



South Carolina DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

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Seven SC Agricultural Entrepreneurs to Get ACRE Funding and Mentoring

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Seven ACRE entrepreneurs are one step closer to taking their agribusinesses to the next level, thanks to a competitive application and pitch process offered by the [Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship \(ACRE\)](#).

The [ACRE Entrepreneurship Program](#) will provide business mentoring and a total of \$125,000 in grants of varying amounts to the entrepreneurs, who represent regions across South Carolina, including: Debbie Webster of Whispering Pines Farm (Pickens County), Jared Jester of Heritage Peanut Co. (Beaufort County), Jason Thomas of Sow, Inc. (Richland County), Matthew and Tracy Woodard of Covered in Cotton (Darlington County), Josh Eboch of Barrier Island Oyster Co. (Charleston County), Steve Lorch of Table Rock Tea Co. (Pickens County), and Brian Wheat of Common Joy (Charleston County).

“By offering targeted funding to these seven entrepreneurs, ACRE is helping to nurture innovation in South Carolina agriculture,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers. “Whether by growing new industries or finding new approaches to existing industries, they all have the potential to spur economic development in our state.”

Debbie Webster of [Whispering Pines Farm](#) has been in business since 1980, but recently started specializing in sheep dairy products with milk from their Pickens County herd. They are now the only sheep dairy producers on South Carolina. Webster will use the ACRE funding to purchase equipment for milk storage, hire more personnel, and increase marketing.

Jared Jester is heading up the **Heritage Peanut Company, LLC**, a new business that is packaging and selling frozen boiled peanuts – South Carolina’s state snack. Partnering with Corrin Bowers, a peanut farmer from Estill, SC, Jester plans to use the ACRE funding for operating and marketing expenses.

Jason Thomas developed the online farmers marketplace called **Sow, Inc.** in order to connect small, local farmers to shoppers in their area that they would normally not have access to. Thomas will use the ACRE funding to fund further development of the software application.

[Covered in Cotton](#), founded by Matthew and Tracy Woodard in 2018, produces and sells luxurious cotton blankets made with cotton from their Darlington County farm. With the ACRE

grant funds, they plan to develop and market several new bedding blankets, as well as a swaddle blanket.

Josh Eboch and Jared Hulteen began [Barrier Island Oyster Co.](#) as the first floating oyster farm in Charleston County. They plan to begin offering tours and education, in order to increase the agritourism impact in Charleston while protecting the native oyster population.

Steve Lorch of [Table Rock Tea Co.](#) (Pickens County) owns a small farm but has big aspirations – turning the upstate area around Table Rock into the “Tea Country” of the East Coast. Having planted a thriving initial crop and formed a co-op with local farmers, Lorch plans to use the ACRE money to purchase equipment to advance his business.

Finally, **Common Joy, Inc.** is a new company in Charleston started by Brian Wheat. As the first luffa farmer in South Carolina, Wheat is ramping up his cultivation of this sustainable, unique plant, which can be used as both an edible vegetable when fresh and as a sponge when dried.

"Heading into our second year, we are now even better positioned to help these seven dedicated and impressive entrepreneurs," said ACRE Executive Director Kyle Player.

Through seeking out and supporting qualified businesses like these, ACRE hopes to encourage, diversify, and strengthen South Carolina's agricultural industry from the bottom up.

For more information on the Entrepreneurship Center and other ACRE Initiatives, please contact Kyle Player, ACRE Executive Director, at 803-734-2324.

About ACRE:

Launched in January 2018 by the SC Department of Agriculture, the [Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship \(ACRE\)](#) seeks to expand economic opportunities for South Carolina agribusiness through competitive grants for entrepreneurs, business education, research funding and other services.

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