



South Carolina DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

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7 SC Agribusiness Entrepreneurs to Share \$150K in Funding

COLUMBIA – The South Carolina Department of Agriculture’s Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship (ACRE) has awarded seven entrepreneurs a share of \$150,000 for their innovative agribusinesses.

Ten finalists pitched their business plans to a panel of judges and were scored based on their business plans, a five-minute video presentation and their demonstrated history of business success. The diverse group of awardees represent six counties and seven established businesses throughout South Carolina:

1. **[Bravo Steaks](#)** is run by husband-and-wife duo, John and Emily Barnes, in Chester County. They ship individually packaged, subscription and gift boxes of their frozen beef and pork products direct-to-consumer through their e-commerce website.
2. **[Crescent Farm](#)** is a woman-owned, USDA Certified Organic vegetable farm in Laurens County. They focus their wholesale offerings on carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, and kale, all of which are sold to in-state food hubs Swamp Rabbit Café and Grocery and GrowFood Carolina. Crescent Farm intends to continue growing while they develop new field space on their recently acquired 47 acres of land.
3. **[Milky Way Jersey Farm](#)**, located in Anderson County, is a fourth-generation, family-owned dairy farm that sells raw milk and low-temperature pasteurized whole and chocolate milk. They recently invested in a state-of-the-art creamery and a robotic milking parlor. The transition to robotic milking will allow them to expand their pasteurized product line while mitigating labor stress.
4. Tom Knaust of **[Queen & Comb](#)** in Charleston County began his business to increase environmental awareness about the ecological services of bees and provide educational experiences through hands-on beekeeping with his Host-a-Hive service. Tom and his team also harvest and bottle the honey from his customers’ hives and sells to wholesale accounts.
5. The **[Gullah Farmers Cooperative Association](#)** (GCFA) is a collection of 17 Gullah farm operations in South Carolina’s Lowcountry. The co-op intends to facilitate the aggregation and distribution of produce to wholesale institutional buyers like the Beaufort County School system.
6. **[Pod Farms, LLC](#)** is a start-up company in Pickens County that is creating cutting-edge hydroponic smart gardens for indoor use. While they prepare their patent-pending vertical smart garden for beta testing, they are selling beginner hydroponic kits that include seed, nutrients, and accessories.



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7. Jeff Siewicki is the founder of [Vital Mission Farm](#), a regenerative farm in Charleston County. Jeff raises pastured ducks using a silvopasture system, the practice of integrating livestock production with trees. He employs a portable netting system to rotate his poultry and ensure they have access to a fresh pasture daily.

2021 was a notable year because it saw the first regenerative agricultural farm, cooperative, beef and pork agribusiness, and USDA organic farm receive funding from ACRE. Chester and Laurens counties also had awardees for the first time.

“Headed into our fourth year, we now feel like we are cemented in South Carolina’s agriculture industry and in an even better position to help these agribusinesses grow and thrive,” said ACRE Executive Director Kyle Player.

“My hope for these seven entrepreneurs is that their innovative agribusinesses will help pave the way for continued development and transformation in South Carolina’s agriculture scene,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers. “Whether they take new approaches to existing industries or create new ones, these awardees all have the potential to stimulate economic development in our state.”

SCDA founded ACRE in 2018 to help identify and nurture new ideas and businesses in the Palmetto State’s agribusiness sector. ACRE also partners with Clemson Extension to offer a curriculum program each fall to train and mentor beginning agricultural entrepreneurs and prepare them to seek advanced award funding.

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