

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – February 20, 2013

Fixing South Carolina's Infrastructure Key to Prosperous Agribusiness

**By: Pamela P. Lackey, Chair- Palmetto AgriBusiness Council
David Winkles, President – S.C. Farm Bureau Federation**

South Carolina must get serious about confronting the problem of our declining transportation infrastructure to avoid significant short- and long-term damage to our state's largest business sector.

Agribusiness (which includes agriculture, forestry and timber products) contributes \$34 billion to South Carolina's economy and provides 200,000 jobs.

In rural areas, agribusiness is often the primary asset to create jobs, improve per capita income and stimulate growth. The good news is South Carolina is well-positioned to participate in the international marketplace.

Looking ahead, the industry is expected to account for \$50 billion in economic impact by 2020, with much of the growth resulting from the creation of new export markets. This ability to efficiently transport products to the Port of Charleston will therefore be even more crucial.

Agribusiness has always depended upon the ability to connect the farm to the consumer, which means an effective transportation system is imperative. Unfortunately, South Carolina's rural roads and bridges are declining, making shipping products to market more costly and time-consuming.

According to the SC Department of Transportation, nearly one-third of South Carolina's primary and interstate highways are in poor or mediocre condition, with approximately half the secondary roads in failing condition. One out of every five bridges in the state is considered deficient.

Our highway system needs far exceed \$6 billion in the long term. However, an immediate infusion of an additional \$300 million annually can address many of our most pressing critical needs in three areas:

- \$100 million new dollars annually dedicated to Act 114 "ranked interstate widening," supplementing the existing federal funds shown in the current Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
- \$100 million annually for "replacement of all 420 "load restricted bridges" within five years. After completing the load-restricted bridges, these funds would supplement the current federal allocation dedicated by the SCDOT for the replacement/rehabilitation of the remaining 468 structurally deficient bridges.
- \$100 million annually for an Act 114 ranked "statewide resurfacing program," touching each of the state's 46 counties.

A recent study by the Association of General Contractors estimates that every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure would create more than 28,500 jobs in construction, manufacturing and other industries.

We do not endorse any specific funding strategy. However, we commend Governor Nikki Haley for recognizing the critical need to fund our state's highways and bridges and for identifying possible funding mechanisms and the General Assembly for its review of all funding alternatives.

The SC DOT has developed an initial plan of action, based on traffic count and needs, which we support. We also support expansion of I-26 to facilitate the flow of commerce through the Port of Charleston.

With the many needs our state faces, the magnitude of the infrastructure problem is a challenge. But the decision will determine South Carolina's economic future.

Neighboring states, strong agribusiness competitors, recognize the importance of infrastructure investment. Georgia spends \$35,000 per mile; North Carolina spends more than \$150,000. South Carolina spends an average of \$15,000 per mile on roads.

We encourage our state leaders to not let this Legislative session pass without developing a comprehensive plan to fix our state's infrastructure, reaffirming South Carolina's commitment to sustainable economic growth through agribusiness.

##

For more information, please contact:

Cathy Novinger
Executive Director
Palmetto AgriBusiness Council
803-926-3462
cathy@novingerqtr.com

-Please see attached for bios of authors.

Pamela P. Lackey
Chair, Palmetto AgriBusiness Council
President, AT&T South Carolina

Pamela P. Lackey is President, AT&T South Carolina, a position she has held since 2007. She is responsible for the public policy, economic development and community affairs activities of AT&T, a leading provider of wireless and wireline communications services. In her role, she works closely with state and community leaders to help bring new technology and jobs to the state and improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians.

Ms. Lackey is actively engaged in community and civic affairs and serves on numerous boards, including: the S.C. Ports Authority Board, the Business Partnership Foundation at USC's Moore School of Business, the Palmetto AgriBusiness Council, the Palmetto Business Forum, and the Hollings Cancer Center Advisory Board. She served four years on the Research Centers of Excellence Review Board. In November 2011, she was named the Business Leader of the Year by the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the highest award bestowed by the state's largest business and industry association.

David Winkles
President, S. C. Farm Bureau Federation

David Winkles is a family farmer from Oswego in Sumter County. His farm produces soybeans, corn, wheat and timber. Over the years, he has been very active in agricultural organizations, including Farm Bureau, the Palmetto Agribusiness Council, the United Soybean Board, the SC Soybean Board and Clemson Extension Service Programs.

He was elected in Dec. 2011 to his eighth term as President of the S.C. Farm Bureau Federation, a non-profit advocacy organization for South Carolina farmers, with 112,000 member families.

Mr. Winkles is Chairman of the Board of the Farm Bureau Bank headquartered in San Antonio, Texas. He is a member of the Southern Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance Board of Directors and First Vice President of Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company. Mr. Winkles also currently serves on the Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee for Oilseed Trade, a position appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. In 2000, he was appointed by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman to serve on a national biotechnology advisory committee. He is the past chairman of the SC Soybean Board and past chairman of the United Soybean Board. Mr. Winkles has testified before Congress on a number of occasions dealing with issues like trade and biotechnology and is currently a National Cotton Council Advisor.

Mr. Winkles holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Clemson University.