



ACRE

Agribusiness Center for
Research & Entrepreneurship

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER

ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM APPLICATION

Download and save the application before you fill it out. Your work will not be saved if you do not download it first.

PROGRAM TERMS & CONDITIONS

The Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship (ACRE), an initiative of the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), connects entrepreneurs with new opportunities in agriculture, research and agribusiness to strengthen the state's economy, particularly in rural counties.

The ACRE Entrepreneurship Center ("Center") seeks the most innovative and forward thinkers in South Carolina agribusiness for participation in an Entrepreneurship Program (the "Program"). The Center is looking for companies and products it can help support in the marketplace through a collaborative effort. This program does not support research. Applicants may not have previously been awarded funds through the Advanced Program.

Applicants selected to participate in the EC Program could receive a grant of up to \$25,000 to develop their product or business, as well as access to a network of business mentors and grant writing consultants. This is a competitive program; not all applicants will be selected to pitch or receive funds. If you've received money in the Advanced Program before, you are not eligible to apply again.

Please read the Terms and Conditions carefully before completing and submitting your application. By submitting your application to the Entrepreneurship Center, you accept and agree to the following terms and conditions:

1. Applicant operates a business headquartered in South Carolina.
2. The product and/or company for which Applicant is applying must be agribusiness related, and specifically related to one or more of the following categories:
 - a. Specialty crops
 - i. Fruits and vegetables
 - ii. Tree nuts
 - iii. Dried fruits
 - iv. Horticulture
 - v. Nursery crops
 - b. Meat products
 - c. Other foods (honey, cheese, milk, eggs, etc.)
 - d. Hydroponics or aquaponics
 - e. Container, urban, or indoor farming
 - f. Aquaculture
 - g. Timber
 - h. Mechanical harvesting
 - i. Agribusiness technology
 - j. Agritourism/education (school tours, workshops, etc.)
 - k. Row crop value-added product/process
 - l. Food hubs (not restaurants)

3. Applicant must submit their business plan along with the Application. See **page 9** for required business plan elements.
4. Applicant's business must have sales history or must show a history of revenue from services being rendered. ***If you have not reached this stage yet, we encourage you to apply to our Curriculum Program in the fall. Contact Kyle Player for more information.***
5. If Applicant is selected as a finalist:
 - a. Applicant must be able to pitch their product and/or company to our panel of judges.
 - i. Applicant must attend Pitch Day on May 13, 2026 at Phillips Market Center (PMC) at the South Carolina State Farmers Market in West Columbia, SC.
 - ii. Time slots will be set in coordination with the finalists.
 - iii. Must register (free) your business or non-profit as a vendor with the state at **procurement.sc.gov**.
 - b. Finalists will be notified of the results by May 20, 2026.
6. If the Applicant is selected to participate in the EC Program:
 - a. Funds will be awarded upfront with a grant agreement, mandatory progress reports, and a site visit from ACRE staff.
 - i. Applicant must supply ACRE with periodic progress reports (timeline to be determined per awardee), including a line item budget for spending the awarded funds.
 - ii. Applicant will work with ACRE staff to set up a site visit to his or her operation.
7. Applications are due by **March 10, 2026** and finalists will be reviewed by our advisory panel. All Applicants will be notified if they have been selected as a finalist far in advance of the Pitch Day.
8. Priority will be given to applicants from rural counties and applicants with products or companies that would have a high impact in rural counties.
9. Applications will be reviewed based on merit as well as demonstrated financial need in the business plan. SCDA reserves the right to consider whether the applicant would be able to complete the proposed project without the requested grant funds.
10. Confidentiality Undertaking: SCDA recognizes that, as part of the application process, Applicants are required to provide SCDA and ACRE with Confidential Information related to Applicants' businesses and products. Confidential Information means all information in tangible or intangible form that is proprietary to the Applicant and has or could have value in the business or industry in which the Applicant is engaged. SCDA, ACRE, and their officers, directors, employees, agents, consultants, and representatives will hold in trust and maintain confidential, not disclose or make available to any third party whether orally, electronically, on disk, in writing, or otherwise, without prior approval of the Applicant, and not use for itself or for any third party (other than a use by a Party for the purposes stated above) any Confidential Information received from the Applicant or Applicant's agents.

I agree to the Terms and Conditions.

Print Name

Signature

Date

FOOD / FEED COMPLIANCE

To receive funding, you must be in compliance with all rules and regulations related to your product/business. **Please note, you do not have to be in compliance at the time of application, but if you are selected to pitch and are awarded funding, you must be compliant to receive these funds in May/June 2026.** Please carefully read below and answer every question. Contact info is provided if you are not in compliance and need to start the process in order to receive services.

■ WHOLESALE FOOD SAFETY

Ensures that foods are manufactured, stored, distributed, and marketed under safe and sanitary conditions through routine surveillance inspections.

For more information or to register, contact Emily Walker at ewalker@scda.sc.gov or 803-737-0147, or visit agriculture.sc.gov/wholesale-food-safety.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

■ MILK SAFETY

Regulates all Grade A Dairy facilities in the state that produce, haul, process, package, and distribute milk and milk products.

For more information on how to obtain a milk permit, please contact the SCDA Milk Safety Department at milksafety@scda.sc.gov or 803-667-1161, or visit agriculture.sc.gov/milk-safety.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

■ RETAIL FOOD SAFETY

Inspects retail food establishments statewide and issues permits to new facilities prior to opening. Retail food establishments include operations such as restaurants, grocery stores, food trucks, schools, and other institutions. Risk-based inspections are conducted at each establishment in the state annually or quarterly, based on an establishment's food processes and their compliance history.

For more information on how to obtain a permit, please contact the SCDA Retail Food Safety Department at retailfood@scda.sc.gov or 803-896-0640, or visit agriculture.sc.gov/retail-food-safety.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

■ PRODUCE SAFETY RULE

This regulation focuses on setting the first-ever federal regulatory standards for the production, harvest, and handling of fruits and vegetables. You can be exempt from this law if both of the below apply to your business:

- During the previous 3-year period, annual **food*** sales are less than \$500,000 adjusted for inflation, and the amount of sales sold to qualified end-users exceeded the amount sold to all other buyers.

**The term “food” means (1) articles used for food or drink for man or other animals, (2) chewing gum, and (3) articles used for components of any such article.*

AND

- You sell more than 50% of your annual food sales to **qualified end-users** (*consumer of the food and/or a restaurant or retail food establishment*) located in South Carolina or within the same Indian Reservation or within 275 miles of your farm.

For more information about the Produce Safety Rule or how to obtain a Produce Safety Rule Certificate of Exemption, please contact Brooke Horton at bhorton@scda.sc.gov or 803-351-1244, or visit agriculture.sc.gov/produce-safety.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

■ SC MEAT-POULTRY INSPECTION

To protect the health of consumers by providing a comprehensive inspection service to assure that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled.

For more information about obtaining a SC Meat-Poultry Inspection Department approved label, please contact the SC Meat-Poultry Inspection Department at 803-788-8732 or visit clermson.edu/public/lph/scmpid/index.html.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

■ FEED SAFETY

Ensures that all commercial animal feed products manufactured or distributed in South Carolina are safe and nutritious. This is achieved through product registration, label review requirements and a statewide inspection and sampling program.

For more information, please contact Bernadette Mundo, Registration Specialist, at bmundo@scda.sc.gov or 803-737-9713, or visit agriculture.sc.gov/feed-safety-compliance.

Does this rule apply to your business/product? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are you currently in compliance? ☐ Yes ☐ In the process of becoming compliant ☐ No

APPLICANT QUESTIONNAIRE

*Required

*Applicant Name(s) _____

*Gender ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Prefer not to answer

*Ethnicity ☐ African American ☐ Asian ☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic ☐ Native American
☐ Other _____ ☐ Prefer not to answer

*Company Name _____

*Street Address _____ *City _____ *ZIP _____

*County _____ *Phone _____ *Email _____

Company Website/Social Media Handles _____

*If actively farming, list the number of acres under production _____

Occupation/Place of Employment _____

*Are you a South Carolina Department of Agriculture employee or do you have any related family working as a current South Carolina Department of Agriculture employee?

☐ Yes ☐ No

BUSINESS DETAILS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer all questions. These answers will serve as an introduction to more detailed information that should be in your business plan, however, "refer to business plan" is not an acceptable answer. If a question is not applicable, please explain.

*Describe your company.

*When did you start your company? _____

*When did you make your first sales or obtain revenue from services (month/year)? _____

*Do you have a business license to operate in South Carolina?

☐ Yes ☐ No

*Do you have patents, licenses, or trademarks? If yes, please list. If no, please explain.

*Which of the following best describes the current stage of your company/product?

☐ Early Sales ☐ Sales Growth ☐ Providing Services (that creates revenue)

*What is your business ownership structure (ex: sole proprietorship, LLC, company, partnership, non-profit)?

List owners and ownership percentage. Must equal 100%.

| OWNER'S NAME | RELATIONSHIP | OWNERSHIP PERCENTAGE |
|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
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***Have you ever applied for or received any other grant funds (federal, state, or other)? If so, please describe.**

***How would you use a grant award from the Entrepreneurship Center (EC)? Briefly describe. You should expand in your business plan.**

***What efforts have you made to build your business? Include some successes and challenges.**

***How will your product(s)/services benefit South Carolina and S.C. agribusiness?**

***What do you hope to get out of participation in the EC program?**

***How did you hear about the EC?**

***Have you ever been involved in any other agribusiness incubator and/or accelerator program? If yes, please list. An example would be Clemson's New and Beginning Farmer Program.**

BUSINESS PLAN

*Please attach your business plan with your application. The following is a brief outline of the topics you should include in your plan. This detailed guide walks you through what should be included in your plan. It also contains links to other business plan resources.

1. **Cover Sheet**

2. **Executive Summary** (no more than one page)

3. **Company Description**

Description of the business

Products or services

Location and facilities

Methods of record keeping

Key tools

4. **Organization and Management**

Legal Structure

Management

Personnel

Contracted professionals

5. **Market and Industry Analysis**

Market trends

Industry trends and descriptions

Competition

6. **Marketing and Promotion**

Target market

Promotional activities

Marketing implementation strategy

Marketing budget

7. **Service or Product Line**

Product benefits

Product design

Pricing

8. **Funding Request**

Grant funds requested

Matching funds and sources

Uses of grant funds

9. **Financials**

Summary of financial needs

Profit and loss/income statement

Cash flow

Sources and uses of funds

10. **Appendix**

Product example photos

Maps

Pro Forma income statement

Profit and Loss full statement

CONTACT

Please attach any pictures of your farm, product, or operations that the application judges might find helpful. If selected to pitch, you will have the opportunity to present more visuals.

If you have further questions about the application or grant process, please contact us as listed below, and we'd be glad to help.

Please direct any questions you may have to:

Kyle Player
ACRE Executive Director
803-734-2324
kplayer@scda.sc.gov

RETURN APPLICATION TO

South Carolina Department of Agriculture
Attn: Kyle Player
P.O. Box 11280
Columbia, SC 29211
kplayer@scda.sc.gov

You will receive email confirmation that your application has been received within three business days. If you don't, please reach out directly to Kyle and ask for confirmation.



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