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AGTV: Is it an idea whose time has come?

By **Laura Hancock**, News Record writer



STEVE REMICH

Gillette resident Patrick Murphy has developed a business plan and is seeking investors for television network devoted to agriculture.



Patrick Murphy's dilemma is akin to "the chicken versus the egg" question.

To broadcast programming for AGTV — the Agriculture Television Network — Murphy needs money. But when he seeks investments from large agribusinesses, they ask him to come back once they can see some programming.

"I'm just trying to get word out there so I can get some interest," he said.

Murphy envisions AGTV to be a 24-hour, high-definition, satellite and cable channel with original news and feature programming. Murphy hopes eventually to have the channel streaming online, too.

For instance, news programs would air stories from the U.S. and various states' agriculture departments, the Chicago and Kansas City boards of trade, and agriculture research centers such as Texas A&M, Perdue and Texas Tech universities.

Feature programming includes titles like "Veterinarians and Livestock," "Agriculture and Technology," "Farm Safety for All" and "FFA Hour."

"I've got 168 hours of programming to carry in a week," Murphy said.

Most of the audience would be ranchers and farmers. But there would be other viewers, too.

"It could be a 4-H club," he said. "It could be an FFA club. It could be an extension service."

The satellite network would have an audience everywhere in the United States. About 73.3 million people get satellite or cable television in the United States, he said.

"Pretty much every state has an agriculture presence," Murphy said.

Sowing a business plan

AGTV is a dream that Murphy planted in 2000.

Since then, he has written — and rewritten — a business plan with the help of the Wyoming Small Business Development Center.

He started a website — www.agtvnetwork.com.

He established a corporation in 2005.

And in August, he quit his job in Cheyenne, moved his wife and children to what he said is more agriculture-focused Gillette, found new work and joined the Campbell County Chamber of Commerce — all to realize the next part of the dream: finding investors.

He works seven days a week on AGTV, writing on his blog, tinkering on the website and selling the idea to anyone who will listen, including bankers. He recently found three people with seed money in Providence, R.I.

"I'm still in talks with them," he said.

Background in ag and TV

Murphy lived on a farm in southwestern Iowa for the first 25 years of his life.

His family raised livestock and "row crops," such as corn and beans, he said.

The idea of an all-agriculture niche network "just came to me," and he had the background to pursue it.

Murphy has an associate's degree in electronics and a bachelor's in broadcasting from Northwest Missouri State University.

He worked at KPTM, the Fox affiliate in Omaha, Neb., as the chief operator, ensuring the station complied with federal laws and maintained technical operations; at Washington International Teleport in Alexandria, Va., as a technical engineer assisting in the long-distance transmission and receipt of programming; and at Dish Network in Cheyenne as a station supervisor over six technicians and responsible for transmitted and received satellite programming.

Although there is a network that has some agriculture programming — RFD-TV, which targets rural America — it accepts some program submissions by viewers and companies.

“The difference (between RFD-TV and AGTV) will be our original programming and content,” Murphy said.

Move to Gillette

The idea for AGTV dawned on him when living in Cheyenne. But Murphy didn't think the Cheyenne economy was properly rooted in agriculture.

He began looking for a more suitable place.

He wasn't particularly keen to move back to Iowa. He considered U.S. agriculture hubs like Denver, Chicago, Indianapolis and Kansas City, Kan.

While Gillette is not a major U.S. city., neither is Bristol, Conn., the headquarters for ESPN Inc., Murphy said.

“Gillette, northeastern Wyoming seemed to be a nice fit, based on the agriculture, all the ranches,” he said.

Benefits for Gillette

Murphy now works for Basin Electric in radio tower communication, while he tries to complete Phase I of his business plan.

Phase I requires raising money for 33 different programs at \$250,000 each.

The programs would be on DVDs that Murphy could show to potential large investors.

Phase II of the business plan is building a \$50 million facility in Gillette for office space and studios. About 100 people would be employed.

He believes a communications industry is the economic diversity that Campbell County needs to flatten the boom-bust cycles of the energy industry.

It would help “ease some of the economic roller-coaster effects that have been occurring in Campbell County,” he said. “Hopefully it could be a unique economic engine that will ease some of that.”