



# PABBCJournal

**Celebrating**



**Years  
1999-2024**

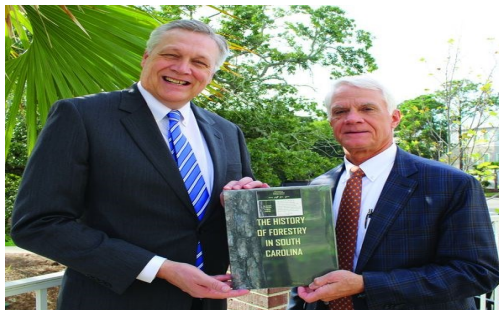


Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack



Harry Ott, President of SC Farm Bureau (L) and Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President.

Several notable speakers were featured at agribusiness events closing out 2023. Top left, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack spoke at a SC State University stakeholder meeting. Top right, American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall addressed the SC Farm Bureau's annual meeting, and bottom photo—Sen. Chip Campsen was the keynote speaker at the Forestry Association of South Carolina's annual meeting.



Cam Crawford, President & CEO of the Forestry Association of South Carolina (L) presents *The History of Forestry in SC* to Senator Chip Campsen.

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## CEO MESSAGE

### FROM RONNIE SUMMERS



**As we look back at the fourth quarter of 2023,** there were some obvious agribusiness success stories for our state while there also remain some challenges in the world of agribusiness. For example, after years of debate on DHEC reform, legislation was finally approved within our state to move in another direction with environmental and food safety leadership. In addition, a new in-state vet school was initiated. On the other hand, our federal leadership have not been able to agree on a Farm Bill, which is typically a bipartisan, critical piece of legislation for our country in that at the core the Farm Bill is about food and fiber (clothes and construction) which are essential needs. There also appears to be agreement as to the need for immigration reform which affects agribusiness labor, but no proposed solution exists that can be collectively agreed upon by Congress or further more even agreed upon among US farmers and those in forestry (primarily regional differences).

**Within SC agribusiness,** we have so much to be grateful for as our industry provides critically essential products not only to the state and country but to the world. The number one SC industry should be very proud of this fact; however, there is a keen need for collaboration on many critical policy matters affecting agribusiness. The great thing about the Palmetto AgriBusiness Council is that it affords a unique platform for our members - state agencies, state trade organizations, privately held agribusinesses, public agribusinesses, and those entities which desire to strongly support SC agribusinesses and rural communities - to communicate and make every effort to find common, productive ground.

**In most instances,** PABC does not lead “policy efforts” as we are fortunate in SC to have excellent organizations specifically leading agriculture and forestry in this regard. But, PABC continues to serve as a strong conduit to leverage support through collaboration as mentioned earlier and to support SC agribusiness needs through a very diversified, collective effort. Our member entities appear to realize this fact about our organization and do a good job communicating, but as CEO, let me encourage our members and close associates to communicate openly with PABC as to where PABC can best support “your efforts/priorities” on important state and federal issues.

**The bottom line** is that your staff remains ready and willing to assist where needed in regards to SC agribusiness advocacy, education, policy, and in any other way we can to make our industry stronger and stronger. Your support of SC agribusiness is very much appreciated and your staff remains here to serve you!!!

# SCDA Prepares to Take on Additional Food Safety Regulations This Year

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) is preparing to take on some important regulatory duties that are currently handled by the Department of Health and Environmental Control, better known as DHEC.

Starting July 1, 2024, SCDA will handle all retail food safety inspection, including restaurant kitchens, school cafeterias, caterers, grocery stores, some convenience stores and more. SCDA is taking over DHEC's Manufactured Food Programs, including soft drinks, cheese and dairy, bottle water and ice; as well as the Milk Inspection Program and Laboratory.

The South Carolina General Assembly entrusted SCDA with these new responsibilities as part of S.399, a bill that restructures DHEC and divides its oversight among new and existing agencies.

The food safety transfer is a natural fit. SCDA has regulated wholesale food manufacturing for nearly 50 years. The agency also regulates animal feed safety, specialty food producers, and produce farming, and has well-equipped specialized labs that conduct a variety of regulatory testing.

"The South Carolina Department of Agriculture has a great reputation for protecting the public and working with South Carolina businesses," said Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers. "These new duties will strengthen our ability to assure food safety while also streamlining services for businesses, some of which are currently regulated by both SCDA and DHEC. This is good news for farmers, too: We'll have even more involvement in every step of the food system, from when it's grown to where it's eaten. We look forward to serving our state in new ways as we affirm our longstanding commitment to food safety and a strong agriculture industry."

SCDA and DHEC are working together with the SC Department of Administration to assure a smooth transition for customers, employees and the public. SCDA will roughly double in size, with about 115 positions transferring over from DHEC. DHEC food safety staff will join SCDA's existing Consumer Protection Division, which includes all the agency's regulatory departments.

"The food safety regulations aren't changing, but the public will see some changes—and not just a new logo on the restaurant door," said Assistant Commissioner for Consumer Protection Derek Underwood. "South Carolina consumers and the businesses we inspect can expect a responsive team dedicated to helping improve food safety. We look forward to continuing to earn public trust with these new responsibilities."

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **SC Green Industry Annual Conference and Trade Show**

**January 24-25**

Columbia Metropolitan  
Convention Center  
[www.greenindustry.org](http://www.greenindustry.org)

### **2nd Annual Pee Dee Klays for Kids March 16**

Cindy Lussier  
860-234-0928

### **Spotlight on Agriculture & Forestry March 19**

Phillips Market Center  
[www.sccchamber.net](http://www.sccchamber.net)

### **2024 SC Agriculture Business & Technology Forum March 20**

Phillips Market Center

### **Certified SC Showcase March 21**

Columbia Metropolitan  
Convention Center

## Members in the News



**Jake Scott**

### **Jake Scott Selected Chairman of Forestry Association of SC**

Congratulations to PABC member Jake Scott, VP of Collum's Lumber Products, for being selected as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Forestry Association of South Carolina.

### **SC 50 Most Influential Business Leaders**

Several PABC members were chosen as 50 Most Influential Business Leaders in South Carolina.

Congratulations to **Andy Carr**, CEO of the SC Manufacturing Extension Partnership; **James Clements**, President, Clemson University; **Lou Kennedy**, CEO, Nephron Pharmaceuticals and **Barbara Melvin**, President and CEO, South Carolina Ports.

## **EDGAR WOODS HONORED AS OUTSTANDING CLEMSON ALUMNI**

PABC member Edgar Woods was recently honored as one of four Clemson alums for outstanding service to the college, university and agribusiness industry.

A 1983 Clemson Ag Business graduate, Woods has been an outstanding representative of CAFLS for his entire career. He is the founder and president of Palmetto Grain Brokerage, headquartered in Ridgeland, SC, and president of Performance Ag, LLC. He is also a founding partner of Silveus Southeast and a partner in the Agriculture Products Exchange with offices in New York, Iowa and South Carolina, past chairman of the Palmetto Agri-Business Council and past president of the SC Grain Dealers Association.

Through all of his professional responsibilities, Woods is proud to promote his Clemson degree and CAFLS and is actively engaged with Clemson Extension. He is a highly sought-after speaker and attracts full meeting rooms, especially when a marketing forecast is on the agenda.

Woods and wife, Karin have given back to Clemson in multiple ways and, as noted in his nomination, he "has a deep, burning passion for Clemson University and CAFLS. He has built Palmetto Grain Brokerage into one of the premier brokerage firms in our industry, but has never forgotten what graduating from Clemson in 1983 did for him professionally."

Because of his love for Clemson and appreciation for the doors his education has opened for him, Woods has always looked to invest in the next generation: "He goes out of his way to promote Clemson to young men and women interested in attending Clemson or a current or past Clemson student seeking career advice or opportunities to work in agriculture. Edgar is most definitely "all in" with Clemson and CAFLS!



**Edgar Woods (L) receives the Outstanding Clemson Alumni award from Dr. Greg Yarrow, Acting Dean of the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences. Ronnie Summers, PABC CEO (R), was the emcee for the event.**





## Duke Energy Provides Grant to Farmers for GAP Certification

A new partnership is helping more South Carolina Farmers show buyers their commitment to food safety.

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture's Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship (ACRE) is helping South Carolina farmers achieve Good Agricultural Practices Certification thanks to a \$100,000 grant from Duke Energy.

Good Agricultural Practices, or GAP, is a voluntary federal audit showing that a farm is taking significant steps to reduce the risk of foodborne illness associated with fresh fruits and vegetables. Some buyers, including some grocery chains and school districts, will only purchase from GAP-certified farms. Thus, GAP certification can be crucial for farms looking to scale up their operations and find sustainable markets for their produce.

ACRE is partnering with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the South Carolina Black Farmers Coalition, Pick 42 Foundation, and Bonita Global LLC to help growers prepare a GAP audit and cover the costs of certification. The program is targeting small, minority-owned farms in South Carolina.

"We know many small South Carolina farms are already using excellent food safety practices, and GAP certification is a stamp of approval so buyers know it, too," said Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers. "I thank all our partners in this effort for their commitment to sustaining South Carolina agriculture."

"GAP certification means opportunity and access for small, socially disadvantaged farms," said Larry Harris, a produce grower who owns Harris Farms LLC in Sumter County. Harris has also worked to bring other farmers in to the program.

"Agribusiness is South Carolina's top industry, and Duke Energy is proud to power thousands of family and commercial farms and related businesses," said Mike Callahan, Duke Energy's South Carolina President. "We are excited to invest in resources like the GAP certification program that will help farmers grow their business and support our agricultural economy."

Half of Duke Energy's generous contribution is being used for the GAP assistance program, while ACRE is using the other \$50,000 for small business development grants to agricultural producers in the region served by Duke Energy.

To learn more about ACRE, visit [acre-sc.com](http://acre-sc.com) (<http://acre-sc.com/>).

### AT&T Contribution Will Enhance Digital Access for Students

In an era where digital connectivity has become a lifeline to education, work, and essential services, AT&T is breaking down barriers to education and fostering digital empowerment by contributing \$40,000 to the United Way of the Midlands' Young Men United program.

The \$40,000 contribution from AT&T will be directed toward purchasing laptops and providing essential virus software, helping ensure that students have the necessary tools for their digital education. Additionally, funding will support hands-on training sessions to equip students with the skills to navigate the digital landscape effectively.

This contribution aligns with AT&T's commitment to helping close the digital divide by expanding broadband access, adoption, and equity, as well as effective digital learning experiences and outcomes for students. Continuing its efforts to help connect more South Carolinians, AT&T is expanding its fiber network to serve more than 700 new customers in the Eau Clair community, in addition to the more than 6,000 customer locations that currently have access to AT&T fiber.

"At AT&T, we are committed to connecting more South Carolinians to greater possibility, and we are proud to support the United Way of the Midlands' Young Men United program," said Terrance Ford, Vice President of External Affairs for AT&T South Carolina. "Together, with the United Way of the Midlands, we are helping connect South Carolina youth with the resources and tools they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond."

## WELCOME NEW PALMETTO AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL MEMBERS

### Growers for Grace



Growers for Grace PBC, has joined at the Associate Level. Growers for Grace is an operation founded by Angela O'Neal Rainwater, and she will represent her entity at PABC. For more on this unique faith-based agricultural entity, please see the Growers for Grace PBC website.

<https://growersforgrace.com/>

### LEI AgroTurf

"Building one relationship at a time." That is Keith LaMere's motto and creed. Introducing Keith LaMere, Owner of LEI AgroTurf, who has joined PABC as an Associate member.

From a small town near Milwaukee - Muskego, WI, Keith grew up working on farms and ranches learning the value of hard work and embracing the traditional Midwestern values.

Upon moving to Charleston, South Carolina, Keith developed a strong sense of wanting to work rurally once again. His plight is to help the growers and farmers of the Southeast find solutions to the growing challenges of the 21st century.

"Whether it is saving money on fertilizer, making the ground perfect or increasing yields, we're here to roll up our sleeves and help," states Keith. "I honestly believe that God has a sense of humor and Mother nature can be sometimes difficult. Just look at this past growing season. Between the up and down frosts for planting to the multiple 116-degree days, it sure was a challenge. It seemed Mother Nature was playing the Hokey Pokey with us. We help mitigate those stresses that the weather throws at us. It is great to come through these challenges and see a farmer with a smile on his face!"

LEI AgroTurf, located in Summerville, SC, covers all the United States. The products they represent are American made by American-owned companies. With organically charged products and natural solutions, LEI practices a one-on-one approach with each grower. Their unique solutions have been

proven over and over in multiple trials in various sites, spanning decades not only to dramatically increase yields but also drop a significant amount to the bottom line.

"We can't do much about the price of equipment, labor and the fluctuating crop prices, but we can sure help with the yield a grower gets," said Keith.

"Nothing is better than seeing a farmer come out of a particularly challenging season with a smile on their face." That is why I do this. My boys ask me what I do for a living, and I just smile and say I get paid to play in the dirt."

Keith and his team can be reached at (843) 870-8284 [kameer@LEIAgroTurf.com](mailto:kameer@LEIAgroTurf.com)



## Site Chosen for Clemson's New Veterinary College

The state's first college of veterinary medicine will be constructed in Pendleton on land next to one of the most pristine areas of the Clemson University Experimental Forest.

The tract of land in Pendleton is adjacent to one of the most ecologically sensitive areas of the 17,500-acre Clemson Experimental Forest known as the George Aull Natural Area, the university says. This area of the forest is the best remnant of Piedmont old-growth forest in the upstate. The area was never logged or planted in cotton and has some overstory trees that are more than 200 years old.

Initial site work for the college is scheduled to begin in April, with a planned completion for fall 2026 when, pending accreditation, the university expects to enroll its first class.

Clemson University announced plans for the vet school in June when the trustees approved initial plans with support from the Governor and the South Carolina General Assembly. The Palmetto State's first home-educated veterinarians would graduate in 2030 if all plans stay on track.

"Today is a historic day," Clemson President Jim Clements said in a statement at the time of the announcement. "We are thrilled that Clemson University has received landmark funding to establish the state of South Carolina's first college of veterinary medicine. Clemson University is continuing its mission of positively impacting the lives of our students and the citizens of South Carolina. The new college will continue to elevate the state of South Carolina by meeting the needs of our communities, retaining top talent, support the state's economy and protecting animal and human health."

A feasibility study conducted ahead of the decision found that 33% of the state's counties have fewer than five veterinarians and 48% of the counties have fewer than 10. At the time of the study, 200 students from South Carolina were enrolled in 13 veterinary colleges outside of the state. The state was providing tuition coverage for 46 students to pursue veterinary education at Tuskegee University (seven), Mississippi State University (10) and the University of Georgia (29) at a cost of more than \$6 million per year.

*(cont. on page 8, see New Vet School Site)*



Palmetto AgriBusiness Council

OFFICERS:

Sarah Windham, Chair

Harry Ott, Past Chairman

Bryant Sansbury, Secretary/Treasurer

STAFF:

Ronnie Summers, CEO

Sandy Boozer, Executive Assistant

**New Vet School Site (cont. from page 7)**

"Veterinarians today play an increasingly important role, in addition to caring for both companion and farm animals, protecting public health, playing an essential role in food safety as well as in detection and control of zoonotic diseases," said Dr. Boyd Parr, co-chair of the Clemson College of Veterinary Medicine steering committee and a retired South Carolina State Veterinarian. "This new veterinary college can produce the veterinarians and research that will contribute to a better future for our citizens and our animals."

The new college will use a distributed model of teaching, where students learn their basic sciences, anatomy, pre-clinical skills and communication skills during their first three years on campus, after which students conduct clinical learning in distributed learning sites throughout the state.

In July, the university named Dr. Steven Marks the founding dean of the college. He was a director of veterinary medical services and clinical professor of emergency and internal medicine at North Carolina State University, where he also served as associate dean. He joined the Clemson faculty in August.

Palmetto AgriBusiness Council

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