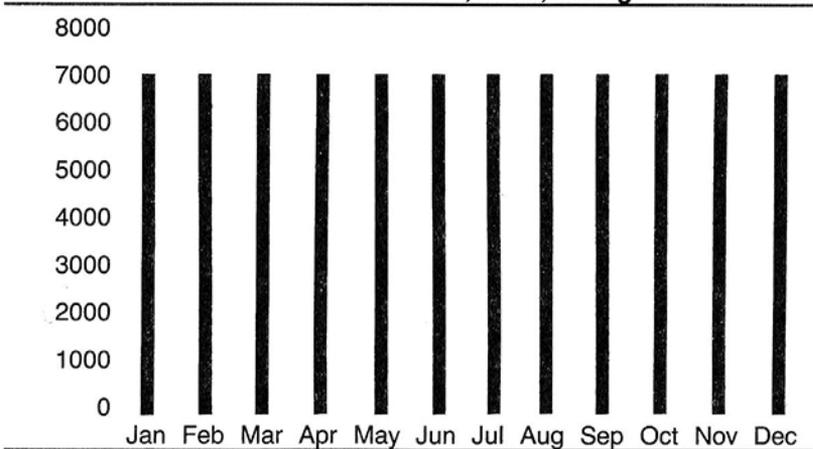
A listing of U.S. agricultural radio networks appeared in the June 1986 edition of *AGRI MARKETING* magazine. It showed 43 networks, a 300-percent increase since 1974. With so many networks, it appears that an opportunity exists for other states to start an agricultural PSA service. For Georgia Extension Service, the announcements have been well worth the time and effort.

Table 1. Georgia Network PSA Time, 1987



\$ Value of Air Time

Table 2. Individual Station PSA Time, 1987, Georgia



\$ Value of Air Time