South Carolina
New and Beginning Farmer Program

2027 PROGRAM OUTLINE

What is the SC New & Beginning Farmer Program?

The South Carolina New and Beginning Farmer Program (SCNBFP) is a public education program focused on enabling new, beginning, and aspiring farmers to be successful, productive, and innovative members of their local agricultural community by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to be successful entrepreneurs, sound business managers, exemplary stewards of the natural environment, and successful marketers of the unique products they create. Most importantly, the SCNBFP seeks to develop individuals who have a sense of pride and enjoy a quality of life as a result of their investment and participation in the industry of South Carolina agriculture. The SCNBFP is offered through Clemson University Cooperative Extension - Agribusiness, in collaboration with dozens of entities throughout the state. Currently funded through a USDA Rural Business Development grant, the SCNBFP is entering its seventeenth year and has guided more than 750 emerging farmers through the program.

The SCNBFP is a 7-month long, comprehensive farm-**business** program. Select qualified applicants will be chosen to go through the program as a *cohort*, attending nine (9) core training workshop events *together*. Additional optional educational opportunities will also be available.

Mixed Workshop Delivery! The core cohort workshop schedule will include the following:

- Three (3) full-day workshops in Lexington, SC – Lunch included!
- Six (6) afternoon online workshops via Zoom

Bonus Programming! The nine cohort workshops will be complemented by optional bonus programming covering specialized and/or more advanced topics. At no extra cost, these eight (8) Lunch & Learn events will be hosted online over 60 to 120-minute lunch hour periods. These will be available to the general public, as well as the 2027 cohort.

Lower Cost! Although we have not raised program fees in many years, online delivery of a portion of the 2027 program enables us to take $100 off the regular price!

Program Snapshot

Program Benefits	SCNBFP Cohort Program
7 Agribusiness Training Events (4 online / 3 in-person)	✓
2 Production Training Events (online)	✓
Access to bonus online Lunch & Learn specialized workshops	✓
In-Person Graduation Event	✓
Printed Certificate of Completion*	✓
FSA Certified	✓
Online access to all available workshop materials	✓
Network with other new farmers and resource providers	✓

Program Requirements	Level 1 Cohort Program	Level 2 Cohort Program
Complete Application / Be Accepted	✓	✓
$250 Program Fee	✓	✓
Minimum Core Workshop Attendance*	✓	✓
Non-Graded Assignments*	✓	✓
Attend a minimum of three (3) Lunch & Learn events*		✓
Submit a completed business plan to SCNBFP staff* (confidential)		✓

** Please read carefully through the Program Outline for details*

Exactly how will the 2027 program be delivered?

To broaden participation throughout the state, ***the 2027 cohort program will include fewer full-day events, and most will be hosted online***. Three (3) workshops will be full-day, hosted in-person at the Lexington County Extension facility. Six (6) workshops will run in the afternoon, online, via Zoom. Note that Zoom workshops are NOT recorded and that real-time participation is required. (Read further for workshop dates.)

What are program costs? Each accepted applicant is automatically subsidized by approximately $5,000 in grant funding – this is why the application process is competitive. This enables us to reduce participant fees to **$250 per person** … $100 off our regular fees! Payment will only be accepted online – debit cards and all major credit cards accepted. ***The entire program fee of $250 must be paid for by Sunday, January 17, 2027.*** Accepted applicants will be emailed a link, along with instructions.

What is included in the program?

- A series of **9 core training workshops** in Agribusiness & Basic Production
    - The three in-person workshops include beverages, snacks, and a catered lunch
- Private participant-only online access to all available program materials
- Access to private SCNBFP Facebook group where you can connect with other new SC farmers
- Printed Graduation certificate (upon successful program completion)
- Special in-person **Graduation event** (workshop #9)
    - Business Plan presentations by participant volunteers
    - Presentation of certificates
    - Opportunity to network with your classmates
- In addition, all cohort participants will have the opportunity to participate in all eight (8) optional "**Lunch & Learn**" events, covering specialized and/or advanced topics at no extra cost. These will all be online and are between 60-120 minutes over lunchtime.

What will I learn in this program? The SCNBFP is fundamentally an **AGRIBUSINESS** program, focused on providing new and beginning farmers with the knowledge and tools necessary for developing a successful business enterprise. These are supplemented by two workshops addressing essential production topics. Some of the key topics of the SCNBFP core cohort program include:

- Start-Up Logistics, Recordkeeping, & Basic Farm Financial Management
- Legal Issues & Risk Management
- Introduction to Marketing & Communication
- Basics of Direct-to-Consumer and Mediated (Wholesale) Markets

- Developing a Business Concept & Basic Business Plan
- Regulatory / Food Safety Issues & Resources
- Fundamentals of Soil Health Management
- Introduction to Integrated Pest, Weed, and Disease Management (IPM)

Workshops are facilitated by SCNBFP staff and taught by a team of dozens of leading experts/faculty/Extension staff throughout Clemson University, as well as other resource and educational providers who support our program. This includes several USDA and SCDA agencies, SC Small Business Development Centers, as well as many farm-related non-profits, consultants, buyers, and even farmers, just to name a few.

Are there other benefits to participating in the SCNBFP? You bet!

- In every workshop, you will be introduced to and can connect with resource providers that will be invaluable to you throughout the life of your business.
- Because you will go through the program with a cohort, you will develop a close peer network of other emerging & aspiring farmers. We have seen partnerships and close friendships develop out of each class year, and many find this support network to be priceless. This is the key reason for hosting several in-person workshops.
- The SCNBFP is certified by the USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA). FSA is often a critical loan resource for farmers, but borrowers are required to attend a certified training program to qualify. These trainings are not always offered on a regular basis, and a one-day workshop can sometimes cost far more than our entire program. *(Note: In order to take advantage of our FSA certification, you must successfully complete the program and earn a graduation certificate. FSA may also contact us to verify that borrowers have attended individual workshops specific to Financial Management.)*

Will you teach me how to farm? NO. While the program includes two production-related workshops critical to almost all types of farm enterprises, the SCNBFP, at its core, is about the *business* of farming.

Who may apply? To apply, you must meet the following criteria:

- Resident of South Carolina (This means you *currently LIVE in South Carolina*. If you have future plans to farm in SC but are currently residing out-of-state, please apply in another year, once you have established proven residency.) NO EXCEPTIONS.
- Age 18+
- Maximum Farming Experience: *Actively farming for no more than 10 consecutive years*

- Minimum Farming Experience: *None.* You do NOT need to have current access to land or be actively farming to apply! You should, however, have a strong desire to develop a professional commercial (or non-profit) farming enterprise. **The SCNBFP is not suitable for those simply exploring the idea of farming, or who are interested in hobby-farming or homesteading only.**
- The SCNBFP is designed for farm businesses that include PRODUCTION enterprises. If your business vision is focused *only* on becoming an entertainment, recreation, or event venue without plans to actually produce agricultural products, we will refer you to different resources, as the SCNBFP will not be a good fit.

Additional requirements?

- Because most workshops will be delivered remotely, you must have reliable internet access and the ability to connect through Zoom well enough to fully participate. This includes equipment (computer or tablet with a webcam) with a display large enough to view presentations and class materials. (Note that smart phones are NOT considered a suitable device – you will need something with a larger display.)
- Not sure if you can connect to Zoom? Test your connection here: https://zoom.us/test
- During online events, all cohort participants will be required to enable video (with or without Zoom virtual backgrounds) and audio. Per Clemson policy for certificate programs, we will ask that you be clearly visible and prepared to fully engage while participating in workshops. **Failure to turn on your video, be clearly visible, or multi-tasking during instruction may result in a marked absence.** This is a university policy and there can be no exceptions.
- For in-person events, participants must have reliable transportation to Lexington, SC as well as be prepared to arrive on-time and stay for the full event.

May I apply with a partner? While we absolutely encourage more than one person from your farm enterprise to apply (including spouses, family members, business partners, staff, etc.), each person should submit their own application (in their own words), and each will be evaluated on its own merit. (Duplicate applications under more than one name will not be considered.)

Are additional scholarships available? As stated above, everyone accepted into the program is already receiving a 'scholarship' valued at approximately $5,000 - additional scholarships beyond the significant grant subsidy are not available. We have endeavored to make program fees as affordable as possible while delivering tremendous value. Note that due to the partial online delivery of 2027 workshops, program fees have already been reduced to our lowest levels to date!

What are the 2027 program dates?

Dates for the mandatory core workshops are listed below and run February through August 2027. All dates are **Fridays** and core workshops run no less than three weeks apart.

2027 Core Cohort Workshop Dates:

February 5, 2027 – Workshop #1 / ***In-Person*** / 9:30 am – 4:00 pm
February 26, 2027 – Workshop #2 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
March 19, 2027 – Workshop #3 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
April 9, 2027 – Workshop #4 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
April 30, 2027 – Workshop #5 / ***In-Person*** / 9:30 am – 4:00 pm
May 21, 2027 – Workshop #6 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
June 11, 2027 – Workshop #7 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
July 9, 2027 – Workshop #8 / Online / 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
August 13, 2027- Workshop #9 (Graduation) / ***In-Person*** / 9:30 am – 4:00 pm

Dates for optional Lunch & Learn events are listed below and will be hosted online over lunchtime on **Tuesdays** in between cohort workshops.

2027 Optional Level 2 Lunch & Learn Workshop Dates:

February 16, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #1
March 9, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #2
March 30, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #3
April 20, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #4
May 11, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #5
June 1, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #6
June 22, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #7
July 20, 2027 – Lunch & Learn #8

While the above workshop and Lunch & Learn dates are FIRM, the topics covered in any given workshop are still pending, based on speaker availability. You will receive a detailed schedule before classes begin.

- **Program applicants are STRONGLY encouraged to confirm your availability for these dates BEFORE you apply for the program**. If you are accepted then discover you cannot attend, we may miss the opportunity to offer your spot to an alternate participant.

What are the workshop times & locations?

- Core Workshops (including the graduation event) listed above are all on Fridays.
    - In-Person workshops will run from 9:30 am – 4:00 pm. Times will include morning & afternoon breaks, as well as a one-hour lunch break.
    - Online workshops will run from 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm and will include one short break.

- In-Person events will be hosted at the following location:

  Lexington County Clemson University Cooperative Extension Office
  605 W Main St # 100, Lexington, SC 29072

  Here is a link to a map of the workshop location:
  https://www.google.com/maps/place/Lexington+County+Extension+Office/@33.984716,-81.2465862,15z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0x934130e41b58bb1c!8m2!3d33.9847092!4d-81.246583

- Lunch & Learn events will all be on Tuesdays. They are all online and will run over lunchtime. Times will vary, between 60-120 minutes.

May I bring a guest with me to core workshops?

- All in-person workshops (including the Graduation event) are open only to accepted participants. We cannot accommodate guests at graduation, due to space limitations.
- For online workshops, you *may* have a guest sit with you at your own shared computer or tablet. You may not share workshop Zoom links and unauthorized persons on additional devices will be removed from the Zoom event. Note that a guest may not attend as your substitute.
- Note that Lunch & Learn events will be open to the general public, but all non-participant attendees will need to register in advance.

What are graduation requirements?

Only those accepted into the cohort program who meet or exceed attendance requirements will receive a certificate of completion for the program. While we encourage you to attend all workshops, *minimum* requirements are as follows:

Level 1 – Beginning Program

- Participants are encouraged to make every effort to attend all scheduled core cohort workshop events. HOWEVER, understanding that emergencies may occur, ***you may miss two (2) online core workshop events, OR one (1) in-person core workshop event and still graduate***. Those who miss more than the maximum allowed are welcome to continue the program but will not receive a graduation certificate.
  - The nine events include the 9 core cohort workshops - Graduation included
  - You must be present for the *full event* to receive credit. (For online workshops, this includes having your *video on and always being clearly visible*, other than during scheduled breaks. You should be fully engaged and able to take notes. Multi-tasking or passive viewing may result in an absence. This is consistent with all Clemson online certificate programs.)

- You must complete a non-graded homework assignment for each workshop to receive attendance credit. (This is in accordance with the terms of our grant, as well as our FSA certification.)

Level 2 – Optional Intermediate Program

- Participants must meet the minimum attendance requirements for Level 1, as stated above. Additional requirements include:
  - Full participation in a minimum of three (3) Lunch & Learn events of your choice.
  - Preparation of a written business plan turned into SCNBFP staff on or before November 1, 2027. (Detailed instructions will be provided during class.)

No one will be expected to choose between Level 1 and Level 2 in advance. Certificates will be awarded by final performance.

Note that continued grant funding and participant subsidies for the SCNBFP is largely dependent on maintaining high graduation rates. We expect all program participants to make every effort to successfully complete the program.

What's this about homework assignments?!! Don't let this worry you. Assignments are NOT graded; they are simply recorded as "complete" or "incomplete". They can be answered in as little as a couple of sentences, or several pages, as you choose. All assignments are designed not to 'test' your knowledge, but to help you think through the details of your enterprise and help you develop a business plan. The assignments also help us evaluate how effectively we are delivering material and are required for us to maintain our FSA certification. Assignments are easily completed online, at your leisure, with three-week completion periods for each assignment.

How do I apply? Applications are only available online, by visiting the program website at www.scnewfarmer.org.

Here are some things you should know:

- You must apply online – paper applications are not available.
- Only a limited number of applicants will be accepted into the program. The application process is competitive, so we encourage taking time to give your best effort.
- The application is long; most of the information collected is for demographic, administrative, and benchmarking purposes. Some questions will indicate your eligibility for the program. Please give yourself at least an hour to complete the application. Do not "submit" until you are satisfied, and all sections have been completed. Please do not submit more than one application per person.
- Applications are not evaluated on writing skills. Your own words are valued, so please do NOT use AI to answer questions.

- **DEADLINE TO APPLY IS 8:00 am, MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2026 – NO EXCEPTIONS or EXTENSIONS!**

What are some basic things you look for in an applicant?

- A complete application. Those that are not complete will not be considered.
- Individuals who meet all eligibility requirements. (See the "Who May Apply" section.)
- Internet access, and basic computer skills – email, internet, & word-processing proficiency.
- Reliable Zoom access, as well as an appropriate connection device. Appropriate devices should be large enough to clearly view presentations and must include audio & video. (Smart phones are too small to be considered an appropriate device.)
- Expressed commitment to meeting attendance requirements and completing the program.
- Demonstration of passion, clear goals, and determination to pursue farming as a commercial or legal non-profit enterprise and not just a hobby or homesteading effort.
- Indication that your learning goals are *compatible with program content.*
- Reliable transportation to in-person workshop events.

I can't make this year work! Will the SCNBFP be offered next year? Yes! We are currently funded to deliver the program through 2029. (You are also welcome to register for and attend Lunch & Learn events!)

When will I find out if I have been accepted?

- Notifications will be emailed to everyone no later than December 18, 2026. We will tell you if your application has been accepted *or* declined.
- You will also be given instructions on confirming your acceptance and making payment. FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY!

HINT: You will receive emails from the program manager, Diana Vossbrinck. Please enter the address dvossbr@clemson.edu into your address book so you do not miss any correspondence. The SCNBFP is not responsible for emails that are delivered to your junk/spam folders, so please monitor carefully.

What deadlines should I be aware of?

- Deadline to apply – 8:00 am, **Monday December 7, 2026** (The application will be disabled at this time – applications must be *submitted* before 8:00 am!)
- Deadline to confirm your participation & pay in full (if accepted) – **Sunday January 17, 2027**
- Deadline to request refund – Sunday, January 31, 2027
  - **NO REFUNDS WILL BE ISSUED AFTER THE DEADLINE**

- **Please make refund requests by email to: dvossbr@clemson.edu**

What if I have additional questions about the program?

1. First, please review this complete *Program Outline* carefully.

2. We will be hosting online open-office hours via Zoom throughout the application period. If you wish to discuss the program with SCNBFP staff, please click on the link below to join us for an informal conversation. ***Sign in at any time during the listed hours*** … the one Zoom link works for both sessions!

   Zoom Link for open-office hours:
   https://clemson.zoom.us/j/94921835535?pwd=BLw0BbrsFYZjoOOKIRBBaK6AaJ9QjF.1

   a. **Session #1** – Friday / November 6, 2026 / 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
   b. **Session #2** – Monday / November 23, 2026 / 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

3. If your question is not answered in the provided online documents and you are unable to attend an open-office session, please email the program manager, Diana Vossbrinck, at dvossbr@clemson.edu.

4. We are happy to assist, but NO UNSCHEDULED PHONE CALLS, PLEASE!

Thank you for your interest in Clemson University's South Carolina New & Beginning Farmer Program!

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