

The Story of Southeast AgNet

In 1984, Gary Cooper founded The Independent Florida Agrinet with help from a few dozen diverse farmers and ranchers in the region. The radio network was the first of its kind covering agriculture news in Florida, and Cooper became the state's first farm broadcaster. Expanding the business plan on schedule, a radio station was purchased and a satellite distribution system assembled in the early years. However, hard freezes then re-focused attentions of original farmer investors in the late 1980's and the company was forced to re-organize and liquidate. The farm network effort eventually went dark for a short period in 1994 as the radio station and other assets were absorbed by a large corporation having no interest in Farm Broadcasting.

Cooper and wife, Robin Loftin, began another farm-news-only company shortly thereafter. Naming it Southeast AgNet to reflect its three-state coverage area in the 'deep southeast', the new ag news radio service was launched from Citrus Expo in southwest Florida in August of 1994. It was a humble re-birth. Southeast AgNet's first regular broadcasts utilized phone lines from a portable storage barn in the backyard of their home, in the tiny remote hamlet of Kenansville in central Florida. After multiple storms whipped the Kenansville location during the historic 2004 hurricane season, home and office were relocated back to Ocala in early 2005 to better accommodate staff expansion and company development.

Today, Southeast AgNet radio programs are aired over 65-plus stations in Alabama, Florida and Georgia, with reports customized for each state's listeners. Approximately 20 ag news headlines programs are produced each weekday, with individual focus on cattle, citrus, cotton, peanuts, vegetables, soybeans, and weather reports for appropriate areas of this very diverse agricultural region. The company now involves 15 team members, some of whom are strategically located throughout the deep southeast.

In spring of 2005, Southeast AgNet became a multi-media enterprise by purchasing 85-year-old Citrus Industry Magazine and blending it into the operation to better serve the Florida citrus community through a multi-media approach. With the purchase, Southeast AgNet became the ONLY agriculture media company owned and operated by agriculture people native to the region. The world's largest citrus seminar and trade show program, Citrus Expo, also came with the purchase, celebrating its 15th anniversary in Ft. Myers in August 2006 with a record crowd of over 2200 grower attendees and approximately 150 exhibitors.

Southeast AgNet further rooted its leading regional multi-ag-media position with the launch of www.agnetonline.com in the summer of 2006. The new website portal is designed for regular updates and ag news archiving, again targeting producers and others involved in agriculture in the "deep southeast". Taking advantage of several modern technologies including blogging, podcasting and other capabilities, www.agnetonline.com provides producers and other visitors more information more often, and provides agri-marketers another method of mixing media to most effectively reach their target with frequent and repetitive exposure.