

Title: **SC agriculture chief endorsing Bush**
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 Size: 20.77 square inch
 Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564



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S.C. Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers is endorsing former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in his Republican bid for president, The State learned Sunday.

Weathers becomes the third statewide S.C. GOP politician to endorse a 2016 hopeful, and the second to back Bush after U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-Seneca.

South Carolina is becoming a vital state to Bush, who has lagged in early-primary state polls, including South Carolina where he is fourth.

Weathers, a popular figure in the farming community in his 12 years as agriculture commissioner, backed Newt Gingrich in the 2012 GOP presidential race that the former U.S. House Speaker won.

"South Carolina agriculture needs a president who understands the correct role Washington should play in dealing with disaster relief and international trade agreements," Weathers said in a statement provided by the Bush campaign. "He has dealt with more natural disasters than any other candidate running, and he has unveiled a plan to reduce the reg-

ulatory burden of Washington agencies."

S.C. farmers are trying to get government assistance after suffering more than \$300 million in crop losses from October's historic rains.

Gov. Nikki Haley has declined to ask for federal aid, saying she does not want to favor one industry over another that suffered losses in the storm. A state aid package is under discussion.

Bush is banking that endorsements from top S.C. politicians, like Weathers and Graham, can help him notch a top-tier finish in a state that his father and brother won en route to the White House. The former governor, along with Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, have collected the most endorsements from S.C. lawmakers.

Bush is stuck behind Trump, Cruz and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who has begun collecting more S.C. endorsements. Several more top GOP Palmetto State politicians could back presidential hopefuls before South Carolina's Feb. 20 primary, including Haley and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott.