

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

FY 2026-27 Budget Hearing

Agency Attendees

- Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner of Agriculture
- Clint Leach, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs and Economic Development
- Derek Underwood, Deputy Commissioner for Consumer Protection
- Aaron Wood, Deputy Commissioner for Agency Operations

SCDA Mission

- The mission of the South Carolina Department of Agriculture is to promote and nurture the growth and development of South Carolina's agriculture industry and its related businesses while assuring the safety and security of the buying public.

SCDA Divisions and Departments

- Office of Commissioner
- External Affairs and Economic Development
 - Marketing, Communications, Agribusiness Development, Legislative
- Consumer Protection
 - Laboratory, Consumer Services, Wholesale Food Safety, Retail Food Safety, Feed Safety, Milk Safety, Produce Safety, Federal-State Inspections
- Agency Operations
 - Finance and Administration, Information Technology, Human Resources, Grants Administration, State Farmers Markets
- Office of General Counsel

Greenville State Farmers Market



Recurring Budget Requests (Form B1)

- **\$1,090,000: Cost Increases for Required Services**
 - We utilize shared services, and their cost increases are being passed along to SCDA.
 - State Fleet Lease Base Rates, DTO networking, hardware, and end user services, IRF premiums have all increased greatly from FY24 to FY26.
 - Unfunded personnel costs (general increases and employer contributions) for our revenue funded employees are eating into the budget, particularly since FY21.
 - Many of our fees are set by statute and cannot be raised cover these costs.

Recurring Budget Requests (Form B1)

- **\$350,000: South Carolina Seafood Marketing**
 - Address the problem highlighted in spring and summer 2025 where some restaurants were serving imported shrimp that was marketed as local.
 - Significant health and safety concerns.
 - Partner with industry associations to educate restaurants and consumers, highlight local fishermen and growers, clearly identify local products, bolster the local seafood marketing chain.
 - Incentivize restaurants to ensure they are buying and selling local seafood.
 - Support the state's commercial fishing industry that is on life support.

Recurring Budget Requests (Form B1)

- **\$860,000: Public Health Inspections Continuity**
 - SCDA inspectors often perform federal and state inspections of food and feed establishments under cooperative agreements, and that funding is shrinking.
 - Maintaining fully compliant and consistently trained inspection teams benefits businesses because they deal with one inspector who lives and works in their communities; and ensures consumers have confidence in what they eat and drink.
 - This seizes the current trend at the federal level to put government closer to the people in the states.

Recurring Budget Requests (Form B1)

- **\$580,000: Retail Food Inspection Quality Enhancement**
 - Through reorganization of teams, territories, and operations, SCDA has achieved greater efficiencies in the Retail Food Safety Program and now has a ratio of 1 inspector per 274 establishments.
 - Hiring 7 more inspectors would get us to a sweet spot of 1:250, enhancing quality of life for inspectors and the quality of the inspection program.
 - The right inspection frequency, better relationships between inspectors and firms, and a good work life balance.
 - If funded, please move five (5) positions from “Earmarked” to “State.”

Nonrecurring Budget Requests (Form B2)

- **\$30,000,000: Growing Agribusiness Fund**
 - Continue economic development efforts for agribusiness expansion in rural counties using reimbursable grants through county governments.
 - Previous funds have been used for beef, dairy, food and beverage processing, seafood, poultry, forestry, and grain storage projects.
 - \$31 million encumbered = \$465 million investment, 951 new jobs, and 21 counties.
 - High interest from forest products companies.
 - This fund is helping strengthen the agriculture and forestry supply chains.

Nonrecurring Budget Requests (Form B2)

- **\$750,000: Microbiological Laboratory Testing Equipment**
 - Bring biological testing in-house at the Consumer Protection Laboratory.
 - Streamline testing, analysis, and response actions.
 - Focus on animal feed, produce, and foods for human consumption.
 - Support SCDA regulatory and compliance programs.

Capital Budget Request (Form C)

- **\$2,500,000: State Farmers Markets Revenue Opportunities**
 - Host outdoor events like small concerts, food festivals, arts and crafts festivals, and kids' activities.
 - Generate revenue and improve aesthetic appeal at Pee Dee SFM.
 - Pavement and retaining wall repair at Greenville SFM.

Pee Dee State Farmers Market





Provisos (Form D)

- ***New: Retail Food Civil Penalties**
 - This would allow SCDA to keep penalties for retail food violations to defray costs associated with operating the Retail Food Safety and Compliance Program.
- ***New: Carryforward Certified SC School Cafeteria Funds**
 - This would allow School Districts more flexibility to purchase local food products.