

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

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Hugh E. Weathers
Commissioner of Agriculture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 9, 2006

SC Farmers Open their Hearts and their Hay Barns

COLUMBIA, SC – Immediately after hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast, Hugh Weathers, Commissioner of Agriculture, called the Departments of Agriculture in those devastated states to offer our assistance. At that time, the agricultural damage had not been fully assessed, but officials said that they would let us know when to help. They have now called for help and SC farmers have come to their rescue with the aid of the South Carolina National Guard.

This morning, SC National Guard trucks which just returned from Iraq left from the Armory in Columbia, SC headed for Mississippi in a new Gulf mission called Operation Hayride. The battle-worn trucks were loaded with hay donated by about 40 South Carolina farmers. Over 3,000 large round and 2,500 square bales of hay have been donated for livestock farmers in the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast states. Thanks to the South Carolina National Guard, the hay is being transported to Mississippi and Louisiana livestock producers who are in dire need. It will take several trips to get all the hay to its destination.

Commissioner Weathers said, “Our farmers have opened their hearts and their hay barns. I’m proud of what they are doing to help the farmers in the Gulf.”

Major General Stan Spears, Adjutant General of South Carolina, said, “This is a new mission to a different Gulf for our soldiers. It’s a mission of compassion to protect lives, human and animal, in our sister states of the deep south of rural America.”

“This is not the first time the military has been the driving force for agriculture,” Commissioner Weathers said. “The first Operation Hayride was held in late 1948 or early 1949. Hay was airdropped to stranded livestock in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada and Utah. In the end, as much as 80% of the livestock in those states were saved.” There have been many instances since then where the military has saved livelihoods and livestock throughout the years.

Commissioner Weathers said, “In America, when the chips are down, everybody chips in. Whether in Mississippi or Louisiana or North Carolina or South Carolina or Kansas or Nebraska, farmers are able to maintain their dignity and determination with the help of

neighbors. Some of our best neighbors are the ones who serve in the National Guard. We deeply appreciate what they have done to help in this massive effort.”

For more information about Operation Hayride, call Mary Ellen Tobias, marketing specialist and large animal emergency coordinator at the SC Department of Agriculture, 803-734-2349, mtobias@scda.sc.gov.