



## ***A BRIDGE TO OPPORTUNITY***

In South Carolina, only 15% (reading), 13% (math) and 11% (science) of African American students perform at or above proficiency. 'As we Grow' addresses these critical subject areas by providing a project-based program where students develop critical thinking skills, gain the ability to solve problems, work effectively as a team, and apply learning outcomes to their present life experience.

'As we Grow' focuses on two farming methods along with the science and technology required to successfully produce vegetation. Students will learn about hydroponics and traditional growing using the "grow bag" method. Technology is rapidly growing in the field of agriculture. The students learn to fly drones and gain an understanding of the role drones play in agriculture.

### **Objective/Goal:**

- Encourage agricultural career pathways
- Fill academic gaps in science, math and reading
- Grasp the large concepts behind agriculture through interactions with instructors.
- Learn about advanced tools available for monitoring and manipulating growth cycles and how to best use them.
- Build and manage a small hydroponic system.
- Create a positive bond between farm animals and the students
- Operate drones and understand drone application
- Learn team-building skills.

**Activities:** Work with animals, fish, incubate eggs, STEAM activities using SC state educational standards, learn about and build hydroponic systems, learn to operate drones, field trips to Edventure, Clean Leafy Greens and Set in Stone Sustainability Farm

**Partnerships:** Clemson Ext, South Carolina Department of Agriculture (ACRE), Set in Stone Sustainability Farm, Clean Leafy Greens, Double V Aerospace, Edgewood Foundation (We are also planning to incorporate Richland School District One and the Farm Bureau)

**Population served:** Richland One students ages 6yrs - 12yrs living in underserved areas (zip codes 29201, 29203, 29204,

**Program Date:** June 12, 2023 – August 4, 2023

**Number of students:** 60; Two cohorts of 30

**Target age:** 6-12yrs

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## SUMMER PROGRAM CONNECTS CHILDREN TO AGRICULTURE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY HANNAH ARNDT

On August 18, 2022, South Carolina Department of Agriculture employees visited with campers participating in the Barrier Breakers "As We Grow" program, a summer-long camp for underserved students ages 6-13, focusing on urban and rural agriculture practices.



With visits to Clean Leafy Greens and Set in Stone Sustainability Farm, students in the Barrier Breakers summer program are learning where their food comes from.

Barrier Breakers is a grassroots nonprofit organization rooted in the ethic of passing on traditional business values infused with an understanding of regenerative work and sustainability. Jennifer Cunningham, a resident of Columbia, South Carolina, founded Barrier Breakers with a mission to engage students living in marginalized communities with our state's agriculture industry, improving their science, math, and technology skills, all while enhancing students' ability to think critically about the food that they eat.

After witnessing a lack of knowledge among young students about where their food comes from, Jennifer set out to ensure the next generation could see firsthand how to grow and process food not only to sustain themselves, but also to have a future career in agriculture.

"It is so important that our students understand how their food is grown and to create a space where they can be engaged through experiential work that fosters creativity and exposes them to new ideas," said Cunningham.

While participating in the program, students have learned valuable skills like fishing, composting, and using grow bags for produce. They have been able to experience exactly what goes into living and working on a farm in rural South Carolina, as well as



observe daily operations at an urban hydroponic facility.

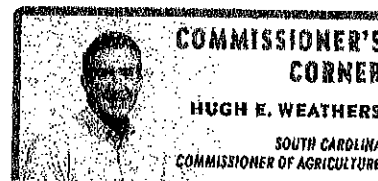
Campers had a busy schedule during SCDA's visit, starting off with a morning meeting to get prepared for the day before heading out on the road. The first stop of the day was Clean Leafy Greens, a hydroponic operation located in Columbia. Students were able to learn about the process of growing plants in nutrient solutions under LED grow lights.

The next stop was Set in Stone Sustainability Farm, located in Jenkinsville. Here, campers learned to feed chickens, goats, and pigs, and even incubate their own quail eggs. The visit also included writing and visual art lessons.

Throughout the summer, participants in the camp also learned about soil composition, water cycles, jam making, teamwork, and more.

"My hope is for Barrier Breakers to grow in the years to come, giving more children the opportunity to look beyond their communities, improve their academics, and develop a personal connection with food, field and flora," Cunningham said.

To learn more about Barrier Breakers, including how to volunteer or donate, visit [barrier-breakers.com](http://barrier-breakers.com).



### COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

HUGH E. WEATHERS

SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE

### SUMMER SCHOOL

When it comes to exploring a career, it's great to see what's possible and get your feet wet ahead of time.

Thirty-six high school students just wrapped up a full week of learning, leadership and some fun as well at the 2022 South Carolina Commissioner's School for Agriculture.

In some cases, their feet actually were wet: The students enjoyed a whitewater rafting trip as one of several team-building activities during the week. I haven't heard of anyone going overboard but it wouldn't surprise me - just to cool off.

Held at Clemson University, the Commissioner's School is a career and leadership development summer program for high school students considering a career in the agricultural, natural resource and life science industries.

For the first time since 2019, the program was in-person for the entire week. It was nice to be back together.

We kicked it off over the weekend with our Industry Tour Day, which featured visits to peach grower Titan Farms, Log Creek Timber, and poultry producer Amick Farms.

When enrolling in the program, students choose among three emphasis areas: Livestock Production, Forestry & Natural Resources, or Plant Science. They then follow a rigorous schedule of academic sessions

and laboratory research for their emphasis area throughout the week.

Also on the agenda was an Expert Panel featuring several staff members from our agency and Discussion Meet, now headed up by Clemson's Dr. Kirby Peyer and sponsored by SC Farm Bureau, which gives students the opportunity to work through some hot topics in ag.

Woven throughout the week are plenty of fun activities. For example, early each morning, the student have the opportunity to participate in a tradition called Fitness Challenge, with prizes given at week's end for top contenders.

I went up Thursday night for the Farm to Table Dinner to wrap up the week. This event featured foods donated by several farms - Vertical Roots, Watson's Farms, WIP Rawl, Rooting Down Farms, the SC Beef Council and Francis Produce - and their support is tremendous. It was a great end to a great week. I'm proud of all these students achieved and learned this week and look forward to seeing them at the next Commissioner's School reunion.

As long as we're talking about inspiring future generations to enter agriculture, let me say a big congratulations to our Sunbelt Ag Expo State Farmer of the Year for 2022, Keith Allen. Thanks for representing South Carolina farmers.

*Hugh E. Weathers*