

“This Week in Louisiana Agriculture”

Before grilling machines, get-rich-quick real estate programs and swimsuit model hawking dozens of exercise and weight loss gadgets, early morning television in Louisiana was dominated by farm programming.

On Sept. 22, 1981 “This Week in Louisiana Agriculture” signed on the air with CBS affiliate WAFB-TV 9 in Baton Rouge. It aired at 5:30 a.m., immediately following the national anthem, which was preceded by the test pattern.



Within a year the 30-minute farm program, produced by the public relations department of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, would be on three more stations, KNOE-TV 8 in Monroe, KALB-TV 5 in Alexandria and KATC-TV 3 in Lafayette. By 1984 Shreveport station KTAL-TV 6 picked up the program, followed by KPLC-TV 7 in 1986.

Today TWILA, the creation of former Louisiana Farm Bureau PR Director and TWILA host Regnal Wallace, is seen on five broadcast stations, three cable affiliates, a webcast (at www.cenlweather.com) and on RFD-TV on the Dish Network and Direct TV. The program is one of the longest-running television programs produced in Louisiana. Next year TWILA celebrates its 25th anniversary.

“Our program has changed over the years but the mission has remained the same,” said Michael Danna, host of TWILA. “We want viewers to know how important agriculture is in their daily lives. Even if you’re not a farmer our program probably has something that will interest you.” Produced at its studios at the Louisiana Farm Bureau state office in Baton Rouge, TWILA airs 52 weeks a year. Weekly topics include regular features like its “ISG,” or in-studio guest segment, weekly crop production updates and livestock prices.

Each week producers Bill Sherman, A.J. Sabine, along with host Michael Danna, travel the state seeking out farm news. Sherman and Sabine both came to TWILA from secular news, while Danna got his start as a newspaper reporter.

“We’re pretty much one-man-bands,” said Sherman, who edits the show each Thursday. “We each go out and shoot, write and edit our own packages. With just three of us working on the program we’ve each got to be somewhere in the state getting news each week.

“As the name implies, we work hard to get as many Louisiana

packages in the program as possible each week,” he continued. “Good shows are when we have three packages with maybe a VO or VOSOT thrown in.”

Over the years the show’s content has moved beyond just row crop production updates to include environmental, legislative and consumer issues. The program was cited recently by a member of the state’s Senate Ag Committee as a “video lesson on the importance of agriculture.”

Recently the program has become somewhat international in scope with a month-long series on the agriculture of South America, which ran in spring 2004 and another month-long series on the agriculture of the Middle East.

“Traveling to Chile, Argentina and to Israel I found that farmers are pretty much the same the world over,” said Danna. “They all worry about the same things, face the same challenges and generally have the same problems. However, the farmers in the Gaza Strip do have to worry about rocket and mortar attacks.” A.J. Sabine joined the TWILA staff two years ago and admits he knew literally nothing about agriculture. Having worked as a news photographer and reporter in Columbia, S.C., Lafayette, La. and Baton Rouge, the NPPA certified shooter said he had a lot to learn.

“I joked with my former news buddies that I went from shooting cops to shooting crops,” Sabine laughed. “But having more time to shoot news stories, features and vignettes really lets me use all my creative skills. I know farm news isn’t as exciting as corrupt politicians running from cameras, or watching criminals make the “perp walk,” but farmscapes offer visuals, I think, that rival run and gun television. And farmers have some great stories.

“I’ve learned how important farming is,” Sabine continued. “That’s why I do my best to tell their stories accurately and fairly.”

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This Week In Louisiana Agriculture

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