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Attachments: 021116 MM Report for DR-4241-SC.docx

NEWS CLIPS

SOUTH CAROLINA-DR-4241

Feb. 11, 2016

Issues:

- None.

Summary:

- A state legislative committee voted unanimously to advance a bill that would provide as much as \$40 million for South Carolina farmers affected by the October floods.
- An editorial in *The State* emphasizes that funding for protecting public health and safety is money well-spent.

Analysis:

- None.

Floods

House bill provides \$40M in aid to flood-devastated farmers (Associated Press)

Editorials

Editorial: DHEC needs funding to protect public health and safety (The State)

TV/Radio Clips

Floods

House bill provides \$40M in aid to flood-devastated farmers (Associated Press)

By Seanna Adcox

Associated Press, February 10, 2016

COLUMBIA — South Carolina farmers devastated by last fall's flooding could get up to \$40 million in state aid

to stay afloat under legislation advanced Wednesday to the House floor.

The legislation approved 21-0 by the Ways and Means Committee allows farmers in disaster-declared counties to apply for grants of up to \$100,000 each. The grants could equal 20 percent of a farmer's total loss.

"We can't make them whole," Chairman Brian White, R-Anderson, said of his bill. "This may not be everything they want but it's something to keep the industry going."

Last October's torrential rains wiped out \$330 million worth of crops at harvest time. Farmers lost an additional \$45 million because they couldn't plant winter crops in bogs, according to the state Department of Agriculture. Those figures don't include losses from last year's spring freeze and summer drought.

Farmers essentially lost their entire inventory after incurring a year's worth of expenses, leaving many unable to pay operating loans that came due Dec. 31. Hopefully, next season's harvest will be profitable, but many family farms won't survive in the meantime, said State Farm Bureau President Harry Ott.

About 30 percent of farm loans through the Farm Service Agency in South Carolina are already delinquent, he said.

"We were totally exposed and had an event nobody could plan for," Ott, the House's former minority leader, told the committee. "The only way out of this quagmire is to put a crop in the ground and plant it forward." The measure is meant to provide a revenue bridge so farmers aren't forced to literally sell the farm. It specifies the grant can't be used to pay down debt. Instead, it must be spent on seeds, fertilizer and other expenses toward planting this year's crops.

"It helps them on the back side and helps grow the economy," since farmers will be spending money that keeps local supply stores open, said Rep. Kenny Bingham, R-Cayce. "It's not going to do any good just to pay off bankruptcy debt."

Legislators said some have already given up on farming. Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, said that includes a sixth-generation farmer in his area.

Legislators in both chambers and parties have said the state needs to help farmers survive.

In December, hundreds of farmers packed the Statehouse to beg Gov. Nikki Haley to ask for federal money to offset losses. But the Republican governor has refused, saying farmers shouldn't be treated differently than other businesses beyond what's already available, such as subsidized flood insurance.

But GOP Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers has said even farmers who paid for the most insurance available didn't recoup enough money to even cover what it cost them to plant the crops. Flood insurance for farms is far more complicated than insurance for homes and other businesses, and a change in the last federal farm bill means farmers are no longer eligible for other disaster aid, he's explained.

The bill's \$40 million would come from state surpluses, so the money would not have to wait on the budget process.

But that doesn't mean help will come quickly. The House will take up the bill in two weeks, following next week's furlough. The bill could then stall in the Senate. If it passes, a board the measure creates to evaluate applications and dole out the grants has 20 days to hold its first meeting.

Ott said ideally the money would be available in March, when corn planting begins. But supply stores should be willing to extend short-term credit to farmers if they know the money's coming, he said.

Editorials

Editorial: DHEC needs funding to protect public health and safety

February 11, 2016 3:52 a.m.

Columbia, SC – Rivers that aren't being monitored often enough for us to know whether the fish are safe to eat. Air-monitoring equipment that's so broken-down that officials don't know whether it's safe to issue permits for new industry. Underground storage tanks and abandoned gold mines that aren't being cleaned up to stop gasoline and acid and metals from leaching into the groundwater. And the giant hazardous waste dump on the shore of Lake Marion that we can't even monitor properly, much less shore up to prevent water contamination of unimaginable proportions.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that the state Department of Health and Environmental Control — the agency charged with making sure we have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe and that the people who cook our meals and provide our medical care don't infect us — says it doesn't have the money to do its job. We slashed its budget from \$169 million in 1998 to \$107 million today. That's a 37 percent reduction. A 37 percent reduction that doesn't even factor in the inflation and growing population that make it cost more to do the job the agency was doing eight years ago. Yet we didn't reduce what we expected the agency to do.

We saw rather dramatically the result of such cuts in October, when the floods washed out dams that hadn't been inspected as they should have been or repaired as they ought to have been, because DHEC didn't have the inspection staff or the enforcement staff to make sure our public-safety laws were obeyed.

If DHEC is spending money wastefully — and any bureaucracy is going to, whether it's in the public sector or the private sector — then it absolutely is appropriate to try to get that under control. And to the extent that this is what former DHEC Director Catherine Templeton did as she oversaw the defunding of the agency (the budget dropped as low as \$83 million at one point), we applaud her work.

But [as *The State's* Sammy Fretwell reports](#), Ms. Templeton's successor, Catherine Heigel, has told the Legislature she needs an additional \$35 million just to cover the basics. That still would be \$27 million less than the agency received in 1998, when there were fewer people and businesses in South Carolina and everything (except maybe gasoline) cost less.

We've seen no reason to believe that Ms. Heigel, a former Duke Energy executive who was hand-picked by Gov. Nikki Haley to run the agency, is a spendthrift, or a shill for the bureaucracy. It's more reasonable to think she's a professional who put her reputation on the line and then discovered that the agency she inherited simply does not have the resources to do the job state law requires it to do. As she told lawmakers last month, it is her job to at least make them aware of the problems — which a lot of people believe Ms. Templeton declined to do for political reasons.

Even Gov. Haley has requested an \$18 million budget increase, which suggests there's some serious underfunding, given her preference for cutting taxes to paying for government services.

We can debate whether the state should be in the business of inspecting the strength of dams and the purity of river water and the safety of restaurants and whether it should limit how much pollution manufacturers can spew into the air and take on the task of cleaning up hazardous sites that have been abandoned by bankrupt owners. But there should be no debate on this: Once the state decides to do those things, it is obliged to *do them*. Well.

DHEC isn't the only agency that sustained massive cuts to its funding without corresponding cuts to its responsibilities, and it's not the only one that is still struggling. The Department of Social Services leaps to mind, and there are others, and our Legislature needs to handle them the same way it needs to handle DHEC:

If the state is not going to guarantee that the water is safe to drink, it needs to let people know that they drink it at their own risk. If the state is not going to hold companies to the pollution standards set in state law and regulations, it needs to just stop spending our money on a program that promises to do that but doesn't.

We believe the state ought to be working to protect the public health, by regulating how much our environment can be despoiled and making sure people who are paid to handle our food and our medicines are doing so safely, and we expect that most South Carolinians feel the same way. That means we have to pay for the equipment and the people who do that important work.

TV/Radio Clips

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[FEMA on WMBF \(NBC\) - Myrtle Beach, SC](#)

02/10/2016 16:03:10

WMBF News at 4 (News)

... for 12 years. she says they have never seen water like this. the only help from FEMA her family received was a few hundred dollars to help pump the water out from the lawn. talked with jerry williams, marion county emergency management director to eoe levels like this across the...

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