Animal Agriculture in South Carolina: A Fact Book

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Current Status of Animal Agriculture in South Carolina: Comparison with Adjacent States

Hal Harris

It is hoped that this section will provide agricultural leaders, policymakers, and environmental groups some basis to make informed decisions about the future of animal agriculture in the Palmetto State. Some may question the use of Georgia and North Carolina as a basis of comparison. However, they are our neighbors; their geography and topography are similar to ours. As can be seen from Figure 4, South Carolina’s land base is much smaller, but on a percentage basis, land is distributed into cropland, pasture, and forest use in a similar pattern (Figure 5). About one-third of the land in each state is in farms (Figure 6).

North Carolina has considerably more farms than South Carolina or Georgia, and the average size of farm is quite a bit smaller in terms of acreage (Figures 7 and 8). But in terms of dollar sales per farm, South Carolina lags far behind our two neighbors (Figure 9). A major reason is the growth in animal agriculture in North Carolina and Georgia compared to South Carolina.
Figures 10 through 14 illustrate trends in animal numbers in the three states during the past 10 years. Key points shown by the figures include:

- Growth in the cattle herd in North Carolina and Georgia during the 1990’s, then a falling off with the cattle cycle in the past two years. Declining to steady cattle numbers in South Carolina.

- Dramatic increase in hog production in North Carolina, particularly since 1990. Stagnant to declining numbers of hogs in the other two states.

- Growth in layer numbers in Georgia, declines in the Carolinas.

- Steady growth in broiler production in all three states, but South Carolina production only one-sixth of Georgia’s.

- Far greater turkey production in North Carolina than the other two states. South Carolina production up, and greater than in Georgia.
The next three illustrations (Figures 15, 16, and 17) show total farm cash receipts, first broken down by crops and livestock, followed by the total of the two. North Carolina’s agriculture (in dollar valuation) is now over five times as large as South Carolina’s; Georgia’s is over three times as large.

Figure 15. Cash Farm Receipts
Crops

Figure 16. Cash Farm Receipts - Livestock

Figure 17. Cash Farm Receipts - Total

Figure 18 puts these totals in a relative change perspective. While growth in South Carolina’s crop cash receipts has almost kept pace with our neighbors, the animal industries did not grow nearly as fast. Income attributable to the poultry and livestock sectors more than doubled in North Carolina from 1987 to 1996. In Georgia the increase was almost 60 percent, about double the growth rate in South Carolina.
In summary, aggregate farm income in North Carolina and Georgia now dwarfs that in South Carolina, and the widening gap has chiefly been caused by the growth in animal agriculture (Figure 19).

Intensive animal agriculture produces much more income per acre than extensive crop farming. Driven largely by growth in value-added animal agriculture, sales per acre of farmland in 1996 were $836 in North Carolina, $448 in Georgia, and only $299 in South Carolina (Figure 20).

Comparing animal numbers to the three states’ total land base provides an aggregate indication of animal concentration. Under the currently used method of manure disposal (land application), acres per animal provides some notion of statewide application rates. The higher the bar on Figures 21 and 22, the greater is the land base per animal. For example, in South Carolina we currently have one pig for each 60+ acres; North Carolina has only about 4 acres for each hog. Only in turkeys per acre does South Carolina surpass either of the other states—and then only Georgia.
Figures 23, 24, and 25 provide a final basis of comparison among the states. The more animals there are in comparison to people, the greater it would seem the likelihood of incidents of unpleasant interactions in the form of odors, etc. South Carolina annually produces half as many broilers per capita as North Carolina, one-third as many as Georgia. The most striking comparison is with hogs — in North Carolina each citizen today could adopt a pig! The only case where South Carolina has more animals per capita is in turkeys compared to Georgia. Thus, it is not surprising that animal agriculture concerns registered low on the survey reported in the following section.

**Conclusions**

The individual reader must form an opinion as to whether we have too few animals on farms in South Carolina, whether there are too many in our neighboring states, or whether animal agriculture in all three states can continue to grow under the right regulatory environment. It is clear from the data shown here that farm income in South Carolina has suffered because of slow growth in animal agriculture. The gap in incomes by any basis—total, per farm, or per acre—is widening compared to our neighboring states. This gap carries over into employment opportunities in the farm supply, feed, processing, and marketing sectors.

There is a long list of tradeoffs involved in public decisions about the growth of animal agriculture in our state. The changing structure of the animal industries makes discussions of these tradeoffs even more contentious. But an improved dialogue among affected interest groups needs to occur. It is hoped that the information in this *Fact Book* will be helpful in achieving more enlightened discussion of the issues involved.