

Would a peach by any other name taste as sweet?

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When you went grocery shopping this past weekend, you probably noticed that there was no state tax charged on your groceries. I was proud to advocate for and vote for this tax cut for the citizens of South Carolina. Eliminating the grocery tax is an example of what the State of South Carolina should be doing to make lives better for all of our citizens. But when it comes to food, South Carolina can be doing more to ensure quality for consumers and a robust local agricultural economy.

Consumers are rightfully more interested now in where our food comes from. This movement stems from greater consciousness of the impact that a dollar has in the local economy to environmental impact of long-distance shipping to the desire for a better tasting, healthful product.

Consumers will often pay more for certain brands or for local or organic foods. For example, if you are looking for quality maple syrup, you are likely to search for syrup that came from Vermont. South Carolina products have their own cachet, too. Each summer I look forward to biting into a fresh South Carolina peach because I believe they are sweeter and tastier than peaches from anywhere else.

Marketing is important. Recently, the SC Department of Agriculture kicked off its *Certified South Carolina* agricultural marketing campaign. If consumers know that a product is from South Carolina, they are inclined to buy it because they want to support their state and feel confident about the higher quality they will receive from a local product. Tourists who visit our state and our coastline expect and pay for a South Carolina culinary experience.

Marketing success, however, creates the need to protect the reputation and quality of the product. Unfortunately, businesses that make it a point to produce, harvest, sell, or serve South Carolina products are often undercut by cheaper imports that are sometimes misrepresented to the public as local. Our state's shrimp industry has been particularly affected by this misleading practice as they struggle to compete with frozen imported shrimp.

Additionally, South Carolina consumers deserve protection from "menu switch," a practice in which a certain, often more expensive item, is advertised while a more common, less expensive item is served. An example of this practice, the *Post and Courier* cited in a January 2007 article, "Something Fishy," is the substitution of carp for advertised snapper.

Whether it is South Carolina wild caught shrimp or juicy sweet South Carolina peaches, there is value inherent in calling something a South Carolina product. To protect consumers and those businesses committed to supporting South Carolina's producers and their products, I have filed House Bill 3028. This legislation makes it a misdemeanor

under the Unfair Trade Practices Act to misrepresent the origin or identity of a food product. In other words, this bill will make people think twice before putting a SC sticker on an out-of-state product, or from advertising one product while serving up another.

The bottom line is that we will continue to harvest South Carolina shrimp and continue to grow South Carolina tomatoes only if it profitable to do so. Every time a consumer is misled the value of the local market is diluted and local profits are lost. To prevent these losses, we must keep the market fair to our local producers.

Our South Carolina economy depends on the success of South Carolinians and our resources. This bill, along with the continued support of South Carolina products, will maintain the integrity of our local foods market and make sure that our local producers are realizing the benefits of their efforts to maintain pride in South Carolina and its products.