South Carolina New and Beginning Farmer Program

2024 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, under the direction of Ben Boyles and in collaboration with dozens of entities throughout the state. Currently funded through a USDA-NIFA Beginning Farmer Rancher Development grant, the SCNBFP is entering its thirteenth year and has guided more than 500 emerging farmers through the program.

The SCNBFP is an 8-month long, comprehensive farm-business program. Forty to fifty qualified applicants will be chosen to go through the basic "Core" program as a cohort, attending nine (9) full-day training workshops and a graduation event together.

Core programming will be complemented by "Advanced" workshops developed by Clemson Cooperative Extension Agribusiness staff throughout the state. These workshops will offer important opportunities for local peer and resource networking, as well as provide additional instruction on advanced agribusiness topics. All Advanced workshops are offered to 2024 cohort participants at a discount but are also open to the public.

How will the 2024 program be delivered?

A hybrid program is planned for 2024, with some workshops scheduled for in-person delivery, and others delivered online, via Zoom (see course description for details). Each workshop will be offered through one of those platforms or the other … participants will NOT have the option to choose.   The COVID years taught us to take public health very seriously, and the health and well-being of the communities we serve are of foremost importance to all of us at Clemson University. While we plan to deliver a hybrid program, it is impossible to know for certain what ongoing public health concerns may require. The SC New & Beginning Farmer Program has two years of experience successfully delivering the entire program remotely, via Zoom, and we are prepared to do so again, in whole or in part. **Participants should be prepared for either**

contingency. In-person workshops will be hosted in Lexington, SC. Remote attendance will not be an option for any in-person workshop.

What is included in the program?

- A series of **10 full-day events**, including:
    - ○ **9 'Core' training workshops** in Agribusiness & Basic Production
    - ○ **Graduation event**, including participant business plan presentations
        - ▪ (*The above 'Core' workshops & graduation event are open only to those who apply and are accepted into the program*)
- A 30% discount off of **ten additional 2024 'Advanced' training workshops** (optional)
    - ○ (*Advanced workshops are also open to SCNBFP Alumni and the general public, with no discount*)
- Beverage service, snacks, and a catered lunch at all scheduled Core & Advanced workshops that are held in-person
- Graduation certificate (upon successful program completion)
- Private participant-only access to all available program materials
- Access to private SCNBFP Facebook group

What will I learn in this program? The SCNBFP is fundamentally an **AGRIBUSINESS** program, focused on providing new and beginning farmers the knowledge and tools necessary for developing a successful business enterprise. Some of the key topics of the SCNBFP **'Core'** program include:

- Legal Issues & Risk Management
- Start-Up Logistics & Basic Farm Financial Management
- Developing a Business Concept & Basic Business Plan
- Introduction to Marketing, Branding, & Communication
- Basics of Direct-to-Consumer Markets
- Opportunities in Mediated (Wholesale) Markets
- Regulatory Issues & Resources
- Fundamentals of Soil Health Management
- Introduction to Integrated Pest & Weed Management

Topics included as optional **'Advanced'** workshops are:
- Enterprise Budgets & Profitability
- Financial Assistance through Farm-Focused Grants
- Organic Production & Certification
- Land Acquisition, Conservation, Transfer, & Preservation
- Opportunities in Agritourism
- Advanced Business Planning & Comprehensive Business Plan Development
- Advanced Farm Financial Management & Analysis

- Tax Management for Farming Enterprises
- Developing a Year-Round Operation Plan
- Social Media & Analytics for Small Farm Businesses

Both Core and Advanced 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, The Small Business Development Center, 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 Core and Advanced workshop, you will be introduced to and have the opportunity to 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. Those who take advantage of the Advanced workshops will also have the opportunity to network with other farmers, including 500+ SCNBFP alumni.
- The SCNBFP is certified by the USDA-Farm Service Agency. 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 more than our entire program. *(Note: In order to take advantage of our 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 Core 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? In order 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 9 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 entertainment, recreation, event venue (etc.) without plans to actually produce agricultural product, we will refer you to different resources, as the SCNBFP will not be a good fit.

Additional Requirements?

- For workshops that will be delivered remotely, you must have reliable internet access and the ability to connect through Zoom well enough to fully participate, including enabling video (with or without Zoom virtual backgrounds) and audio. 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.) We ask that you be clearly visible and prepared to fully engage while participating in remote workshops … multi-tasking during instruction may result in a marked absence.
  - o Not sure if you can connect to Zoom? Test your connection here: https://zoom.us/test
- For in-person workshops, you must have reliable transportation 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.)

What are program costs? Each accepted applicant is automatically subsidized by approximately $5000 in grant funding – this is why the application process is competitive. This enables us to reduce participant fees to **$350 per person** for the Core program. There is an additional **$25 - $35** discounted fee for each Advanced workshop you may want to attend. Payment will only be accepted online – debit cards and all major credit cards accepted. The entire Core program fee of $350 must be paid for by April 21, 2024; Advanced workshops may be paid for individually, close to actual workshop dates, at a discounted rate of $25 - $35 each.

Are additional scholarships available? As stated above, everyone accepted into the program is already receiving a 'scholarship' valued at approximately $5000 - 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.

What are the 2024 program dates? Dates for the full-day, 'Core' workshops are listed below and run May through December 2024.

2024 Core Workshop Dates:
> May 17, 2024 – Core Workshop #1 / In-Person
> May 31, 2024 – Core Workshop #2 / Online
> June 14, 2024 – Core Workshop #3 / In-Person
> June 28, 2024 – Core Workshop #4 / In-Person
> July 12, 2024 – Core Workshop #5 / Online
> July 26, 2024 – Core Workshop #6 / In-Person
> August 9, 2024 – Core Workshop #7 / Online
> August 23, 2024 – Core Workshop #8 / In-Person
> September 13, 2024- Core Workshop #9 / Online
> December 6, 2024 – Core Graduation Celebration / In-Person

> (September – November: Advanced Workshops / dates vary)

- While the above Core workshop and Graduation dates are FIRM, the topics covered in any given workshop are still pending, based on speaker availability.
- **We STRONGLY encourage you 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.
- Advanced programming runs September through November 2024 – no more than one workshop per week on varying days of the week. Descriptions and dates for Advanced programming can be found in the *Course Description* document, here: 2024 Course Calendar & Description

What are the workshop times & location?

- Core workshops listed above are all on Fridays, from 9:30 am – 4:30 pm. Times will include morning & afternoon breaks, as well as a one-hour lunch break. Dates & times will be the same whether workshops are delivered in-person or online.
- All Core workshops that are delivered in-person 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**

- Advanced workshops that are in-person will be hosted throughout the state. Dates and general location can be found in the *Course Calendar & Description* document, here: [2024 Course Calendar & Description](#)
    - Specific venues and exact times will be made available well in advance, but all will be full-day events from 4-6 hours in duration.
    - Like the Core workshops, Advanced workshops will be hosted either in-person, or online ONLY – there is no opportunity to choose an option.
    - To receive credit for Advanced workshops, the same attendance and engagement policies apply.

May I bring a guest with me to workshops?
- 'Core' workshops and the Graduation event are open only to accepted participants. We cannot accommodate guests at in-person workshops, due to space limitations.
- For any workshops that are delivered online, you *may* have a guest sit with you at your own, shared computer or tablet. You may not share workshop links and unauthorized persons on additional devices will be removed from the Zoom event.
- Advanced workshops are open to the general public. Any guests will need to register separately and pay full price.

What are graduation requirements? Only those who meet or exceed attendance requirements will receive a certificate of completion for the program. While we encourage you to attend all Core workshops and as many Advanced trainings as you like, *minimum* requirements are as follows:

To earn a Level-I "Beginning" level certificate of graduation
- Minimum attendance of eight (8) out of the ten (10) scheduled 'Core' events (in other words, you may miss two events and still graduate)
    - The ten events include the 9 Core workshops as well as Graduation
    - You must be present for the *full day* to receive credit. (For online workshops, this includes having your *video on at all times*, other than scheduled breaks. This is consistent with all Clemson online certificate programs.)
    - You must complete a non-graded homework assignment for each workshop to receive credit

To earn a Level-II "Intermediate" level certificate of graduation
- Meet all requirements of the Beginning level, as outlined above, ***plus***
- Attend a minimum of four (4) Advanced workshops of your choice – including full-day participation, ***plus***
- Deliver a five-minute presentation of your business plan at the 2024 Graduation event. (This is only in front of your peers and you will receive loads of preparation, guidelines, and templates!)

Note that continued grant funding for the SCNBFP is largely dependent on maintaining high graduation rates. We expect all participants to make every effort to successfully complete the program at either the Beginning or Intermediate level.

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 <u>not</u> 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 two-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. Because this is a competitive process, we encourage you to give your best effort.
- The application is long. 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.
- **DEADLINE TO APPLY IS 11:59 PM, SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024 – 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 pages 3 and 4)
- Internet access and basic computer skills – email, internet, & word-processing proficiency.

- Expressed commitment to meeting attendance requirements and completing the program.
- 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.)
- Reliable transportation.
- Demonstration of passion, clear goals, and determination to pursue farming as a commercial or legal non-profit enterprise and not just a hobby.
- Indication that your learning goals are *compatible with program content.*

I can't make this year work! Will the SCNBFP be offered next year? Yes! At this time, we are funded for just the basic Core program in 2025. If you are interested in attending Advanced programming, we suggest you take advantage of the 2024 program.

When will I find out if I have been accepted?
- Notifications will be <u>emailed</u> to everyone no later than March 22, 2024. We will tell you if your application has been accepted *or* declined.
- You will also be given instructions on <u>confirming your acceptance</u> and <u>making payment</u>. FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY!

HINT: You will receive emails from the assistant program director, 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 – 11:59 pm, Sunday March 3, 2024
- Deadline to confirm your participation & pay in full (if accepted) – 11:59 pm, Sunday April 21, 2024
- Deadline to request refund – 11:59 pm, Thursday May 2, 2024
  - ➢ **NO REFUNDS WILL BE ISSUED AFTER THE DEADLINE**

What if I have additional questions about the program?
1. First, please review this complete *Program Outline* carefully. You should also review the *Course Description* document, found on our website at www.scnewfarmer.org.

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 all three sessions!

Zoom Link for open-office hours:

https://clemson.zoom.us/j/91835195010

    a. **Session #1** – Thursday / January 18, 2024 / 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm
    b. **Session #2** – Tuesday / February 6, 2024 / 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
    c. **Session #3** – Friday / March 1, 2024 / 10:00 am – 11:00 am

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 assistant program director, 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!