



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

Helping Health Happen for All: A Roadmap for Food Policy in South Carolina

JUNE 2026



South Carolina is the **7th** highest in the nation for food insecurity¹



Food insecurity increases healthcare costs by **\$2,500** per family annually.²



14.4% of SC households are impacted by food insecurity¹



Food insecurity contributes to chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, in turn contributing to increased healthcare costs.² Individuals experiencing food insecurity are more likely to rely on emergency departments for preventable complications related to chronic diseases.³

Leveraging its robust agricultural sector, South Carolina has an opportunity to improve access to nutritious food, strengthen support for farmers and agribusiness, and advance statewide economic growth. The state-level policy solutions outlined below have demonstrated success in comparable states and offer meaningful return-on-investment potential.

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State Policy Options

Expand investment in training and support for aspiring, new, and beginning farmers to strengthen local food security

To address South Carolina's aging farmer population, the state can leverage Clemson Cooperative Extension's South Carolina New and Beginning Farmer Program (SCNBFP) to assist new and younger farmers through technical assistance. SCNBFP is currently financed through time-limited grant funding resources, preventing long-term planning and program continuity.

Invest in regional processing capacity at food hubs

South Carolina has an existing Food Hub Network. With strategic investment into the network, South Carolina can ensure food grown within the state can be turned into products ready for schools, childcare centers, higher education institutions, and hospitals. **Currently, only 32% of agribusiness goods purchased by SC residents are produced in-state, while 68% are imported.**⁴ Arkansas has coordinated investments in local food infrastructure and procurement programs allowing schools to consistently source in-state products, providing farmers with a more stable demand.⁵

Develop food waste recovery guidelines

South Carolina can reduce food waste and cut disposal costs by codifying a food recovery hierarchy and donor protections that establish clear guidelines and ensure that individuals and businesses donating food in good faith are protected from legal liability.

Prioritize purchasing South Carolina foods in institutions (e.g. school, childcare centers, universities, and government agencies)

In addition to the Certified SC Cafeteria program, the state can establish a minimum purchasing threshold for in-state products. Like the state of Arkansas, this effort can require schools to spend at least 20% of their food purchases to be sourced from South Carolina producers to generate economic activity to support South Carolina farmers, processors, and distributors. A 2020 economic impact study found that every \$1 spent on Certified SC Grown products generates \$1.70 in total economic activity in South Carolina.⁶

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5. Arkansas Department of Agriculture. (2025). FY 2025 Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act annual report. <https://arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FAsssembly%2FMeeting+Attachments%2F000%2F27768%2FExhibit+H.02.b++DOA++FY+2025+LFFJA+Annual+Report.pdf>.

6. Von Nessen, J.C. (2020). The economic impact of agribusiness in South Carolina and the Certified SC Grown campaign. South Carolina Department of Agriculture. <https://agriculture.sc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SCDA-Certified-Economic-Impact-Study-Von-Nessen.pdf>.