



GEORGIA AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL

Leading Georgia's Strongest Industry

OUR MISSION:
"TO ADVANCE THE BUSINESS OF AGRICULTURE THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL GEORGIANS."



Home
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GAC »
Publications »
Events »
Member Tools »
GAC Foundation
Administration



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SINE DIE, Y'ALL!

for our members that put trust in us to serve this industry under the gold dome and beyond. **Thank you!**

Lawmakers wrapped up the 40-day legislative session Thursday at midnight with a bit of a whimper following a robust Day 39 on Tuesday that saw the transportation bill and FY 16 budget pass in a blaze of glory. That's a tough act to follow. Regardless, **Day 40 is important for finalizing legislation - and we had three bills of interest that did just that.** It also marked the end of a productive session for agribusiness interests. Some initiatives that are accomplished have bill numbers and vote totals, others are hallway conversations and quick meetings that bear fruit with little attention – both happen every session and that is why the GAC staff spends every legislative day at the Capitol. Opportunities are made - and we don't want to miss'em. We are grateful

This session spanned 81 calendar days from start to finish. We covered closely nearly 20 bills that have ag impacts during this time and watched countless others, but we don't do it alone. We appreciate the partnerships we share with the Georgia Poultry Federation, Georgia Farm Bureau, Georgia Forestry Association, Georgia Chamber of Commerce and others. We work together - combining strengths, talents and information to get the job done.



(L-R) Jonathan Harding GAC, Bryan Tolar GAC, Mike Giles GPF, Abit Massey GPF, Jeffrey Harvey GFB, Matthew Smith GFB & Alex Bradford GFB



We also appreciate Southeast AgNet catching up with us each week for brief legislative reports. Good news is worth sharing and they are a great outlet for the industry. So, here's our quick summary of key ag bills from the 2015 legislative session - [click here to listen to our Sine Die report.](#)

As we wrap up this legislative year, it's important to remember that each legislative session lasts two years – *so bills that didn't make it through the process are still viable next year.* That is good news for some and bad news for others. To better focus on what passed and what didn't, we have organized them with a Spring themed flare: **FULL BLOOM** for those that made it to Governor Deal's desk for signature and **STILL GERMINATING** for

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those that missed the mark, but are still viable for next year...*here we go!*

FULL BLOOM

TRANSPORTATION

The elephant in the room all session was transportation funding (**HB 170**) – it is a tough issue and had a very thorough and painstaking path to get to the finish line. The **34 page bill is the epitome of compromise**, but it does accomplish much of the \$1 billion in new revenue sought and does so in a way that draws fuel tax and fees from visitors to/through our state. A balance of dedicated funding through excise taxes per gallon of fuel (it goes from 19 cents currently to 26 cents on gas and 29 cents on diesel) and a combination of hotel and heavy truck registration fees add to the pot. Provisions are also in place to revive dedicated transportation sales taxes for a region of the state or just a single county. While not perfect, **this bill does move the needle in a meaningful way and helps provide transportation infrastructure funds that are sorely needed.**



We congratulate **Rep. Jay Roberts** and **Sen. Tommie Williams** for bulldogging the negotiations to make it happen. (photo (l-r) Senate President Pro Tem David Shafer thanks House Transportation Committee Chairman Jay Roberts as they reached agreement on a transportation funding compromise)

FY 2016 BUDGET

The House and Senate finished their work on the \$21.8 billion **FY16 Big Budget** Tuesday evening and there is much to celebrate for ag and forestry interests. We were pleased to catch **House Appropriations Chairman Terry England** for a summary on these key additions. **UGA Extension, Forestry, Dept. of Ag, FFA, 4-H, ABAC, UGA labs and ag teachers all have much to celebrate.**

Here are a few highlights:

- * **UGA Extension** will receive \$360,000 funds to hire six new extension agents.
- * **UGA Ag Experiment Station** received \$520,000 to hire three research & science positions: Agronomist, Ornamental Horticulturalist, and a Cotton Physiologist.
- * **Forestry Cooperative Extension** received \$300,000 for three research positions: Forest Health, Wildlife, and Economics & Taxation.
- * **Georgia Department of Agriculture** will receive \$9 million in bonds to address reconfiguration at the Atlanta State Farmer’s Market and the addition of wholesale cooler capacity.
- * The **Georgia Forestry Commission** is poised to receive \$4 million in bond funds to replace firefighting equipment statewide – a much needed boost.
- * The **FFA/FCCLA Center** in Covington will receive \$9.5 million for building construction.
- * The **Georgia Young Farmers** program picked up \$300,000 for four counties.
- * The **UGA Animal Dairy Science** building in Tifton received full funding at \$5 million in the bond package.
- * \$2 million was added for the renovation of King Hall at **ABAC**.
- * The **UGA Vet laboratories** picked up \$1.5 million for new equipment at Athens and Tifton labs.

You’ll want to check out the video with **Chairman England** for the full story – it’s well worth the view.

Chairman Terry England Budget Summary

DEBIT CARD PAYROLL

SB 88 is on the Governor’s desk for signature. We appreciate the work of **Sen. Burt Jones** for his work guiding this bill throughout the session. It will allow workers in Georgia to be paid via a debit card - providing employers another option for issuing payroll. This will make it much easier for some agribusinesses to pay their workers with a technology that allows workers to avoid the high fees associated with check cashing services or long bank lines.

FERAL HOG CONTROL

House Ag Committee Chairman Tom McCall’s bill to expand opportunities to hunt feral hogs year-round (**HB 475**) passed the Senate Tuesday and now is awaiting Governor Deal’s signature. Hunting feral hogs at night with a light during deer season is one of the few prohibitions. This bill also addresses permitting for transporting live feral hogs as well. **Feral hogs don’t have many friends on the farm or at the State Capitol...this bill didn’t receive a single “no” vote.** We commend **Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Farm Bureau, Georgia Department of Agriculture** and others for their work with Rep. McCall on this issue. *Let the shooting begin!*



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- [AgGeorgia Farm Credit, ACA](#)
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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

We were pleased to see [SB 101](#) pass so that Georgia's marshlands are protected from erosion and sedimentation with a

25 ft. buffer, but in a way that **doesn't restrict landscape uses**. It now is awaiting action by Governor Deal. Water bills are never easy and we congratulate **Sen. Ben Watson** for working with urban agriculture interests throughout this process.



TIMBER HARVESTING

[HB 199](#) by **Rep. John Corbett** should be signed by Governor Deal in the weeks ahead. This bill would provide that a timber harvest notice to county or municipal government authorities should be made prior to entering the harvest area, but no later than 24 hours after entering onto the property. This bill makes the timber harvest notice process easier and more uniform throughout the state for those in the forest industry. We appreciate the work of the **Georgia Forestry Association** on this legislation.

METAL THEFT REFORM

GAC member **Rep. Jason Shaw** introduced [HB 461](#) to expand on the very successful metal theft legislation he and others passed a few years ago. Among the changes, it adds batteries to the list of restricted items to make it harder for the criminals to cash in on their crimes. It awaits the Governor's signature.



WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE

[HB 412](#) updates workers comp insurance law by raising the benefit for both temporary partial and total disability, the death benefit, and extends the Subsequent Injury Trust Fund (SITF). It addresses a case referred to as the Pitts case, which provides important stabilization for workers compensation insurance. We appreciate the work of **Rep. Mark Hamilton** and the Workers Compensation Advisory Committee on this bill. GAC is proud to have a very successful self-insured workers comp fund, **AgriTrust of Georgia**, for the agribusiness industry. This bill now just needs Governor Deal's signature.



TAX FILING COMPLIANCE FIX

[HB 292](#) was the necessary state action needed for Georgia to benefit from the passage of U.S. **Section 179 expense deduction extension** passed by Congress in late December 2014. Governor Deal signed this legislation on March 6 and it was effective immediately to assist with tax filings underway. The limits have set so they mirror those passed by the Feds, providing for up to \$500,000 with a \$2,000,000 cap. We appreciate **Rep. David Knight** and **Sen. Judson Hill** for their swift action on this legislation.

TRAILER SAFETY CHAINS

Longtime legislator and military veteran, **Rep. John Yates** advanced his trailer safety chain bill ([HB 123](#)) to the finish line this week. Ag input helped shape this legislation substantially from where it started. It will require that all registered trailers (those with a license plate) be adequately and safely attached to the vehicle while being towed. **This would not include most commodity trailers**. It is waiting for the Governor's approval.

SOLAR POWER EXPANSION

After almost four years in the making, [HB 57](#), is well on the way to providing a new mechanism to fund solar power initiatives. This bill doesn't deal with increasing the use of solar panel arrays, but allows solar power financing companies to **help make the cost of solar panel usage more affordable**. Any solar energy generated must be used by the facility where it is installed or sold back on the grid of the local utility – excess power cannot be sold to other consumers. We expect Governor Deal to sign this bill into law very soon.

UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES (DRONES)

[HR 744](#) will establish a House Study Committee on the Use of Drones. These unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) have much to contribute to ag production and surveillance, so this committee is of interest. Areas targeted by the committee will be: use of law enforcement to gather evidence; use by governing authorities; flying drones over private property with or without permission; and flying drones over public property.

STILL SPROUTING

LIVESTOCK LIABILITY PROTECTION

The Senate passed [SB 183](#) three weeks ago, but we could never get traction in the House Judiciary Committee. Since this bill will carryover until next year, we will keep pushing it in 2016. You'll recall that equine owners and facilities already have access to liability protections and we are seeking to add livestock (goats, sheep, cattle, pigs) protections as well. These added protections would help 4-H, FFA, and others participating in livestock activities. We thank **Sen. Agriculture Committee Chairman John Wilkinson** for his work to guide this bill to victory in the Senate. GAC is proud to partner with the **Georgia Cattlemen's Association** and **Georgia Farm Bureau** to advance this bill.

SOLAR PANELS ON AG LAND

[HB 496](#) by **Rep. Matt Hatchett** passed the House but didn't make it to the Senate floor for a vote. This bill would allow the property where solar energy is generated to be removed from the existing covenant such as CUVA or FLPA without penalty. From that point forward, it would be subject to property tax at fair market value. Other legislation looks to something similar next year. We must always be cautious when we start amending the uses of CUVA and FLPA. Stay tuned...

TRUCK WEIGHT LIMIT INCREASE

[HB 411](#) passed the House Transportation Committee...then got locked down. **Rep. Sam Watson** led this important issue for forestry and ag, but timing is often as important as policy and, following a big transportation funding bill, the timing this year was bad. We expect to see a study committee take up this issue over the summer to help put more facts together and advance this issue next year.

AQUIFER STORAGE & RECOVERY

[SB 36](#) started out with hopes of placing an indefinite moratorium on the injection of surface water into the Floridan Aquifer in 11 coastal counties, but instead, the House passed [HR 601](#), the **House Study Committee on Saltwater Intrusion into Coastal Aquifers**. This five member committee will look at issues of saltwater intrusion on the coast in relation to important principles highlighted in Georgia's state-wide water plan: population forecasts, economic

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development forecasts, and water quality and quantity needs. GAC supports keeping all viable water storage technologies as a part of long-term water planning strategies. We look forward to these fact finding meetings and engaging further on water policies impacting agriculture and the economy.



Rep. Sam Watson

MEAT SALES & PROCESSING

HB 450 sought to provide slaughter/meat processing, etc. facilities with an exemption from state/federal mandated inspections. However, concerns about food safety and federal inspection contracts stopped it in cold blood. It is an important issue that is sure to garner additional conversation in the months ahead.

IMMIGRATION

Ag interests and others worked to silence **SB 6**...and we were successful. This bill hoped to prevent those receiving a Presidential Executive Order work permit from getting a Georgia driver's license, BUT it also sought to give police officers the authority to remove and impound a driver's vehicle for 60 days if the driver has no legal license and no lawful alien status. Attempts were made to attach this bill to others in the final two days of the session, but all attempts were defeated. We are grateful to our vocal industry and Senate leaders for keeping this bill off the public radar.

GRAPEVINE



* **54th Annual Georgia Cattleman's Association Convention & Trade Show** is ongoing at the AgriCenter in Perry. GAC is proud to have an exhibit at this event to greet GAC members and others. Please stop by and say hello to Anna McIntyre today and Jonathan Harding tomorrow. Congratulations to the beef industry leaders that do an outstanding job with this event.



* Special thanks to the **Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors** for hosting an outstanding supper at the Capitol for legislators and guests on the final day of the session. It was good having these stewardship leaders at the Capitol and we appreciate **Danny Hogan** and the team for making it happen. Good BBQ is a coveted meal at the Capitol and everyone left happy!

* The **87th Georgia FFA Convention** will be held in Macon on April 23 – 25. We look forward to another great event and presenting the Star in Agribusiness Award again this year. Many thanks to **Ben Lastly** and **Chip Bridges** for all that they do for this program.



* **AGL (Advancing Georgia's Leaders) program** is ready to accept nominations for the 2015 – 2016 class. This 18 month program will begin in August and includes 15 days of interactive engagement in the industry, along with an optional 5 day international experience. **Applications can be submitted until April 15.** GAC is proud to be a longtime sponsor of AGL and ag leadership development. Go to www.agl.caes.uga.edu for additional details.

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