Nearly 60 people attended the first SCORE Agribusiness Seminar in South Carolina on July 18, 2018.

Topics included: The Importance of Planning for Business Success; Marketing, Wholesaling, and Brokering for Local Grown Produce, and On-line Marketing using Web Sites, Social Media and SEO techniques. The four-plus hour seminar ended with a discussion of financing options for rural and agribusiness entrepreneurs.

The Barnwell location featured strong local partners: The Chamber of Commerce provided connections to local businesses and agricultural organizations. The Southern Carolina Alliance provided the facility and additional connections with local and statewide development organizations. Barnwell also includes agricultural lenders, a USDA office and a Clemson Agricultural Extension Agent.

Planning and presentations for the initial seminar were also greatly enhanced by the active involvement of a respected and experienced agricultural consultant, Jim Matson, Matson Consulting. Jim provided insights that helped guide development of the first seminar, was a presenter in two seminar sessions and has committed to the second seminar in West Columbia, SC.

SCORE in South Carolina has taken several steps to partner with organizations dedicated to developing business in rural and farming areas of the state, with special emphasis on entrepreneurs.

Following the USDA-SCORE Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing last year, the SCORE State District Director and members of the Greater Aiken SCORE Chapter met with the SBA State Director and the USDA Rural Development Director for Business and Industry Programs during the fall and winter months. Under the leadership of the State SBA Director, Gregg White, initial meetings were held with Rural America participants in Columbia. These meetings included SBA, USDA RD, USDA FSA, Clemson University, SBDC, SCORE, and South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA).

At the same time, the SCDA chartered a new organization designed to focus on assistance to rural agribusiness and entrepreneurs - ACRE. SCORE volunteers joined the small group chartered by ACRE to judge applicants for five $25,000 grants being awarded to rural agribusinesses in the state. From that experience grew the ACRE - SCORE partnership that jointly planned and organized Agribusiness Seminars.

The Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship (ACRE), is an umbrella organization that capitalizes on opportunities in the fields of agriculture, agricultural research and entrepreneurship.
Overall, ACRE seeks to provide additional economic prosperity for SC agribusiness from within the state and from across the globe. ACRE will house a unique research platform devoted to addressing specific challenges for industries that can provide more market opportunities to South Carolina agribusinesses and farmers. The research component combined with an entrepreneurship initiative is designed to help drive new ideas, technologies and solutions into the market to increase jobs and economic development in the South Carolina agricultural sector.

Barnwell was the first SCORE-ACRE Agribusiness Seminar. The second will be in West Columbia, SC on AUG 21, and a series of fall events are also being planned.

A portion of SCORE USDA grant funding of $3000 provided a solid economic base for covering expenses relating to promotional materials of the seminar and refreshments during the seminar for attendees. With it SCORE designed and printed promotional materials and provided light refreshments for the attendees. The Greater Aiken SCORE Chapter provided the business planning presentation, and supported the event with web site registration and Constant Contact list management of seminar registrants, as well as distribution of a press release shared with several area newspapers. Two additional agribusiness seminars will also be supported with the grant funds.

ACRE contributed planning experience and a broad range of state-wide contacts. ACRE also provided design expertise and printing support for flyers announcing the seminar. The second agribusiness seminar will utilize the excellent state facilities at the Phillips Market Center.

The Greater Aiken Chapter includes several volunteers with extensive equestrian experience, which greatly aids their application of business mentoring skills for rural and agribusiness clients. Aiken County has more equestrians than any other county in the state of South Carolina, and adjoins Barnwell County. SCORE volunteers also include Clemson University-trained Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists, skills that also combine with business experience for the benefit of SCORE rural clients.

The next SCORE Agribusiness Seminar will also include ACRE as the planning partner. It will be held in West Columbia at the Phillips Market Center on AUG 21, 9:00 - 2:30. The Phillips Market Center is located at the State Farmers Market.