



# Inside Agriculture

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



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*This was an especially active week under the gold dome as lawmakers moved quickly to advance legislation ahead of the Day 30 crossover deadline. Twenty-nine legislative days have ticked off the 40 Day clock as lawmakers head home today. They will return Monday to take on a long list of bills, setting the stage for the final 10 day stretch...and a little March Madness of their own. We have listed several bills that need your attention – time is short for making changes and letting your elected leaders hear from you. Here's an update on bills of interest:*

## AGRICULTURAL TAX EXEMPTION (GATE)



The House passed a revised version of [HB 911](#) on Thursday afternoon, sending the discussion to the Senate. There are some favorable

components to this bill, but there is still much work to be done. The revised bill changes the qualifying threshold from \$2,500 up to a new level of \$7,500. It creates a three-year card (with a fee of \$150). However, agriculture retailers (or any retailer that accepts the GATE card) would be mandated to perform several functions for GATE card customers:

1. All GATE items sold **must** be denoted as sales tax exempt on the receipt.
2. The retailer **must** maintain copies of receipts.
3. The GATE cardholder name and certificate number **must** be listed on each receipt by the retailer.
4. The retailer **must** verify the validity of the GATE card at least once a year.
5. Any invalid cards detected by the retailer **must** be reported to the Dept of Agriculture.

We recognize that these requirements can be burdensome to retailers and we have expressed that sentiment to legislators over the past few weeks. Some of these actions are being performed voluntarily, but this bill would make them mandatory. Your input is appreciated. [We also encourage](#)



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[you to call or email Senate Members to express your concerns.](#) With your input and direction, we will continue to work on this legislation as it moves forward.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP & WATERS OF THE U.S. (WOTUS)**

The “**Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) like bill**” received a hearing in a House Natural Resources subcommittee Thursday afternoon. We were among the agriculture, forestry, construction, and real estate groups that spoke to oppose [HB 966](#). The bill received several modifications, but is still a far cry from property rights policy needed for Georgia as it seeks to redefine how stream buffers are delineated. It would also create an opening for even more lawsuits from environmental zealots. We appreciate **Rep. Lynn Smith** and **Rep. Buddy Harden** for hearing our concerns and for not allowing the bill to advance.



As mentioned before our allies, **House Ag Committee Chairman Tom McCall** and **Senate Ag Committee Chairman John Wilkinson** have introduced anti-EPA resolutions of their own, [HR 1343](#) and [SR 1018](#). These identical resolutions stress the need to repeal the federal WOTUS regulations being pushed by EPA and highlight the opposition that has been expressed by a long list of landowners and nearly every level of elected leadership. **Senator Wilkinson passed SR 1018 out of his Senate Agriculture Committee on Monday** and we look forward to seeing it advance to the Senate floor very soon. This action will send yet another signal to the EPA that their WOTUS regulations are just another government overreach and we need to “ditch the rule.” We thank **Chairman McCall** and **Chairman Wilkinson** for their leadership and

for continuing to fight EPA and their land grabbing agenda.

## **SEED LAW**

[HB 1030](#), which would alter the requirements for those able to be appointed to the Georgia Seed Commission, passed the House on Wednesday. **Rep. Sam Watson** is leading this effort to broaden the eligibility of those involved production, conditioning, or marketing of seed, turfgrass, or horticultural plants are eligible. It now heads to the Senate.

## **BUDGET**

The [FY 2017 budget](#) continued its march through the committee process in the Senate this week. While there are many good items as a part of the budget, we remain concerned that the **Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC)** had funds eliminated that they use for irrigation meter monitoring and maintenance. These funds were moved to the Georgia Forestry Commission, which has been a partner for GSWCC to help read the meters. **The GSWCC has led the metering program since inception in 2004.** Their service not only includes leading efforts to read over 12,000 meters each year, but also the repair or replacement of damaged meters. In addition, [HB 1084](#) that would change Georgia law with regard to GSWCC having these responsibilities. **Those with concerns about these proposed changes**

**in the budget and law are encouraged to contact your State Representative and State Senator immediately.**

## **UAVs (Drones)**

A revised [SB 325](#) passed the Senate Science and Technology Committee on Tuesday. It would



preempt local regulations on drone/UAV use 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. Agriculture is not specifically listed in the bill, but we have been assured our industry will have a seat at the table. We will continue working with **Senator Judson Hill** to be sure ag interests have a role to play in this

process.

**Rep. Kevin Tanner** made numerous revisions to [HB 779](#) since last week. It now narrows the scope of UAV use for law enforcement and State agencies. It also maintains language regarding the unlawful uses of drones, such as flying over public roads and highways. There are no specific references to agriculture in the bill, but we will continue to monitor the legislation as it moves forward.

## **IMMIGRATION**

Ag interests and others worked all last year to silence [SB 6](#)...and we were successful. It would have prevented those with “deferred action” from the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) from obtaining a Georgia driver’s license, among other penalties. This bill surfaced again this session, but in a very weak form. **Thanks to the outstanding work of Sen. Tyler Harper, it advanced in a very whittled down form.** It would now allow those with “deferred action” status to receive a temporary “driver permit” that would have a special design signifying it is for those with DHS deferred action. It is a much-improved bill from where it started and we appreciate the compromise approach on this very important matter.

## **GRAPEVINE**

\*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.

\* 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.](#)

\*Congratulations to **Georgia FFA** on their annual day at the Capitol. The halls were filled with FFA blue jackets representing agriculture education very well. We were pleased to attend their breakfast event where numerous state leaders welcomed them, including **Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black.**



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



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