



# Inside Agriculture

....and the 2016 session of the Georgia General Assembly



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*We are halfway home! Lawmakers hit the highway Thursday afternoon after having completed the 20th of the allotted 40 legislative days. It's a good reminder that just because half of the days are complete, the work of the session is far from halfway done – quite the contrary. The pace of the last 20 days will far surpass that of the first 20. Lawmakers will return Tuesday to get the ball rolling once again...so stay alert.*

*Action on several key bills is expected next week, including GATE and truck weights. Here's an update on bills of interest:*

## AG TAX EXEMPTION CHANGES (GATE CARDS)



Since [HB 911](#) was introduced late last week, we have had several meetings around the Capitol with key leaders in this

debate. Meetings with the sponsor, **Rep. Geoff Duncan, House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Jay Powell, House Ag Chairman Tom McCall, Rep. Sam Watson and Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black** have all been very helpful. Through these discussions, we expect several adjustments to the bill to be made. In addition, **we have growing support for moving the annual card to a multi-year card that would be good for our industry.** Increasing the \$2,500 minimum in annual sales up to \$10,000 is an issue we continue to discuss and keeping the program under the control of the Georgia Department of Agriculture is very important. We're also expressing concerns about potential GATE sales requirements that may be put on retailers.



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There is much work to do on this legislation and we expect the committee meetings for HB 911 to begin next week. With just 20 days to go in the session, please watch this discussion closely and let us hear from you.

## TRUCK WEIGHT LIMIT INCREASE



The truck weight increase bill is set to start moving as early as Tuesday next week now that the benefits and concerns have started to settle. A revised version of [HB 411](#) will be provided to the House Transportation Committee by **Rep. Sam Watson** and the next phase of lobbyist input will begin. Moving the overall truck weight limit from 84,000

lbs up to 88,000 lbs is priority for this effort – but it will be an uphill battle. We commend **Rep. Chad Nimmer** for his fact-finding work over the past year. The input and data stemming from his good work will be key to shaping the next steps for this debate. Stay tuned as this debate picks up speed...

## TAX FILING COMPLIANCE FIX:



**Rep. David Knight's** [HB 742](#) cleared the Senate on Wednesday and has now landed on the desk of Governor Deal for signature. We appreciate Senate Finance Committee Chairman Senator Judson Hill for leading the bill through the Senate. Once signed by Governor Deal, we'll have the necessary state language to take advantage of the Section 179 expense deductions passed by Congress in late December. This law provides for up to \$500,000 for those in the agriculture heavy equipment industries and we are very pleased with the expedited handling of this legislation to help with tax filings. Thanks again to

Rep. Knight for his leadership in tackling this issue so early in the session.

## BUDGET

This week, Governor Deal announced Georgia's **tax collections for January 2016 were up 6.4% over January 2015**...a great sign of continued growth. As the state collections improve, so does the budgeting process for those dollars. The **FY 2016 Amended Budget** passed the Senate on Wednesday, setting the stage to have it sent to the desk of the Governor soon. There is still work to do, but you can [click here to see the latest tracking document](#). The **FY 2017 Big Budget** began moving through the numerous House subcommittees this week. It includes funds for the **Georgia Dept of Agriculture** to further improve the numerous state run farmers markets across Georgia. Bond funds that will assist the **Georgia Forestry Commission**, the **FFA/FCCLA Center**, and the **Soil & Water Conservation Commission**, among others are also included. There are numerous long overdue state wage adjustments for teachers and state workers. We'll continue monitoring the long and thorough budget process as it builds momentum.



## PROPOSED UAV COMMISSION

With UAV use on the rise, there has been more interest from legislators and the public on how to manage and regulate their use. **Senator Judson Hill's [SB 325](#)** seeks preempt local regulations with a statewide approach, which we support. It also outlines the development of a five-year "**Georgia Unmanned Aircraft**

**Commission**" to better evaluate the various benefits of drone use for the state. Public safety, job creation and positive economic impact are among those topics. Unfortunately the bill does not include agriculture as a part of this potential commission - we are working to fix that.

## STREAM BUFFER LAND GRAB

A new battle over stream buffers has surfaced in the form of [HB 966](#). This bill was crafted by a host of environmental groups that aspire to make your land become their land. By adding a definition of "ordinary high water mark," they want to move the required 25ft state buffer on most streams from the normal level of water flow to the highest possible level, which is **eerily identical to wording used in the federal Waters of the US (WOTUS) regulations** that we and other ag groups vigorously opposed. This action would grow the buffer width and take land out of production or use, in addition to building the case for litigation. We'll be watching this one closely. It has been assigned to the House Natural Resources Committee.

## GRAPEVINE

\*Please join us for the **UAC Landscape Awards Banquet and Ceremony February 23, 2016**. It will be held at Magnolia Hall in Piedmont Park in Atlanta, GA. For ticket details [click here](#).

\* **February 23 is FFA Day at the Capitol**. We always look forward to seeing the Capitol halls filled with FFA leaders from all over the state!

\*Mark your calendars for **Thursday-Friday, March 17-18 for the "World of Landscape" Workforce Development Student Career Expo, sponsored by CEFGA**. UAC's 2nd annual outreach to expose middle and high school students to careers in our industry. [Please click here for details and contact us today to find out how you can get involved](#). **Act NOW to become a major sponsor of this event and interact with students - your future employees!**

\*The **UAC Networking and Education Dinner will be held March 22, 2016** at the Chattahoochee Nature Center. Join us for great networking, delicious food, and insight to the future of your business. For registration information please [click here](#).

\* Please join us **Tuesday, April 19** at the **UAC Networking & Education Dinner "Right Plant Right Place Right Now: 5 easy tips for strong designs and stronger profits"** - Eric King, King Landscaping, sponsored by Topiary Courtyard. At Topiary Courtyard. Check our [website](#) for more information.

\*Congratulations to the **Georgia Young Farmers Association** on their annual day at the Capitol. The Capitol halls were filled with red coats and the great smell of brisket and biscuits for their breakfast event. We appreciate the many GYFA friends that make this event so great!

\* Nominations for the **CAES Alumni Association's Awards** are now open. These awards recognize alumni who have made significant contributions and have achieved excellence in their chosen field and/or in their community. [Click here for nomination form.](#)

\***Advancing Georgia Leaders:** A panel of agriculture industry lobbyists showed the AGL group around the Capitol Thursday morning. They spent the day in Atlanta engaging in reviews of legislation, meeting with legislators like **Reps Terry England, Tom McCall, Chuck Williams, Jason Shaw** and **Sen. Frank Ginn** among others. Congratulations to this outstanding group of ag industry friends and to UGA's **Lauren Griffeth** for the great work of her team in pulling this program together. (Pictured l-r: Rep. Tom McCall meeting with AGL participants and Georgia Forestry Association President Andres Villegas and other ag industry lobbyists meeting with AGL)



Questions? Call Mary Kay Woodworth 770-359-7337 or email [mkw@georgiauac.com](mailto:mkw@georgiauac.com)



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