

South Carolina New and Beginning Farmer Program

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Farmer Program

2025 PROGRAM OUTLINE

CLEMSON
EXTENSION 

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 fifteenth year and has guided nearly 600 emerging farmers through the program.

The SCNBFP is a 5-month long, comprehensive farm-business program. Select qualified applicants will be chosen to go through the program as a cohort, attending nine (9) full-day training workshops events together.

New 'Audit' Option! For the first time, the 2025 SCNBFP will offer two course options: An 'Audit' option for those who may not be able to commit to the full program, and a 'Certificate' option for those desiring to earn a certificate, as well as enjoy other benefits. A snapshot and further details of these options are below.

Online Delivery! In order to accommodate those unable to travel to our traditional in-person workshops, 2025 SCNBFP training events will be hosted entirely online!

Bonus Programming! Full day workshops will be complemented by optional bonus programming covering specialized topics such as Agritourism and E-Commerce. At no extra cost, these will be hosted online over the lunch hour.

Lower Cost! Although we have not raised program fees in many years, online delivery of the 2025 program enables us to take \$100 off the regular price!

Program Snapshot

Program Benefits	Audit Program	Certificate Program
7 Full-Day Agribusiness Training Events (online)	✓	✓
2 Full-Day Production Training Events (online)	✓	✓
Access to bonus online lunch & learn specialized webinars	✓	✓
In-Person Graduation Event		✓
Printed Certificate of Completion*		✓
FSA Certified		✓
Access to Business Plan Contest with \$5000 in cash prizes*		✓
Online access to all available workshop materials	✓	✓
Network with other New Farmers	✓	✓

Program Requirements	Audit Program	Certificate Program
Complete Application	✓	✓
\$250 Program Fee	✓	✓
Minimum Attendance*		✓
Non-Graded Assignments*		✓
Short Graduation Presentation for those competing in graduation day Business Plan Contest		✓

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

Exactly how will the 2025 program be delivered?

In an effort to broaden participation throughout the state, ***the 2025 program will be delivered entirely online, through Zoom.*** (The only exception will be an additional Graduation event for those enrolled in the 'Certificate' program. This will be an in-person event, hosted at the Lexington County Clemson Extension office.) Note that Zoom workshops are NOT recorded and that real-time participation is required.

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 **\$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 March 17, 2025.

What is included in the program?

'Audit' & 'Certificate' Options

- A series of **9 full-day training workshops** in Agribusiness & Basic Production
- 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

'Certificate' Option Only

- Printed Graduation certificate (upon successful program completion)
- Special in-person **Graduation event**
 - Full-day event includes farm-to-table catered lunch
 - Meet your classmates & network in person
 - Presentation of certificates
- **Opportunity to participate in a graduation day Business Plan contest**
 - Select participants will have the opportunity to deliver short presentations of their business plans as part of the graduation event ... A total of \$5000 in cash prizes to be awarded
- While there are greater expectations of participants in the 'Certificate' program (see below), there is ***no additional cost***

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 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 and Mediated (Wholesale) Markets
- Regulatory / Food Safety Issues & Resources
- Fundamentals of Soil Health Management
- Introduction to Integrated Pest & Weed Management
- Farm Funding Resources / Tools for Farm Businesses / Further Training

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 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.
- 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 more than our entire program. *(Note: In order to take advantage of our FSA certification, you must successfully complete the ‘Certificate’ program option 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. *(Please see the Course Description for curriculum details.)*

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?

- Because 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>
- For those enrolled in the ‘Certificate’ program, you must be able 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 or multi-tasking during instruction may result in a marked absence.
 - For the graduation event, those enrolled in the ‘Certificate’ program 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 \$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. Note that due to the online delivery of 2025 workshops, program fees have already been reduced to our lowest levels yet!

What are the 2025 program dates? Dates for the full-day workshops are listed below and run April through July 2025.

2025 Program Event Dates:

April 4, 2025 – Workshop #1 / Online
April 18, 2025 – Workshop #2 / Online
May 2, 2025 – Workshop #3 / Online
May 16, 2025 – Workshop #4 / Online
May 30, 2025 – Workshop #5 / Online
June 13, 2025 – Workshop #6 / Online
June 27, 2025 – Workshop #7 / Online
July 11, 2025 – Workshop #8 / Online
July 25, 2025- Workshop #9 / Online
August 15, 2025 – Graduation Event / In-Person ('Certificate' program participants only)

- Dates for bonus Lunch & Learn events are TBD but will be hosted over lunchtime on non-workshop Fridays.
- While the above workshop and Graduation 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.
- **'Certificate' 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 & location?

- Workshops (including the graduation event) listed above are all on Fridays, from 9:30 am – 4:00 pm. Times will include morning & afternoon breaks, as well as a 30 minute lunch break.
- The Graduation event (for 'Certificate' program participants only) 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>

May I bring a guest with me to workshops?

- Workshops and 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.

What are graduation requirements?

‘Audit’ Program Participants: Those auditing the program are not eligible to earn a certificate of graduation. There are no requirements in terms of attendance.

‘Certificate’ Program Participants: Only those accepted into the ‘Certificate’ program and 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:

- Minimum full-day attendance of eight (8) out of the ten (10) scheduled events (in other words, you may miss two events and still graduate)
 - The ten events include the 9 workshops as well as the Graduation event
 - You must be present for the *full day* to receive credit. (For workshops, this includes having your *video on at all times*, other than scheduled breaks. This is consistent with all Clemson online certificate programs.)
 - Note that the Graduation event is IN-PERSON with NO ONLINE OPTION
 - You must complete a non-graded homework assignment for each workshop to receive attendance credit. (This is in accordance with terms of our FSA certification.)
 - Bonus Lunch & Learn webinar events are not offered for credit.

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

What’s this about homework assignments?!! Don’t let this worry you. First, this applies only to ‘Certificate’ program participants and not those enrolled in the ‘Audit’ program. Second, 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 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.
- ‘Audit’ and ‘Certificate’ program applicants will complete the same application. ***You must decide at the time you apply which program best suits your needs and goals.***
- Only a limited number of applicants will be accepted into both the ‘Audit’ and ‘Certificate’ programs. The application process is especially competitive for the ‘Certificate’ program, so we encourage those applicants to take 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.
- **DEADLINE TO APPLY IS 11:59 pm, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2025 – NO EXCEPTIONS or EXTENSIONS!**

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

All applicants:

- 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.)

‘Certificate’ program applicants only - In addition to the above, we will be looking for the following in ‘Certificate’ program applicants:

- 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.
- Indication that your learning goals are *compatible with program content*.
- Reliable transportation to Graduation event.

Help! Should I choose the 'Audit' or 'Certificate' program?

We suggest the 'Audit' program if:

- You are interested in some workshops but not others
- You have professional and/or personal commitments that may limit your ability to meet the attendance requirements of the 'Certificate' program
- You do not have the capacity to meet other requirements of the 'Certificate' program
- Earning a certificate of completion is not a priority

We suggest the 'Certificate' program if:

- You are interested in most of the workshops and intend to participate in at least eight of the ten scheduled events (including graduation)
- You are personally goal-oriented and would like to earn a certificate of completion
- You think you may want a loan from FSA in the future and want credit for their required training
- You would like to meet some of your classmates in person at the graduation event
- You are interested in the opportunity to participate in the graduation day Business Plan Contest with \$5000 in total cash awards

Note: *You must choose between the 'Audit' and 'Certificate' options at the time you apply. Please apply for the program you prefer ... you do not increase your chances of acceptance by choosing one over the other. We will do our best to accept as many qualified applicants as possible. If we receive far more 'Certificate' applications than we can accept, we may extend offers to audit.*

I can't make this year work! Will the SCNBFP be offered next year? At this time, the SCNBFP is not funded beyond 2025. While we will be submitting various grant proposals, continued delivery of the program cannot be assured.

When will I find out if I have been accepted?

- Notifications will be emailed to everyone no later than February 24, 2025. 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 assistant program director, Diana Vossbrinck. Please enter the address dvossbr@clermson.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 February 9, 2025
- Deadline to confirm your participation & pay in full (if accepted) – 11:59 pm, Monday March 17, 2025
- Deadline to request refund – 11:59 pm, Sunday March 30, 2025
 - **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. 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 both sessions!

Zoom Link for open-office hours / QA:

<https://clemson.zoom.us/j/91006433722?pwd=YjfVWApRrAYfe2XbeKmo40hhal0PAX.1>

- a. **Session #1** – Wednesday / January 15, 2025 / 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
 - b. **Session #2** – Thursday / February 6, 2025 / 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 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!

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