

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA

SESSION 2025

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SENATE BILL 639

Short Title: North Carolina Farm Act of 2025.

(Public)

Sponsors: Senators Jackson, Sanderson, and Barnes (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 26, 2025

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

2 AN ACT TO MAKE VARIOUS CHANGES TO THE AGRICULTURAL LAWS OF THIS
3 STATE.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **AGRICULTURAL WATER PLAN UPDATE**

6 **SECTION 1.(a)** The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall update
7 the Strategic Plan for Protecting Agricultural Water Resources in North Carolina established in
8 S.L. 2010-149 to include all of the following:

- 10 (1) Water infrastructure needs to increase access and long-term storage capacity.
- 11 (2) Water conservation and reuse practices.
- 12 (3) Cost-share assistance needed to incentivize (i) construction of water
13 infrastructure to increase access and long-term storage capacity and (ii)
14 implementation of water conservation and reuse practices.
- 15 (4) Methods to identify best management practices for temporary water storage
16 and retention to mitigate downstream flooding.
- 17 (5) Methods to identify best management practices to reduce the impact of
18 flooding on agricultural lands.
- 19 (6) Methods to design incentive programs to compensate landowners that
20 participate in flood mitigation programs.

21 **SECTION 1.(b)** The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall report
22 to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic
23 Resources by October 1, 2026, on the development of the plan and any legislative changes needed
24 to implement the plan.

25 **FERAL SWINE WORKING GROUP**

26 **SECTION 2.(a)** There is authorized and housed administratively within the Wildlife
27 Resources Commission the Feral Swine Working Group. The Working Group shall consist of
28 nine members, as follows:

- 30 (1) The Executive Director of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources
31 Commission or the Executive Director's designee, who shall serve as cochair.
- 32 (2) The Commissioner of Agriculture or the Commissioner's designee, who shall
33 serve as cochair.
- 34 (3) The Forest Supervisor of the United States Forest Service or the Forest
35 Supervisor's designee.



- 1 (4) The State Director of the Wildlife Services Division of the Animal and Plant
2 Health Inspection Service of the United States Department of Agriculture or
3 the State Director's designee.
- 4 (5) A representative of the North Carolina Pork Council.
- 5 (6) A representative of the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association.
- 6 (7) A representative of the North Carolina Cattlemen's Association.
- 7 (8) The President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., or the
8 President's designee.
- 9 (9) A representative of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation.

10 **SECTION 2.(b)** The Feral Swine Working Group shall develop a statewide plan to
11 control feral swine damage on private and public lands. The Feral Swine Working Group shall
12 act in an advisory capacity to the Wildlife Resources Commission. In developing the plan, the
13 Working Group shall do all of the following:

- 14 (1) Orient the plan primarily toward public health and safety and toward
15 landowner assistance, providing some relief to landowners through feral
16 swine control, management, and eradication.
- 17 (2) Develop a system for sharing data and information as well as documenting all
18 activities associated with feral swine damage control efforts, so as to facilitate
19 evaluation of efforts.
- 20 (3) Provide educational activities as a part of the program, such as printed
21 materials, on-site instructions, and local workshops.
- 22 (4) Provide for the hiring of personnel necessary to implement feral swine damage
23 control activities, administer the program, and set salaries of personnel.

24 **SECTION 2.(c)** No later than January 1 of each year, the Working Group shall issue
25 a report to the Wildlife Resources Commission, the Senate and House Appropriations
26 Subcommittees on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, and the Fiscal Research
27 Division on the results of the program during the preceding year.

28 **SECTION 2.(d)** The Wildlife Resources Commission shall implement the plan and
29 may enter a cooperative agreement with the Wildlife Services Division of the Animal and Plant
30 Health Inspection Service, the United States Department of Agriculture, the North Carolina
31 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and other relevant agencies or organizations
32 to accomplish the plan.

33 **PROTECT LAND IN PERMANENT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

35 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 160D-804 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

36 " (k) Protected Farm Tracts. – The regulation shall provide that if any boundary of the
37 proposed subdivision abuts one or more protected farm tracts, the applicant shall reserve a
38 vegetative buffer of at least 100 feet between the shared boundary of the land to be developed
39 and the residential lot or lots that would otherwise abut the protected farm tract or tracts. The
40 applicant shall indicate on the subdivision plat that the vegetative buffer has been set aside. For
41 the purpose of this subsection, "protected farm tract" means a tract of land that is subject to an
42 agricultural conservation easement as that term is defined in G.S. 106-744(b)."

43 **ALLOW DENIAL OF SPECIAL USE PERMITS FOR UNDUE IMPACT ON** 44 **AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

46 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 160D-705(c) reads as rewritten:

47 " (c) Special Use Permits. – The regulations may provide that the board of adjustment,
48 planning board, or governing board hear and decide special use permits in accordance with
49 principles, conditions, safeguards, and procedures specified in the regulations. Reasonable and
50 appropriate conditions and safeguards may be imposed upon these permits. Where appropriate,
51 such conditions may include requirements that street and utility rights-of-way be dedicated to the

1 public and that provision be made for recreational space and facilities. A board of adjustment,
2 planning board, or governing board may deny a special use permit on the ground that the
3 proposed land use will have an undue negative impact on agricultural production within the local
4 government's jurisdiction. Conditions and safeguards imposed under this subsection shall not
5 include requirements for which the local government does not have authority under statute to
6 regulate nor requirements for which the courts have held to be unenforceable if imposed directly
7 by the local government, including, without limitation, taxes, impact fees, building design
8 elements within the scope of G.S. 160D-702(b), driveway-related improvements in excess of
9 those allowed in G.S. 136-18(29) and G.S. 160A-307, or other unauthorized limitations on the
10 development or use of land.

11"

13 REPEAL VIOLATION POINTS SYSTEM APPLICABLE TO SWINE FARMS

14 SECTION 5. G.S. 143-215.6E is repealed.

16 SWINE FARM SITING ACT TECHNICAL CORRECTION

17 SECTION 6.(a) G.S. 106-803(a2) reads as rewritten:

18 "(a2) No component of a liquid animal waste management system for which a permit is
19 required under Part 1 or 1APart 1A of Article 21 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes, other
20 than a land application site, shall be constructed on land that is located within the 100-year
21 floodplain."

22 SECTION 6.(b) G.S. 106-805 reads as rewritten:

23 "§ 106-805. Written notice of swine farms.

24 Any person who intends to construct a swine farm whose animal waste management system
25 is subject to a permit under Part 1 or 1APart 1A of Article 21 of Chapter 143 of the General
26 Statutes shall, after completing a site evaluation and before the farm site is modified, notify all
27 adjoining property owners; all property owners who own property located across a public road,
28 street, or highway from the swine farm; the county or counties in which the farm site is located;
29 and the local health department or departments having jurisdiction over the farm site of that
30 person's intent to construct the swine farm. This notice shall be by certified mail sent to the
31 address on record at the property tax office in the county in which the land is located. Notice to
32 a county shall be sent to the county manager or, if there is no county manager, to the chair of the
33 board of county commissioners. Notice to a local health department shall be sent to the local
34 health director. The written notice shall include all of the following:

- 35 (1) The name and address of the person intending to construct a swine farm.
- 36 (2) The type of swine farm and the design capacity of the animal waste
37 management system.
- 38 (3) The name and address of the technical specialist preparing the waste
39 management plan.
- 40 (4) The address of the local Soil and Water Conservation District office.
- 41 (5) Information informing the adjoining property owners and the property owners
42 who own property located across a public road, street, or highway from the
43 swine farm that they may submit written comments to the Division of Water
44 Resources, Department of Environmental Quality."

46 AMEND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ANIMAL WASTE FERTILIZER 47 CONVERSION COST-SHARE PROGRAM

48 SECTION 7. Section 10.4(e) of S.L. 2023-134 reads as rewritten:

49 "SECTION 10.4.(e) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

- 50 (1) Eligible entity. – Any person who owns or operates an anaerobic lagoon or
51 other liquid animal waste management system treating animal waste from a

livestock operation that generates sludge suitable for conversion into fertilizer products, or any person converting sludge from an anaerobic lagoon or other liquid animal waste management system treating animal waste from a livestock operation into fertilizer products.

- (2) Eligible project. – Costs associated with the site engineering, permitting, acquisition, or installation of sludge collection and processing equipment needed for production of fertilizers and other soil additives meeting applicable State and federal requirements for use in agricultural operations.
- (3) Foundation. – The NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation, Inc., a nonprofit corporation.
- (4) Livestock. – Cattle, sheep, swine, goats, farmed cervids, or bison.
- (5) Person. – Any individual, trust, estate, partnership, receiver, association, company, limited liability company, corporation, or other entity or group.
- (6) Program. – The Animal Waste Fertilizer Conversion Cost-Share Program created by this section."

CLARIFY SPECIES SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

SECTION 8. G.S. 106-549.97 reads as rewritten:

"§ 106-549.97. Regulation by Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services of farmed cervids produced and sold for commercial purposes; definitions.

(a) Repealed by Session Laws 2015-263, s. 14(a), effective September 30, 2015.

(a1) The following definitions apply in this Article:

- (1) Commission. – The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.
- (2) Department. – The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- (3) Farmed Cervid. – Any cervid, as defined by the USDA Standards, that is susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease, or any other member of the Cervidae family that is not susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease, that is held in captivity and produced, bought, or sold for commercial purposes. Cervids that are susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease are those set forth in 9 C.F.R. § 55.1. With regard to cervids that are susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease, the term "farmed cervid" shall only include any cervid that was bred in captivity and has been continuously maintained within a herd that is enrolled in and complies with a USDA-approved Herd Certification Program. Any animal registered or tagged in any licensed captive cervid facility existing within the State as of July 1, 2015, is deemed to be a farmed cervid.
- (4) Non-Farmed Cervid. – All animals in the family Cervidae other than farmed cervids.
- (5) USDA. – The United States Department of Agriculture.
- (6) USDA Standards. – The United States Department of Agriculture's Chronic Wasting Disease Program Standards, May 2014 edition, and subsequent updates.

(a2) The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall regulate the production, possession, and transportation, including importation and exportation, of farmed cervids. The Department shall have sole authority with regard to farmed cervids, including administration of the North Carolina Captive Cervid Herd Certification Program. The Department shall allow the sale of farmed cervids, whether alive or dead, whole or in part, including, but not limited to, the sale of antlers, antler velvet, hides, or meat from captive populations of farmed cervids. The Department shall follow the USDA Standards and the provisions set forth in 9 C.F.R. Part 55 and C.F.R. Part 81 in the implementation of this Article with regard to cervids susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease. The Department may adopt rules to implement this Article, including,

1 but not limited to, requirements for captivity licenses, captivity permits, transportation permits,
2 importation permits, and exportation permits. The Department may issue new captivity licenses
3 or permits for farmed cervid facilities that will hold cervids susceptible to Chronic Wasting
4 Disease only if Chronic Wasting Disease-susceptible source animals are from a certified herd in
5 accordance with USDA Standards from an existing licensed facility. Nothing in this section shall
6 limit the Department's ability to issue new captivity licenses and permits for farmed cervid
7 facilities that will hold cervids that are not susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease. Any cervid
8 that is not susceptible to Chronic Wasting Disease as set forth in 9 C.F.R. § 55.1 may be imported
9 into the State to any licensed captive cervid facility. The Department shall not issue an
10 importation permit for any farmed cervid from a Chronic Wasting Disease-positive, exposed, or
11 suspect farmed cervid facility. Until such time as the USDA has adopted an approved method of
12 testing for Chronic Wasting Disease in living cervids, cervids susceptible to Chronic Wasting
13 Disease shall not be imported into North Carolina.

14"

15

16 MODIFY REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPOSTING OF EQUINE AND BOVINE 17 MORTALITY

18 **SECTION 9.(a)** Definitions. – For purposes of this section, "Disposal Systems Rule"
19 means 15A NCAC 02T .0113 (Permitting By Regulation).

20 **SECTION 9.(b)** Disposal System Rule. – Until the effective date of the revised
21 permanent rules that the Environmental Management Commission is required to adopt pursuant
22 to subsection (d) of this section, the Commission shall implement the Disposal System Rule as
23 provided in subsection (c) of this section.

24 **SECTION 9.(c)** Implementation. – Notwithstanding any provision of Subchapter
25 02T of Title 15A of the North Carolina Administrative Code, the Environmental Management
26 Commission shall deem a disposal system to be permitted pursuant to G.S. 143-215.1(b) and not
27 require individual permits or coverage under a general permit provided the system if the disposal
28 system meets all of the following criteria:

- 29 (1) The disposal system is a composting facility for equine or bovine mortality.
- 30 (2) The disposal system does not result in any violations of surface water or
31 groundwater standards.
- 32 (3) The disposal system does not directly discharge to surface waters.
- 33 (4) The construction and operation of the facilities are approved by the North
34 Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- 35 (5) The facilities are approved by the State Veterinarian pursuant to G.S. 106-403.
- 36 (6) In the event of an imminent threat of a contagious animal disease, any
37 emergency measure or procedure related to composting of animal mortality
38 pursuant to G.S. 106-399.4(a) is authorized.

39 **SECTION 9.(d)** Additional Rulemaking Authority. – The Commission shall adopt
40 rules to amend the Disposal System Rule consistent with subsection (c) of this section.
41 Notwithstanding G.S. 150B-19(4), the rules adopted by the Commission pursuant to this section
42 shall be substantively identical to the provisions of subsection (c) of this section. Rules adopted
43 pursuant to this section are not subject to Part 3 of Article 2A of Chapter 150B of the General
44 Statutes. Rules adopted pursuant to this section shall become effective as provided in
45 G.S. 150B-21.3(b1), as though 10 or more written objections had been received as provided in
46 G.S. 150B-21.3(b2).

47 **SECTION 9.(e)** Sunset. – This section expires when permanent rules adopted as
48 required by subsection (d) of this section become effective.

49

50 ALLOW EXCUSED SCHOOL ABSENCES FOR EQUESTRIAN COMPETITIONS AND 51 OTHER AGRICULTURAL EVENTS

1 **SECTION 10.** G.S. 115C-379 reads as rewritten:

2 **"§ 115C-379. Method of enforcement.**

3 (a) It shall be the duty of the State Board of Education to formulate the rules that may be
4 necessary for the proper enforcement of the provisions of this Part. The Board shall prescribe (i)
5 what shall constitute unlawful absence, (ii) what causes may constitute legitimate excuses for
6 temporary nonattendance due to a student's physical or mental inability to attend or a student's
7 participation in a valid educational opportunity such as service as a legislative page or a
8 Governor's page, and (iii) under what circumstances teachers, principals, or superintendents may
9 excuse pupils for nonattendance due to immediate demands of the farm or the home in certain
10 seasons of the year in the several sections of the State.

11 (b) In addition to any excused absences authorized pursuant to subsection (a) of this
12 section, the rules shall require school principals to authorize the following excused absences:

13 (1) Religious observance. – A minimum of two excused absences each academic
14 year for religious observances required by the faith of a student or the student's
15 parent or legal guardian.

16 (2) Military leave. – A minimum of two excused absences each academic year, if
17 all of the following conditions are met:

18 a. The student's parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the
19 uniformed services, as defined by Article 29B of this Chapter, the
20 Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
21 b. The student's parent or legal guardian has been called to duty for, is on
22 leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat
23 zone or combat support posting.
24 c. The student is not identified by the local school administrative unit as
25 at risk of academic failure because of unexcused absences.

26 (3) Equestrian and agricultural events. – A minimum of two excused absences
27 each academic year for participation in equestrian sporting events, livestock
28 shows, or similar agricultural events.

29 The rules may require that the student's parent or legal guardian give the principal written
30 notice of the request for an excused absence a reasonable time prior to the religious observance
31 or military leave. observance, military leave, or equestrian and agricultural event. The student
32 shall be given the opportunity to make up any tests or other work missed due to an excused
33 absence for a religious observance or military leave.

34 (c) It shall be the duty of all school officials to carry out such instructions from the State
35 Board of Education, and any school official failing to carry out such instructions shall be guilty
36 of a Class 3 misdemeanor: Provided, that the compulsory attendance law herein prescribed shall
37 not be in force in any local school administrative unit that has a higher compulsory attendance
38 feature than that provided herein."

39 **ADD NEW HANOVER AND PENDER TO HIGH HAZARD COUNTIES FOR OPEN**
40 **BURNING**

42 **SECTION 11.** G.S. 106-942 reads as rewritten:

43 **"§ 106-942. High hazard counties; permits required; standards.**

44 (a) The provisions of this section apply only to the counties of Beaufort, Bladen,
45 Brunswick, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Duplin, Gates, Hyde, Jones,
46 New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Pender, Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington
47 which are classified as high hazard counties in accordance with G.S. 106-940.

48 (b) It is unlawful for any person to willfully start or cause to be started any fire in any
49 woodland under the protection of the Department or within 500 feet of any such woodland
50 without first having obtained a permit from the Department. Permits for starting fires may be
51 obtained from forest rangers or other agents authorized by the forest ranger to issue such permits

1 in the county in which the fire is to be started. Such permits shall be issued by the ranger or other
2 agent unless permits for the area in question have been prohibited or cancelled in accordance
3 with G.S. 106-944 or G.S. 106-946.

4"

5

6 **ALLOW PESTICIDE BOARD TO ADJUST ANNUAL ASSESSMENT FOR**
7 **REGISTERED PESTICIDES**

8 SECTION 12. G.S. 143-442 reads as rewritten:

9 **"§ 143-442. Registration.**

10 (a) Every pesticide prior to being distributed, sold, or offered for sale within this State or
11 delivered for transportation or transported in intrastate commerce or between points within this
12 State through any point outside this State shall be registered in the office of the Board, and such
13 registration shall be renewed annually before January 1 for the ensuing calendar year. Beginning
14 in 1988, the Board may by rule adopt a system of staggered three-year registrations. The applicant
15 for registration shall file with the Board a statement that includes all of the following:

16 (1) The name and address of the applicant and the name and address of the person
17 whose name will appear on the label, if other than the applicant.
18 (2) The name of the pesticide.
19 (3) A complete copy of the labeling accompanying the pesticide and a statement
20 of all claims to be made for it including directions for use.
21 (4) If requested by the Board, a full description of the tests made and the results
22 thereof upon which the claims are based.
23 (5) In the case of renewal of registration, a statement with respect to information
24 which is different from that furnished when the pesticide was last registered.
25 (6) Repealed by Session Laws 2011-239, s. 1, effective June 23, 2011, and
26 applicable to applications for registration or renewals of registration filed on
27 or after that date.
28 (7) Any other information needed by the Board to determine the amount of annual
29 assessment payable by the applicant.

30 (b) The applicant shall pay an annual registration fee of one hundred fifty dollars
31 (\$150.00) plus an additional annual assessment for each brand or grade of pesticide registered.
32 The annual assessment shall be ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00) if the applicant's gross sales of the pesticide~~
33 ~~in this State for the preceding 12 months for the period ending September 30th were more than~~
34 ~~five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) and twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) if gross sales were less than~~
35 ~~five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) set by the Board.~~ An additional two hundred dollars (\$200.00)
36 delinquent registration penalty shall be assessed against the registrant for each brand or grade of
37 pesticide which is marketed in North Carolina prior to registration as required by this Article. In
38 the case of multi-year registration, the annual fee and additional assessment for each year shall
39 be paid at the time of the initial registration. The Board shall give a pro rata refund of the
40 registration fee and additional assessment to the registrant in the event that registration is
41 canceled by the Board or by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

42"

43

44 **LIQUID PETROLEUM GAS ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY**

45 SECTION 13. G.S. 119-57 reads as rewritten:

46 **"§ 119-57. Administration of Article; rules and regulations given force and effect of**
47 **law; powers.**

48 (a) It shall be the duty of the ~~Commissioner~~ ~~Commissioner, or agents of the~~
49 ~~Commissioner, to administer all the provisions of this Article and all the rules and regulations~~
50 made and promulgated under this Article; to conduct inspections of liquefied petroleum gas
51 containers and installations; to investigate for violations of this Article and the rules and

1 regulations adopted pursuant to the provisions thereof, and to prosecute violations of this Article
2 or of such rules and regulations adopted pursuant to the provisions thereof.

3 (b) When necessary for the enforcement of this Chapter or rules adopted pursuant to this
4 Chapter, the Commissioner or the Commissioner's authorized agents shall have the authority to
5 do all of the following:

- 6 (1) Access the premises and records of any place where liquefied petroleum
7 products are stored for the purpose of conducting an inspection or examining
8 any documentation related to the transport, sale, safety, and storage of
9 liquefied petroleum gases.
- 10 (2) Issue stop-sale, hold, and removal orders for any equipment used to dispense,
11 store, or transport liquefied petroleum gases that is found in violation of the
12 provisions of this Chapter or rules adopted pursuant to this Chapter.
- 13 (3) Recall a vehicle used for the delivery of liquefied petroleum gas back to its
14 original point of dispatch for inspection upon receipt of a consumer
15 complaint."

17 PUBLIC WEIGHMASTER MODERNIZATION

18 SECTION 14.(a) G.S. 81A-52 reads as rewritten:

19 "§ 81A-52. License.

20 All public weighmasters shall be licensed. Any person not less than 18 years of age who
21 wishes to be a public weighmaster shall apply to the Department on a form provided by the
22 Department. A person operating as a public weighmaster outside of this State shall include with
23 the person's application for licensure in this State a copy of the most recent weighing device
24 inspection report performed by the person's local or state weights and measures officials within
25 the 12-month period immediately preceding the date of application. The Board may adopt rules
26 for determining the qualifications of the applicant for a license. Public weighmasters shall be
27 licensed for a period of one year beginning the first day of July and ending on the thirtieth day
28 of June, day the application is processed, and a fee of nineteen dollars (\$19.00) twenty-five
29 dollars (\$25.00) shall be paid for each person licensed at the time of the filing of the application."

30 SECTION 14.(b) G.S. 81A-54 reads as rewritten:

31 "§ 81A-54. Official seal of the public weighmaster.

32 (a) It shall be the duty of every public weighmaster to obtain from the Department an
33 official seal for the sum of six dollars (\$6.00), inscribed with the following words: that contains
34 the following information:

- 35 (1) "North Carolina Public Weighmaster" and any other design or legend the
36 Commissioner considers necessary. Weighmaster."
- 37 (2) The weighmaster's name.
- 38 (3) The assigned weighmaster license number.
- 39 (4) The expiration date of the weighmaster license.

40 (b) The seal shall be stamped or impressed on every certificate issued pursuant to this
41 Article. When an electronic stamp is used, the weighmaster's signature shall be captured using
42 either of the following:

- 43 (1) Software that requires the user to sign in prior to adding the electronic
44 signature to the certificate.
- 45 (2) An electronic signature pad that captures the signature live and then transfers
46 it to the certificate.

47 (c) The weighers of tobacco in leaf tobacco warehouses may use, instead of the seal, their
48 signatures in ink or other indelible substance posted in a conspicuous and accessible place in the
49 warehouse. All seals remain the property of the State and shall be returned to the Commissioner
50 upon termination of duties as a public weighmaster."

1 **DIRECT AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY AWARENESS STUDY COMMISSION TO**
2 **STUDY LOW-HANGING COMMUNICATION LINES**

3 **SECTION 15.** The Agriculture and Forestry Awareness Study Commission shall
4 collect information on communication lines that fall below the minimum height requirement and
5 create a public safety hazard, particularly to agricultural operations. In conducting the study, the
6 Commission shall seek input from the Office of Broadband Infrastructure of the Department of
7 Information Technology, telecommunications companies, agricultural trade associations,
8 commodity organizations, electric cooperatives, electric utility companies, third-party
9 contractors, and any other stakeholders the Commission deems necessary. The Commission shall
10 report its findings, including any recommendations or proposed legislation, prior to the
11 convening of the 2026 Regular Session of the General Assembly.

12 **REDUCE PENALTY FOR CERTAIN SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE VIOLATIONS**

13 **SECTION 16.(a)** G.S. 113-187 reads as rewritten:

14 **"§ 113-187. Penalties for violations of Subchapter and rules.**

15 (a) Any person who participates in a commercial fishing operation conducted in violation
16 of any provision of this Subchapter and its implementing rules or in an operation in connection
17 with which any vessel is used in violation of any provision of this Subchapter and its
18 implementing rules is guilty of a Class A1 misdemeanor.

19 (b) Any owner of a vessel who knowingly permits it to be used in violation of any
20 provision of this Subchapter and its implementing rules is guilty of a Class A1 misdemeanor.

21 (c) Any person in charge of a commercial fishing operation conducted in violation of any
22 provision of this Subchapter and its implementing rules or in charge of any vessel used in
23 violation of any provision of this Subchapter and its implementing rules is guilty of a Class A1
24 misdemeanor.

25 (d) Any person in charge of a commercial fishing operation conducted in violation of the
26 following provisions of this Subchapter or the following rules of the Marine Fisheries
27 Commission; and any person in charge of any vessel used in violation of the following provisions
28 of the Subchapter or the following rules, shall be guilty of a Class A1 misdemeanor. The
29 violations of the statute or the rules for which the penalty is mandatory are:

30 (1) Taking or attempting to take, possess, sell, or offer for sale any oysters,
31 mussels, or clams taken from areas closed by statute, rule, or proclamation
32 because of suspected pollution.

33 (2) Taking or attempting to take or have in possession aboard a vessel, shrimp
34 taken by the use of a trawl net, in areas not opened to shrimping, pulled by a
35 vessel not showing lights required by G.S. 75A-6 after sunset and before
36 sunrise.

37 (3) Using a trawl net in any coastal fishing waters closed by proclamation or rule
38 to trawl nets.

39 (4) Violating the provisions of a special permit or gear license issued by the
40 Department.

41 (5) Using or attempting to use any trawl net, long haul seine, swipe net,
42 mechanical methods for oyster or clam harvest or dredge in designated
43 primary nursery areas.

44 (e) Any person who takes menhaden or Atlantic thread herring by the use of a purse seine
45 net deployed by a mother ship and one or more runner boats in coastal fishing waters is guilty of
46 a Class A1 misdemeanor.

47 (f) Notwithstanding subsection (a) or subdivision (d)(4) of this section, a violation of the
48 provisions of a shellfish lease or aquaculture operation permit that are not related to shellfish
49 sanitation shall be punishable only as an infraction as provided in G.S. 14-3.1, unless the
50 violation is knowing or willful."

1 **SECTION 16.(b)** This section becomes effective July 1, 2025, and applies to
2 offenses committed on or after that date.
3

4 **DACS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER JURISDICTION**

5 **SECTION 17.** G.S. 106-900 reads as rewritten:
6 **"§ 106-900. Powers of Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services law-enforcement
7 officers.**

8 (a) Authorization to Appoint. – The Commissioner is authorized to appoint as many
9 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services law enforcement officers as he or she deems
10 necessary to investigate and enforce any violation of the laws within the authority of the
11 Department or which occur on Department property. necessary. Such officers shall meet the
12 requirements of Article 1 of Chapter 17C of the General Statutes and shall take the oath of office
13 prescribed by Section 7 of Article VI of the North Carolina Constitution. Of these officers, the
14 Commissioner may designate certain officers to also have the powers and the duties of a forest
15 ranger enumerated in G.S. 106-898 and G.S. 106-899 and the power to enforce the forest laws.
16 A Department law enforcement officer may arrest, without warrant, any person or persons
17 committing any crime in the officer's presence or who such officer has probable cause for
18 believing has committed a crime in the officer's presence and bring such person or persons
19 forthwith before a district court or other officer having jurisdiction. Department law enforcement
20 officers shall also have authority to obtain and serve warrants including warrants for violation of
21 any duly promulgated rule of the Department.

22 (b) Territorial Jurisdiction. – A Department law enforcement officer is a State officer
23 with jurisdiction throughout the State, and beyond its boundaries to the extent provided by law,
24 in enforcing all matters within his or her respective subject matter jurisdiction as set forth in this
25 section.

26 (c) Subject Matter Jurisdiction. – After taking the oath described in subsection (a) of this
27 section, a Department law enforcement officer shall have the authority to arrest and take other
28 investigatory and enforcement actions for any criminal offense meeting any of the following
29 criteria:

- 30 (1) Occurring, encountered, or otherwise discovered on the premises of, or
31 elsewhere when the conduct relates to, property owned by, leased to, or
32 managed by the Department.
- 33 (2) Provided for under this Chapter, including the forest laws as set forth in
34 G.S. 106-897.
- 35 (3) Provided for in any duly adopted rule of the Department.
- 36 (4) Encountered or otherwise discovered while investigating or enforcing matters
37 for the Department or encountered or otherwise discovered while
38 investigating or enforcing the provisions of this Chapter, including the forest
39 laws as set forth in G.S. 106-897 and any duly adopted rule of the Department.
- 40 (5) Encountered or otherwise discovered while carrying out any duty or function
41 assigned to the Department by law.
- 42 (6) Occurring in a Department law enforcement officer's presence.
- 43 (7) Occurring outside of a Department law enforcement officer's presence as
44 provided in G.S. 15A-401(b), and for other offenses evincing a flouting of
45 their authority as enforcement officers or constituting a threat to public peace
46 and order which would tend to subvert the authority of the State if ignored. In
47 particular, Department law enforcement officers are authorized to arrest for
48 violations of G.S. 14-223, 14-225, 14-269, and 14-277.
- 49 (8) When assisting another law enforcement agency.

50 (d) Authority. – Department law enforcement officers have authority as peace officers to
51 do all of the following:

- 1 (1) Execute criminal process.
- 2 (2) Obtain and serve warrants, including arrest warrants, search warrants, orders
3 for arrest, criminal summonses, citations, subpoenas, and warrants for
4 violation of any duly adopted rule of the Department, and all other process
5 connected with any cases within their subject matter jurisdiction.
- 6 (3) Respond to and take enforcement action for any crime of violence or breach
7 of the peace.
- 8 (4) Any additional duties as may from time to time be directed by the
9 Commissioner when needed for security purposes at a public event or to
10 protect persons or property because of a disaster or state of emergency.

11 (e) Primary Responsibilities. – The primary law enforcement responsibility of a
12 Department law enforcement officer is the enforcement of this Chapter, including the forest laws
13 as set forth in G.S. 106-897 and any duly adopted rule of the Department.

14 (f) Service of Orders. – Department law enforcement officers have the authority to serve
15 and execute notices, orders, or demands issued by the Commissioner, the Department, or the
16 Board of Agriculture relating to any administrative proceeding. While serving and executing such
17 notices, orders, or demands, Department law enforcement officers shall have all of the power and
18 authority possessed by law enforcement officers when executing an arrest warrant.

19 (g) Temporary Stops. – Department law enforcement officers are authorized to stop
20 temporarily any persons they reasonably believe to be engaging in any activity regulated by the
21 Department to determine whether the activity is being conducted in compliance with the law,
22 including license and permitting requirements. Department law enforcement officers are also
23 authorized to see that the provisions of Chapter 20 of the General Statutes are enforced within
24 their jurisdiction and shall have the power to arrest on sight or upon warrant any motor vehicle
25 upon the highways of the State for the purpose of determining whether the motor vehicle is being
26 operated in violation of any of the provisions of Chapter 20 of the General Statutes. If the person
27 stopped is in a motor vehicle being driven at the time and the Department law enforcement officer
28 is also in a motor vehicle, the Department law enforcement officer shall sound a siren or activate
29 a special light, bell, horn, or exhaust whistle approved for law enforcement vehicles under
30 G.S. 20-125(b)."

31 **INCREASE PENALTY FOR A SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT OFFENSE FOR 32 LARCENY OF CROPS**

33 **SECTION 18.(a)** G.S. 14-78 reads as rewritten:

34 **"§ 14-78. Larceny of ungathered crops.**

35 (a) If It is unlawful for any person shall to steal or feloniously take and carry away any
36 maize, corn, wheat, rice or other grain, or any cotton, tobacco, potatoes, peanuts, pulse, fruit,
37 vegetable or other product cultivated for food or market, growing, standing or remaining
38 ungathered in any field or ground, that person is guilty of a Class H felony.ground.

39 (b) A violation of this section is punishable as follows:

- 40 (1) For a first offense under this section, the person is guilty of a Class H felony,
41 punishable by a fine of not less than two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00) in
42 addition to any other punishment prescribed for the offense.
- 43 (2) For a second or subsequent offense under this section, the person is guilty of
44 a Class G felony, punishable by a fine of not less than five hundred dollars
45 (\$500.00) in addition to any other punishment prescribed for the offense."

46 **SECTION 18.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to
47 offenses committed on or after that date.

48 **SEVERABILITY CLAUSE AND EFFECTIVE DATE**

1 **SECTION 19.(a)** If any provision of this act or the application thereof to any person
2 or circumstances is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications
3 of this act that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application and, to this end,
4 the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

5 **SECTION 19.(b)** Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes
6 law.