

South Carolina Department of Agriculture . . .

Hugh Weathers
Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Farmers Market at Columbia - construction begins with Groundbreaking Ceremony

COLUMBIA, SC – After years of research and planning, ground was finally broken with shiny, new shovels this morning for the new State Farmers Market at Columbia. The groundbreaking ceremony to launch the beginning of site preparation was held on the new market property on Pineview Road in Columbia. Several hundred people attended including farmers, market vendors, public officials, representatives of agricultural-related organizations and consumers.

Hugh Weathers, Commissioner of Agriculture, led the ceremony saying, “Breaking ground for a new state farmers market has been a long time coming. But we are here not only to celebrate the breaking of ground for a new market, we are also here to celebrate the past, present, and future of the State Farmers Market here in Columbia, the heart of Richland County.” He said, “This effort was started long before I came on board. I just happen to be the one in office when it all came to pass. But, I believe that building this new market is a good thing for all of South Carolina, and I am happy to be a part of it all.”

Dr. Perry Bowers of Focus Living gave the invocation followed by Representative Billy Witherspoon – Chairman of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee who said, “The State Farmers Market at Columbia will be a centerpiece of agriculture in our state. I am proud to be a part of this endeavor.”

Partners with the SC Department of Agriculture who will oversee and manage the new market are the University of South Carolina who will buy the current market property at the appraised value, Richland County who purchased the land for the new site, and the major wholesalers from the Bluff Road site who are investing in their own facilities at the new site.

Tony Mizzell, Chairman of Richland County Council said, “This day stands as a testament to the faith that Richland County has in South Carolina farmers, and our commitment to the agricultural industry as a whole.” In all, the County has committed over \$10 million dollars to the development of the new SC State Farmers Market at Columbia.

Representing the wholesalers was Jimmy Senn of Senn Brothers. He said, “We are a third generation family-owned business and have been involved in the farmers market since it was on Assembly Street. As a family business with a long history of supporting South Carolina agriculture, I am proud to be a part of this new day for South Carolina agriculture.”

The new market will be more user-friendly, safer, and more attractive for consumers. Consumers will have easy access to fresh, quality produce inspected by the Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Service located directly on the new market. Because of their new state-of-the-art facilities,

vendors will be able to comply with HACCP regulations, a system designed to prevent hazards that could cause foodborne illness by applying science-based controls. Produce can be readily tested for pesticide residue in the SCDA food safety laboratory that will be located at the new State Farmers Market at Columbia enhancing the safety and protection of our food supply.

The market will include a retail area with a family-friendly destination for more of a pleasant experience than a dreaded chore for consumers. It will feature a restaurant focusing on South Carolina products, picnic areas, spaces to locate a meat market or sell other non-produce goods, vendors that offer fresh items like those on the outside aisles of the supermarket such as meat, fish, cheeses, coffee, and spices and organically grown products. And, we will be able to provide valuable support to community-minded initiatives.

This groundbreaking ceremony marks the beginning of a two-year construction project to provide the state with a new public-private farmers market, the first of its kind in the United States. The State of South Carolina and Richland County are investing a total of approximately \$40 to \$50 million for construction and land. Adding the additional cost to vendors for their operations at the new site is expected to create an overall public-private investment for development of nearly \$60 million.

Before the ceremonious breaking of ground, Commissioner Weathers said that the new market is expected to open in early 2008. "But," he said, "in the meantime, the market on Bluff Road is still open for business and will remain open until the last light is turned off." So, continue to frequent the market at its current location.

Following comments, participants were invited to dig the first shovel of dirt to launch the construction process and the beginning of a new era in marketing South Carolina Quality products.

For more information about the new State Farmers Market at Columbia, call 803-734-2210.