



March 26, 2021

Legislative Update

South Carolina State Legislative Weekly Update - March 26, 2021

The General Assembly returned to the Capitol this week for their eleventh week of the legislative session to continue their work for the state.

House Budget Finalized - Sent to the Senate

The House budget deliberations concluded this week with a vote of 112-6 to approve the \$9.8 billion state spending plan. The total state budget is approximately \$31.1 billion with a breakdown of: \$9.8 billion in state funds, \$9.2 billion in federal funds and \$12.1 billion in other funds (including fees and fines). Revenue projections limited the amount of new recurring dollars to \$189 million. Lawmakers identified \$30 million for broadband expansion in rural South Carolina.

The Senate is expected to begin full Senate Finance committee deliberations on the bill the week of April 13-15 with an eye on scheduling Senate floor debate the week of April 26-29. This schedule is always subject to change.

South Carolina Farm Bureau continues to emphasize the expansion of the state's broadband infrastructure services to rural communities. The lack of access to broadband and its expansion is a top legislative priority that we will continue to work with the General Assembly to increase funding to meet the needs across our state.

Illegal Transportation of Feral Hogs

The **Feral Hog Transportation Bill**, [House Bill 3539](#), was heard in full committee this week and passed favorable with a vote of 9-4. The bill will now head to the floor for

debate. SC Farm Bureau Government Relations team is deeply engaged with the committee, and other members of the Senate, working to push this crucial legislation.

Feral hogs are responsible for \$115 million in damage statewide each year and have been a growing problem for farmers. The Feral Hog Transport Bill gives law enforcement the tools needed to identify and prosecute individuals illegally transporting feral hogs. While it is currently illegal in South Carolina to transport feral hogs, it is very difficult to prove hogs are wild. This legislation would require individuals to obtain proper identification of the animals to prove their origin. An amendment was adopted that created additional documents that can be used for identification of hogs during transportation. More information on this priority issue can be found [here](#).

Warehouse Guaranty Fund

Senate Bill 698 authorizes the use of certain funds in the Warehouse Receipts Guaranty Fund. These funds are derived from interest and investment revenue that will be used to pay cotton producer claims for losses until the balance is depleted to three million dollars or all cotton producer loss claims are paid in full. The bill received Senate floor readings and will now head to the House for action.

PSC Schedules Virtual Public Hearing's for Solar Choice Rates

Duke Energy is requesting PSC approval for new rooftop solar rates designed to reduce costs imposed on all consumers who do not use rooftop solar, while allowing rooftop solar adopters to generate power without penalties. As described in greater detail in the application and agreed to via settlement with clean-energy advocates, Duke Energy has proposed rates and schedules for residential and non-residential customers. The virtual public night hearing will be held on April 21, 2021 from 9 AM - 1 PM and 4 PM - 7 PM.

To testify or express comments to PSC commissioners at the virtual public hearing, consumers must submit information to the PSC before Tuesday, April 20, 2021 by 4:45 PM. Consumers will need to provide the PSC with their: name, telephone number for the PSC to call during the hearing to receive testimony, and physical address. This information can be sent via [email](#) or given over the phone by calling (803) 896-1972.

Congressional Report

National News

PPP Loans: Legislation to extend the PPP application deadline for two months, through May 31, 2021, passed the House on March 16, 2021, and the Senate today, March 25, 2021. Farm Bureau supported passage of this legislation. Farmers and ranchers operating as single-member LLCs and State and County Farm Bureaus who were recently made eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program, now have more time to apply for PPP loans.

Pandemic Assistance for Producers (PAP): USDA announced its plans to distribute more than \$12 billion for the Pandemic Assistance for Producers, which will help farmers and ranchers who previously did not qualify for COVID-19 aid and expand assistance to farmers who have already received help. Additional sign-ups will not be necessary for those who previously submitted CFAP applications. The funding includes \$6 billion to develop new programs or modify existing proposals using remaining discretionary funding from the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Another \$5.6 billion will be directed to formula payments to cattle producers and eligible flat-rate or price trigger crops. In addition, \$500 million in new funding is included for existing programs such as the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Farmers Opportunities Training and Outreach Program, Local Agricultural Marketing Program, Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Research Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the Economic Adjustment Assistance for Textile Mills Program. Sign-up for the new program begins April 5.

More information can be found at: <https://www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance>

Trucking: Last week, Senator Deb Fisher (R-Neb.), a member of the of the Senate Commerce Committee and Ranking Member of the Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight, and Ports Subcommittee, reintroduced the Haulers of Agriculture and Livestock Safety (HAULS) Act. Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.) joined Senator Fischer in introducing the HAULS Act. The bipartisan HAULS Act modernizes the agricultural exemption to the hours-of-service rules and provides much needed regulatory relief for farmers, ranchers and ag haulers.

The HAULS Act would:

1. Eliminate the requirement that ag and livestock hours-of-service exemptions only apply during state designated planting and harvesting seasons
2. Amend and clarify the definition of "agricultural commodities" based on feedback provided by agriculture and livestock organizations

3. Authorize a 150 air-mile exemption from HOS requirements on the destination side of a haul for ag and livestock haulers
Farm Bureau supports the HAULS Act.

More News!

It's Official

New Official State Flag

The Senate Family and Veterans' Services Full Committee met on [Senate Bill 101](#), a bill by Senators Cromer and Hembree to add to the Code a section that clearly specifies the approved elements and features of the flag including the color, crescent, and palmetto tree. In 2018 a task force was formed to study the flag and develop a design to be considered as the official flag. However, after publishing their recommendation last year, the public rejected their design via social media and newspapers around the state. That design included elements from the oldest surviving state flag belonging to the 2nd SC Regiment sewn in 1776. Historians selected the shape and design of the crescent and the original color from that flag, and they took the palmetto tree from a sketch by Ellen Heyward Jervey that had been used on the official flag design from 1910.



Photo Credit *The State Newspaper*

