



South Carolina DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

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SC Gov. Henry McMaster and Ag Commissioner Hugh Weathers Host Regional Ag Summit at Governor's Mansion

[COLUMBIA, SC] -- Some two-dozen retail, wholesale and food-service produce buyers and other supporters recently joined Governor Henry D. McMaster and Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers at the South Carolina Governor's Mansion for an ag summit to promote cooperation among Southeastern producers and purveyors and shine a spotlight on South Carolina agriculture.

The attendees represented chains from across the Southeast and gathered at the Governor's home to explore opportunities in South Carolina agriculture and explore ways Southeastern states can work together as a region to drive U.S. produce consumption.

The overarching goal was to launch an initiative of the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to promote Certified S.C. Grown products and regional collaboration in the Southeast.

"We are looking for ways we can work together, reach across state lines and capitalize on the resources, growers, infrastructure and products already in abundance in the Southeast," said Weathers. "This is the season of a new spirit of cooperation between Southeastern growers and distributors to capture more market share among the 80 percent of the U.S. population who live east of the Rocky Mountains."

Added Gov. McMaster, "The political and business leadership of the State of South Carolina understand the importance of agriculture not only to South Carolina and its farmers but to those families who consume it locally and around the world. Any way you look at it, agriculture is a great part of South Carolina's future -- and the notion of increasing consumption of home-grown product by South Carolina farmers is a big part of what we want to put forward for the future."

Weathers and McMaster emphasized current strengths in South Carolina agriculture: diversity of product, supporting infrastructure, transportation grid and ports, processing and distribution capabilities and its critical central hub location on the East Coast.

They also pledged a willingness to explore new ideas with partners from the buying side on-demand and by request, noting the success of South Carolina farmers with an increasingly diverse crop mix. Of equal importance was a call for ways to work regionally with other states to increase opportunities for Southeastern growers and producers.

"We have a tendency to look at California as the production leader in this kind of agriculture. If we look at the Southeastern United States from Florida to Virginia we very much see equivalencies in terms of what we're able to produce, the variety of products, the diversity of operations and the ingenuity of Southeastern farmers and land grant universities," said RFD-TV Network Producer and Correspondent Chip Carter, who moderated the event. "There's nothing they can do there that we can't do here. There is unique opportunity for the Southeast moving forward to serve this ever-increasing demand from consumers for more, and South Carolina is uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in this new Southeastern ag power bloc."

A local lunch, prepared by staff Chefs Jared Hudson and Brian Mather, showed off South Carolina's finest to invitees, including Certified SC Grown sautéed kale, goat cheese, roasted chicken, strawberry sauce and more.

Look for televised coverage of the event on the RFD-TV Network's *Market Day Report* Wednesday May 1 at 9:25 and 11:25 a.m. and 1:25 p.m. Those same reports will also be available post-air at SoutheastProduceWeekly.com, where the event can also be viewed in its entirety.

FOR EDITORS:

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Dropbox Link to video and audio of the complete presentation at the Governor's Mansion
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/k6bo7xror6zgr9/Full%20Governor%27s%20Mansion%20Interview.mp4?dl=0>

Dropbox link to photos from the event
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/as0qi4j820zw31l/AAAZjDCmdSMiMqBn6j1_TCS6a?dl=0