



## NEWS FROM GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Week 2 – January 23, 2026

The SC Farm Bureau team sends prayers to farmers who are preparing for potentially damaging winter weather this weekend. Thank you for all you do to feed and clothe our state and nation every day!

Week 2 of the Legislative Session saw continued emphasis on subcommittee and committee hearings to progress legislation to the full House and Senate for debate as this year's Session gets fully underway.

Here's a recap of the week:

### [\*\*Governor McMaster Declares State of Emergency – Overweight Loads Temporarily Affected\*\*](#)

Governor McMaster's [\*\*Executive Order\*\*](#) declared yesterday, January 22, ahead of the expected winter storm this weekend will activate the state emergency plan and allows state agencies to coordinate resources and quickly respond to local government requests. This includes authorizing SCOTD and SCDPS to temporarily suspend the enforcement of state and federal rules and regulations for those involved with:

- assisting with existing or anticipated threats and circumstances associated with the event to include commercial vehicles and operators of commercial vehicles transporting equipment, materials, or persons necessary for the restoration of utility services or debris removal and those transporting essential goods and products, such as food, water, medicine, medical supplies & equipment, fuels and petroleum products (to include fuel oil, diesel oil, gasoline, kerosene, propane, liquid petroleum, and other refined petroleum products and related equipment or assets), **livestock, poultry, feed for livestock and poultry, and crops and other agricultural products** ready to be harvested (to include timber and wood chips).

The Order was effective upon the Governor's signature and remains in effect for 30 days or the duration of the emergency, whichever is less, except requirements relating to registration, permitting, length, width, weight, and load which are suspended for

commercial and utility vehicles traveling on non-interstate routes for up to 120 days, unless otherwise modified, amended, or rescinded by a subsequent Order.

## In the House

### **State Agencies Continue Annual Budget Requests to House Ways & Means Members**

#### **SC Department of Natural Resources:**

SCDNR Executive Director, Tom Mullikin, and other senior staff, presented the agency's Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget ask to the Ways & Means Criminal Justice subcommittee, highlighting items from their \$409m total request. Some of the larger items requested include:

- \$130m for Land Conservation & Habitat Protection;
- \$100m for Coastal and Marine Resources Center;
- \$49m for Field and Regional Buildings;
- \$28.2m for Fish Hatchery Renovations;
- \$27m for State Lakes High Hazard Dams, Spillways, and Piers.

Director Mullikin attributed the substantial ask to the unprecedented growth pressures on South Carolina and the impact of extreme weather events, including an estimated \$78b in damages imparted by Hurricane Helene in 2024.

#### **SC State PSA:**

Dr. Louis Whitesides, Vice President for SC State Public Service & Agriculture, presented their request to the Ways & Means Economic Development budget subcommittee:

- \$20m: Animal Research & Extension Center
- \$5m: Training Activity Center
- \$2.3m: Statewide Extension Agribusiness Development & Expansion
- \$1.5m: Agriculture Innovation Research
- \$600,000: New Farmer Business Assistance
- \$525,000: Business Development Training & Assistance
- \$425,000: Health QUAD Initiative
- \$250,000: Future Farm Planning
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### **John de la Howe School of Agriculture:**

Dr. Timothy Keown, President of the Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe (JDLH), presented the school's annual request to the Ways & Means Education and Special School subcommittee, totaling \$33.5m, which includes:

- \$17m: LS Brice School Building Renovation;
- \$7m: agricultural arena;
- \$4.3m: Branch House renovation;
- \$3.6m: campus road resurfacing;
- \$1.5m: additional operating costs and employee funding (recurring).

The budget presentation also included key updates about school enrollment and students who have now graduated and either entered the professional arena or enrolled in higher education. Legislators in attendance were highly complementary of JDLH's operations and success over the last several years.

### **SCDNR Regulations Considered by Subcommittee**

This week, the House Regulations, Administrative Procedures, Artificial Intelligence & Cybersecurity, Environmental & Natural Resources Subcommittee met to consider several DNR Regulations. Of interest were:

- Doc 5439: **Shellfish Permit Applications:** will establish an expiration date for permit applications that do not receive an agency decision, request for additional information, or other official correspondence within twelve (12) months of the date of submission;
- Doc 5440: **Blue Crab Verifiable Documentation:** will establish a definition of 'verifiable documentation' for use when renewing a limited commercial blue crab license; additional language states that commercial blue crab landings must be recorded in the Wholesale Seafood Dealer reports.

*Both regulations were passed by the subcommittee and advanced to the full Committee.*

### **In the Senate**

A Senate Finance special subcommittee met to discuss S.344, the **SC Equine Advancement Act**. As written, the bill establishes the SC Equine Commission, creates a statewide equine industry development fund, and provides for rules and definitions related to advanced deposit account wagering (ADW).

The bill has been discussed by the subcommittee three times previously, so this week's meeting was reserved for member discussion, amendments, and voting. The subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Tom Young (Aiken), advanced three amendments and ultimately voted 3-1 to give the bill a favorable report, moving the bill to the full Senate Finance Committee. "Yes" votes included Senators: Young, Hutto(Orangeburg), and Williams (Marion); Senator Garrett(Greenwood) voted no. *A full Committee meeting is expected in the coming weeks.*

**Bulk Ag Transportation Legislation** – The Senate took the first step in codifying into law the current farm-specific free bulk ag hauling permit. This permit allows producers to haul loads up to 90,000 pounds on US and state routes. The proposed legislation would not change the ability to haul within existing specifications with a farm tag, but would eliminate the requirement for a permit. This effort would aid growers by eliminating unnecessary red tape to ensure all producers are treated equally while safely hauling their commodities from field to bin. *The bill was referred to the Senate Transportation Committee.*

### In Other News

Governor McMaster announced the selection of the 2026 South Carolina Chef Ambassadors:

- **Jordan Heyd**, owner/executive chef of Lekker Eats in Myrtle Beach;
- **James London**, owner/chef of Chubby Fish and Seahorse in Charleston;
- **Guichard Ulysse**, owner/chef of House 509 Bistro & Wine Bar in Greer.

Chef Ambassadors represent the state through food festivals and other promotional opportunities, sharing South Carolina's culinary traditions, agricultural heritage, and undiscovered places with the world. They support our state's farmers by using Certified South Carolina produce, meats, dairy, seafood and other farm-fresh foods.

Pictures and bios of the Chef Ambassadors can be found here: <https://scprt.widencollective.com/c/ihz2kk1a>

## 2026 SCFB Commodity Day



This week, SCFB hosted all of our Commodity Advisory Committees in Columbia for their first 2026 organizational meetings. We thank all those who attended this successful morning of business and fellowship!

South Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers, State FSA Director Cody Simpson, and Rep. Patrick Haddon of Greenville all joined the event and addressed the crowd during lunch giving their respective updates on the state of agriculture and other important issues in South Carolina.



Commissioner Weathers addressing the lunch crowd.



Dairy Advisory



Beef Advisory