

South Carolina Farm Bureau Legislative Report - Week 12 March 31, 2023



In This Week's Issue

- **Weekly Session Highlights**
- **Farmers of the Week**
- **Looking Ahead**

The General Assembly hit a fever pitch in completing week 12 of session this week. The House returned from furlough energized and hit the ground running, while the Senate continued to work through their calendar focusing on legislation that impacts the state as the April 10th cross-over deadline looms.

Cross-over date requires bills to move from one legislative chamber to the other to have a realistic chance of passage during this session. After the cross-over deadline, it is more difficult for a bill to be passed. For example, for a House bill to be considered by the Senate after cross-over requires a two-thirds vote even to be considered.

Weekly Highlights

Working Ag Lands Preservation Act Sees Floor Debate

The "Working Agricultural Lands Preservation Act", **H.3951**, sponsored by **Representative Patrick Haddon** (House District 19 - Greenville County), passed the House this week after seeing spirited discussion on the floor. During the debate, several representatives worked hard to ensure that amendments being proposed to the bill would not diminish its original intent - to provide a mechanism for property owners to securitize their productive ag land for ongoing use. Specifically, H.3951 establishes the "South Carolina Working Farmland Protection Program" to provide permanent protection to strategically significant working farmland properties. The continued availability of this valuable acreage for agricultural purpose is essential to the long-term future of the economic sector. The bill will also create a fund for qualifying projects to receive financial support. It received approval in a 104-2 vote and has been sent to the Senate Ag Committee for further action after the budget debate.

Representative Jay West (House District 7 - Abbeville, Anderson and Greenville Counties) passionately addressed the full House on the need for this bill and voiced frustration at unwarranted amendments.

Please take a moment and watch Rep. West's partial comments [HERE](#).

A big thanks to Rep. West and **Rep. Russell Ott** for taking the podium and fiercely defending our state's farmers for what they devote and provide to South Carolina every day.



Rep. Jay West speaking passionately in support of the Working Ag Lands Preservation Act: **"This is serious. This is an innovative idea to help the people of our state that fight to feed our state. Our farmers deserve a lot better than this."**

DHEC Restructuring – Consolidation of Statewide Water Functions

Testimony concluded this week on **Senate Finance Chairman Harvey Peeler** (Senate District 14 - Cherokee, Spartanburg, Union and York Counties) and **Senate President Thomas Alexander's** (Senate District 1 - Oconee and Pickens Counties) co-sponsored bill that focuses on DHEC reform and increasing government efficiency while creating separate health and environmental state agencies, including moving all statewide water regulation into one agency. The bill, **S.399**, received overwhelming support last year from the Senate. Members of the subcommittee committed to continuing to work to find the best solution possible to effectively separate the agency.

SCFB remains supportive of government efficiency with single-agency water being of utmost importance to our members. We support S.399 as it creates certainty, streamlined efficiency, and increases the focus on environmental efforts.

A similar bill sponsored by **House Speaker Murrell Smith of Sumter County** was passed out of the Ways and Means Committee this week. The bill primarily separates DHEC while allowing the Department of Administration to assist in the process. SCFB will continue to advocate for single-agency water regulation to eliminate any uncertainty for our farmers.

Alien Ownership of Real Property

Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey (Senate District 25 - Aiken, Edgefield, Lexington, McCormick and Saluda Counties) sponsored **Senate bill 576** which was sent to the House for action this week. As amended, the bill would change existing law related to land ownership by foreign-controlled adversaries, specifically disallowing a citizen of a foreign adversary or a corporation controlled by a foreign adversary to acquire any interest in real property within the limits of this State. Current law limits any alien or corporation controlled by aliens to own or control more than 500,000 acres of land. The bill now heads to the House Ways and Means committee for action.

Senate Passes Grain and Cotton Producers Guaranty Fund Clarification Bill

Senate Ag Committee Chairman Wes Climer (Senate District 15 - York County) filed **Senate Bill 603**, that provides clarifying language for pro rata determination for producers that participate in the SC Grain and Cotton Producers Guaranty Fund. The bill would allow for producers that participate in the fund to be reimbursed at a higher rate than those that have limited participation. The bill now heads to the House Ag Committee for consideration. The SCFB GR team will continue to support the bill that provides protection for farmers.

South Carolina Conservation Enhancement Act

The "SC Conservation Enhancement Act", **H.3786**, sponsored by **Representative Phillip Lowe** (House District 60 - Florence County) recognizes that rapid development has led to the loss of ag and forest lands that impact the quality of life in our state. The bill specifically aims to financially support the SC Conservation Bank, which protects vulnerable properties across the state, by requiring a portion of state deed recording fees be credited to the Fund. H.3786 also adds the Commissioner of Agriculture to the Conservation Bank's Board.

The bill was passed out of the Ways and Means Committee to the full House for action. SCFB will continue to strongly support programs that focus on conserving agricultural lands.

State of South Carolina Agriculture

South Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers provided the "State of SC Agriculture" to the Senate Ag and Natural Resources Committee this week. The Commissioner did a great job highlighting our state's number one industry. With nearly 25,000 farms and 4.8 million acres of farmland, South Carolina is driven by agriculture. Agribusiness (agriculture + forestry) is the state's number 1 industry, accounting for 259,215 jobs and \$51.8 billion in annual economic impact.

Federal Update

This week, the U.S. Senate joined the House in a rare bipartisan vote, to pass a Congressional Review Act Resolution of disapproval for the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers' 2023 WOTUS Rule. Senator Tim Scott and Senator Lindsey Graham were both co-sponsors of the bill.

While the President is expected to veto the bill, it is a strong message that over half of Congress does not agree with the flawed WOTUS Rule.

GetConnectedSC Campaign

The SC Office of Regulatory Staff's Broadband Office in collaboration with the SC Department of Administration's Digital Equity Office (SCDEO) have launched the **GetConnectedSC campaign**. GetConnectedSC is designed to identify the areas of greatest connectivity need in our state, invest in broadband infrastructure to those areas and provide support services to make that transformation possible for every home, business and community in South Carolina.

The campaign includes a 26-community listening tour and a Better-Internet Survey. Below are times and places for the upcoming GetConnectedSC events in South Carolina and a link to the survey:

- **Wednesday, April 5, 2023 at 10:00 am at the Denmark Technical College: Room TBD, 1126 Solomon Blatt Blvd. Denmark, SC 29042. RSVP to the event here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/600519007517>**

- [Wednesday, April 5, 2023 at 10:30 am at Spartanburg Community College: Union Campus, Room 105A, 1401 Furman L. Fendley Hwy Union, SC 29379. RSVP to the event here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/get-connected-sc-better-internet-for-sc-townhall-spartanburgunion-tickets-579209851257](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/get-connected-sc-better-internet-for-sc-townhall-spartanburgunion-tickets-579209851257)
- [Wednesday, April 5, 2023 at 2:00 pm at Ned Branch Missionary Baptist Church, 10620 Dunbarton Blvd, Barnwell, SC 29812. RSVP to the event here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/600523250207](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/600523250207)
- [Thursday, April 6, 2023 at 10:30 am at the Technical College of the Lowcountry: New River Campus, Room 126, 100 Community College Dr. Bluffton, SC 29909. RSVP to the event here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/577397981907](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/577397981907)

[TAKE THE BETTER – INTERNET COMMUNITY SURVEY HERE](#)

Farmers of the Week



Boot Camp Participants (L-R): Kinsley Miller, Lauren Clemency, Loren Lindler, Angel Brabham, Andrea McCutchen, Brittany Jeffcoat, Margaret Harrison, Sally Harrison.

The inaugural class of the **SC Farm Bureau Women's Communication Boot Camp** were this week's *Farmers of the Week*. This intense three-day program is a training opportunity for female members to enhance the skills they need to effectively communicate about agriculture and its importance to consumers, the media and elected officials. This amazing group of women spent 3 days with SCFB staff and others honing their skills, devoting time and effort to becoming even better ag advocates.

Participants were:

Kinsley Miller - Edgefield County

Loren Lindler - Lexington County

Andrea McCutchen - Lee County

Brittany Jeffcoat - Aiken County

Lauren Clemency - Orangeburg County

Angel Brabham - Allendale County

Margaret Harrison - Greenville County

Sally Harrison - Saluda County





The group with Rep. Patrick Haddon (Greenville), Rep. Heather Bauer (Richland), Rep. Annie McDaniel (Fairfield), and Rep. Cal Forrest (Saluda).

Looking Ahead to Next Week



Next week, the House will turn its attention to bills destined to meet the cross-over deadline while the Senate will be on furlough. The full Senate Finance Committee, however, plans to meet all week to tackle the budget bill through committee work. Be on the lookout for updates next week as we continue through the 2023 general session.