

Weathers deserves nod

Incumbent agriculture commissioner has restored credibility to the office and has a plan to help state farmers.

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Hugh Weathers assumed his role as state agriculture commissioner under difficult circumstances, and since being appointed in 2004 he has served admirably and restored credibility to this position. Weathers deserves the Republican nomination on June 13.

The nominee will face Democrat Emile DeFelice. The GOP primary has two exceptionally qualified candidates. Weathers is opposed by Saluda County farmer William Bell. Both have agricultural experience, a love for farming and ideas to improve the future of agriculture....

Weathers' performance offers proof this position -- and the posts of some other constitutional officers -- can be effectively filled by executive appointment. Weathers supports such a change provided the state sets out clear criteria for the appointee. Bell opposes appointment of this officeholder.

Weathers is a fourth-generation South Carolina farmer. He has a business degree from the University of South Carolina and has served as a bank officer. He also has served on the United Dairy Industry Association board and is a past president of the American Dairy Association of South Carolina. Weathers has the business and agricultural experience to run this department effectively.

Weathers pledges to be aggressive in promoting the state's No. 2 industry. He has convinced lawmakers to give his department \$600,000 to conduct a marketing campaign aimed at increasing demand for South Carolina's agricultural products. It's part of his strategy to make agriculture a profitable career choice for South Carolinians. He also hopes to attract ancillary industries to the state to help cut costs for farmers. He points to the growing presence of peanut farms -- and efforts by the state to attract roasting operations -- as an example of how the state can improve farmers' fortunes.

Bell has similar goals, but Weathers' clear plan and performance so far in the job give him the edge in this race.