

Article 50.

Promotion of Use and Sale of Agricultural Products.

§ 106-550. Policy as to promotion of use of, and markets for, farm products; official marketing campaign.

(a) It is declared to be in the interest of the public welfare that the North Carolina farmers who are producers of livestock, poultry, seafood, field crops and other agricultural products, including cattle, sheep, broilers, turkeys, commercial eggs, peanuts, cotton, potatoes, sweet potatoes, peaches, apples, berries, vegetables and other fruits of all kinds, as well as bulbs and flowers and other agricultural products having a domestic or foreign market, shall be permitted and encouraged to act jointly and in cooperation with growers, handlers, dealers and processors of such products in promoting and stimulating, by advertising and other methods, the increased production, use and sale, domestic and foreign, of any and all of such agricultural commodities. The provisions of this Article, however, shall not include the agricultural products of tobacco, strawberries, strawberry plants, porcine animals, or equines, with respect to which separate provisions have been made.

(b) The "Got to be NC" marketing campaign of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall be the official agricultural marketing campaign for the State. (1947, c. 1018, s. 1; 1951, c. 1172, s. 1; 1957, cc. 260, 1352; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1027, s. 1.1; 1991, c. 605, s. 2; 1995, c. 521, s. 1; 1998-154, s. 2; 2014-100, s. 13.4; 2014-103, s. 15.)

§ 106-551. Federal Agricultural Marketing Act.

The passage by the Seventy-Ninth Congress of a law designated as Public Law 733, and more particularly Title II of that act, cited as "Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946," makes it all the more important for producers, handlers, processors and others of specific agricultural commodities to associate themselves in action programs, separately and with public and private agencies, to obtain the greatest and most immediate benefits under the provisions of such law, in respect to research, studies and problems of marketing, transportation and distribution. (1947, c. 1018, s. 2.)

§ 106-552. Associations, activity, etc., deemed not in restraint of trade.

No association, meeting or activity undertaken in pursuance of the provisions of this Article and intended to benefit all of the producers, handlers and processors of a particular commodity shall be deemed or considered illegal or in restraint of trade. (1947, c. 1018, s. 3.)

§ 106-553. Policy as to referenda, assessments, etc., for promoting use and sale of farm products.

It is hereby further declared to be in the public interest and highly advantageous to the agricultural economy of the State that farmers, producers and growers commercially producing the commodities herein referred to shall be permitted by referendum to be held among the respective groups and subject to the provisions of this Article, to levy upon themselves an assessment on such respective commodities or upon the acreage used in the production of the same and provide for the collection of the same, for the purpose of financing or contributing towards the financing of a program of advertising and other methods designed to increase the consumption of and the domestic as well as foreign markets for such agricultural products. Such assessments may also be used for the purpose of financing or contributing toward the financing of a program of production, use and sale of any and all such agricultural commodities. (1947, c. 1018, s. 4; 1951, c. 1172, s. 2.)

§ 106-554. Application to Board of Agriculture for authorization of referendum.

Any existing commission, council, board or other agency fairly representative of the growers and producers of any agricultural commodity herein referred to, and any such commission, council, board or other agency hereafter created for and fairly representative of the growers or producers of any such agricultural commodity herein referred to, may at any time after the passage and ratification of this Article make application to the Board of Agriculture of the State of North Carolina for certification and approval for the purpose of conducting a referendum among the growers or producers of such particular agricultural commodity, for commercial purposes, upon the question of levying an assessment under the provisions of this Article, collecting and utilizing the same for the purposes stated in such referendum. (1947, c. 1018, s. 5.)

§ 106-555. Action by Board on application.

Upon the filing with the Board of Agriculture of such application on the part of any commission, council, board or other agency, the said Board of Agriculture shall within 30 days thereafter meet and consider such application; and if upon such consideration the said Board of Agriculture shall find that the commission, council, board or other agency making such application is fairly representative of and has been duly chosen and delegated as representative of the growers producing such commodity, and shall otherwise find and determine that such application is in conformity with the provisions of this Article and the purposes herein stated, then and in such an event it shall be the duty of the Board of Agriculture to certify such commission, council, board or other agency as the duly delegated and authorized group or agency representative of the commercial growers and producers of such agricultural commodity, and shall likewise certify that such agency is duly authorized to conduct among the growers and producers of such commodity a referendum for the purposes herein stated. (1947, c. 1018, s. 6.)

§ 106-555.1. Official State board for federal assessment programs; no subsequent referenda required.

For the purpose of any federal commodity assessment program, the producers' agency certified by the Board of Agriculture pursuant to G.S. 106-555 shall be deemed to be the official State board for such commodity. No subsequent referenda shall be required under this Article in order for such producers' agency to maintain its status as the official State board for the purposes of such federal commodity assessment program. (1991, c. 99.)

§ 106-556. Conduct of referendum among growers and producers on question of assessments.

Upon being so certified by the said Board of Agriculture in the manner hereinbefore set forth, such commission, council, board or other agency shall thereupon be fully authorized and empowered to hold and conduct on the part of the producers and growers of such particular agricultural commodity a referendum on the question of whether or not such growers and producers shall levy upon themselves an assessment under and subject to and for the purposes stated in this Article. Such referendum may be conducted either on a statewide or area basis. (1947, c. 1018, s. 7.)

§ 106-557. Notice of referendum; statement of amount, basis and purpose of assessment; maximum assessment.

With respect to any referendum conducted under the provisions of this Article, the duly certified commission, council, board or other agency shall, before calling and announcing such referendum, fix, determine and publicly announce at least 30 days before the date determined upon for such referendum, the date, hours and polling places for voting in such referendum, the amount and basis of the assessment proposed to be collected, the means by which such assessment shall be collected if authorized by the growers, and the general purposes to which said amount so collected shall be applied; no annual assessment levied under the provisions of this Article shall exceed one half of one percent ($\frac{1}{2}$ of 1%) of the value of the year's production of such agricultural commodity grown by any farmer, producer or grower included in the group to which such referendum is submitted. Provided, that the assessment for the research and promotion programs of the American Dairy Association of North Carolina may be fixed on the volume of milk sold not to exceed one percent (1%) of the statewide blend price paid to all North Carolina producers during the previous calendar year for three and one-half percent (3.5%) milk as computed by the United States Department of Agriculture. Provided further, that the assessment authorized by this Article and collected by the Commissioner of Agriculture to be paid to the North Carolina Yam Commission, Inc., or other duly certified agencies entitled thereto for research, marketing and promotional programs related to yams or sweet potatoes may be levied at a rate not to exceed two percent (2%) of the value of the year's production of that agricultural commodity grown by any farmer, producer or grower included in the group to which the referendum is submitted, and when authorized by two-thirds or more of the farmers, producers or growers in the area in which the referendum is conducted, the rate of the assessment may remain in effect for the length of time provided in the referendum. Provided further, that the assessment authorized by this Article on peanuts may not exceed two percent (2%) of the price paid to the producer. (1947, c. 1018, s. 8; 1967, c. 774, s. 1; c. 1268; 1981, c. 216, s. 1; 1983, c. 246, s. 1; 1997-371, s. 1; 2004-199, s. 27(e); 2006-264, s. 24.)

§ 106-557.1. Ballot by mail.

(a) As an alternative method of conducting a referendum under the provisions of this Article, the certified agency in its discretion may conduct the referendum by a mail ballot as herein provided. In the event that a certified agency determines in its discretion to conduct a mail ballot, public notice of said mail ballot shall be made at least 30 days before the date of said referendum. Said notice shall contain the same information required by G.S. 106-557, except that the notice will also state that the ballot is to be conducted by mail rather than at polling places. The notice shall also state that official ballots are being mailed on a date specified in the notice to all persons known by the certified agency to be eligible to vote and that any person not receiving by mail an official ballot by a date specified in the notice will have 10 days thereafter to apply for an official ballot at the office of the certified agency. The notice shall state the deadline for the receipt of all ballots and the address of the certified agency.

Official ballots shall be prepared by the certified agency and mailed by first-class mail to the last known address of all persons known by the certified agency to be eligible to vote. As announced in the public notice, said ballots shall be made available for a period of not less than 10 days, to those who are eligible to vote in said referendum and did not receive a ballot by mail.

Before any person shall receive an official ballot, he shall furnish such proof as the certified agency may require of his eligibility to vote in said referendum. The certified agency shall keep a list of those persons who receive official ballots. No person may receive more than one official ballot unless he satisfies the certified agency that his ballot has been lost or destroyed.

No votes shall be counted which are not on official ballots. To be eligible to be counted, ballots must be received by the certified agency at the place and by the deadline previously announced in the public notice of said referendum.

(b) The provisions of this section shall not apply to the North Carolina Potato Association and the North Carolina Soybean Association. (1969, c. 111.)

§ 106-558. Management of referendum; expenses.

The arrangements for and management of any referendum conducted under the provisions of this Article shall be under the direction of the commission, council, board or other agency duly certified and authorized to conduct the same, and any and all expenses in connection therewith shall be borne by such commission, council, board or agency. (1947, c. 1018, s. 9.)

§ 106-559. Basis of referendum; eligibility for participation; question submitted; special provisions for North Carolina Cotton Promotion Association.

Any referendum conducted under the provisions of this Article may be held either on an area or statewide basis, as may be determined by the certified agency before such referendum is called; and such referendum, either on an area or statewide basis, may be participated in by all farmers engaged in the production of such agricultural commodity on a commercial basis, including owners of farms on which such commodity is produced, tenants and sharecroppers. In such referendum, such individuals so eligible for participation shall vote upon the question of whether or not there shall be levied an annual assessment for a period of three years in the amount set forth in the call for such referendum on the agricultural product covered by such referendum. Provided, that notwithstanding any other provision of this Chapter, the North Carolina Cotton Promotion Association, Inc., in 1967 shall hold a referendum, pursuant to law, for the years 1969 and 1970, or for the years 1969 through 1973, in its discretion. Thereafter, the North Carolina Cotton Promotion Association, Inc. shall conduct either triennial or sexennial referendums as provided by law. (1947, c. 1018, s. 10; 1967, cc. 213, 561.)

§ 106-559.1. Basis of vote on milk product assessment.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Article, any milk product assessment referendum conducted pursuant to this Article shall be conducted on the basis of one vote per base holder. (1981, c. 216, s. 2; 2023-63, s. 5.4(b).)

§ 106-560. Effect of more than one-third vote against assessment.

If in such referendum with respect to any agricultural commodity herein referred to more than one third of the farmers and producers in the area in which such referendum is conducted, eligible to participate and voting therein shall vote in the negative and against the levying or collection of such assessment, then in such an event no assessment shall be levied or collected. (1947, c. 1018, s. 11.)

§ 106-561. Effect of two-thirds vote for assessment.

If in such referendum called under the provisions of this Article two thirds or more of the farmers or producers in the area in which such referendum is conducted, eligible to participate and voting therein shall vote in the affirmative and in favor of the levying and collection of such assessment proposed in such referendum on the agricultural commodity covered thereby, then such

assessment shall be collected in the manner determined and announced by the agency conducting such referendum. (1947, c. 1018, s. 12.)

§ 106-562. Regulations as to referendum; notice to farm organizations and county agents.

The hours, voting places, rules and regulations and the area within which such referendum herein authorized with respect to any of the agricultural commodities herein referred to shall be established and determined by the agency of the commercial growers and producers of such agricultural commodity duly certified by the Board of Agriculture as hereinbefore provided; the said referendum date, area, hours, voting places, rules and regulations with respect to the holding of such referendum shall be published by such agency conducting the same through the medium of the public press in the State of North Carolina at least 30 days before the holding of such referendum, and direct written notice thereof shall likewise be given to all farm organizations within the State of North Carolina and to each county agent in any county in which such agricultural product is grown. Such notice shall likewise contain a statement of the amount of annual assessment proposed to be levied – which assessment in any event shall not exceed one half of one percent (1/2 of 1%) of the value of the year's production of such agricultural commodity or such other assessment as shall be authorized by law, grown by any farmer, producer or grower included in the group to which such referendum is submitted – and shall likewise state the method by which such assessment shall be collected and how the proceeds thereof shall be administered and the purposes to which the same shall be applied, which purposes shall be in keeping with the provisions of this Article. (1947, c. 1018, s. 13; 1967, c. 774, s. 2; 1983, c. 246, s. 2.)

§ 106-563. Distribution of ballots; arrangements for holding referendum; declaration of results.

The duly certified agency of the producers of any agricultural product among whom a referendum shall be conducted under the provisions of this Article shall likewise prepare and distribute in advance of such referendum all necessary ballots for the purposes thereof, and shall, under rules and regulations promulgated by said agency, arrange for the necessary poll holders for conducting the said referendum; and following such referendum and within 10 days thereafter the said agency shall canvass and publicly declare the result of such referendum. (1947, c. 1018, s. 14.)

§ 106-563.1. Supervision of referendum on milk product assessment.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Article, any milk product assessment referendum conducted pursuant to this Article shall be conducted under the supervision of the County Extension Chairman in each county in which the referendum is held. (1981, c. 216, s. 3; 2023-63, s. 5.4(c).)

§ 106-564. Collection of assessments; custody and use of funds.

In the event two thirds or more of the farmers eligible for participation in such referendum and voting therein shall vote in favor of such assessment, then the said assessment shall be collected annually or at regular intervals during the year established by the rules and regulations of the duly certified commission, council, board or other agency for the number of years set forth in the call for such referendum, and the collection of such assessment shall be under such method, rules and regulations as may be determined by the agency conducting the same; and the said assessment so collected shall be paid into the treasury of the agency conducting such referendum, to be used together with other funds from other sources, including donations from individuals, concerns or

corporations, and grants from State or governmental agencies, for the purpose of promoting and stimulating, by advertising and other methods, the increased use and sale, domestic and foreign, of the agricultural commodity covered by such referendum. Such assessments may also be used for the purpose of financing or contributing toward the financing of a program of production, use and sale of any and all such agricultural commodities. (1947, c. 1018, s. 15; 1951, c. 1172, s. 3; 1965, c. 1046, s. 1; 1975, c. 708, s. 1.)

§ 106-564.1. Alternate method for collection of assessments.

As an alternate method for the collection of assessments provided for in G.S. 106-564, and upon the request of the duly certified agency of the producers of any agricultural products referred to in G.S. 106-550, the Commissioner of Agriculture shall notify, by registered letter, all persons, firms and corporations engaged in the business of purchasing any such agricultural products in this State, that on and after the date specified in the letter the assessments shall be deducted by the purchaser, or his agent or representative, from the purchase price of any such agricultural products. The assessment so deducted, shall, on or before the first day of June of each year following such deduction or at regular intervals during the year following such deductions, be remitted by such purchaser to the Commissioner of Agriculture of North Carolina who shall thereupon pay the amount of the assessments to the duly certified agency of the producers entitled thereto. The books and records of all such purchasers of agricultural products shall at all times during regular business hours be open for inspection by the Commissioner of Agriculture or his duly authorized agents.

For the purposes of this Article the Commissioner may designate the duly certified agency of the producers as his agent to conduct inspections or audits of the books of the purchaser of such agricultural products. If it is discovered, as the result of such inspection or audit, that such purchaser has willfully failed to remit assessments when due, then such purchaser shall be liable to the duly certified producers agency for the reasonable costs of such inspection or audit. Such costs may be recovered by the agency by an action against the purchaser in a court of competent jurisdiction. The agency shall also be entitled to recover from such purchaser a penalty of five percent (5%) of the amount due for each month it remains unpaid, not to exceed twenty percent (20%) of the total amount due.

Any packer, processor or other purchaser who originally purchases from the grower, apples grown in North Carolina, shall collect from the grower thereof any marketing assessment due under the provisions of Article 50 of Chapter 106 and shall remit the same to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Upon failure of said packer, processor or other purchaser to collect and remit said assessment then the amount of the assessment shall become the obligation of the packer, processor or other purchaser who originally purchased the apples from the grower and he shall become liable therefor to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Failure of the packer, processor or other purchaser to comply with the provisions of this section shall constitute a bar to engaging in said business in this State upon proper notice from the Board of Agriculture. The Board of Agriculture shall have authority to promulgate such rules and regulations as shall be necessary to carry out the purpose and intent of this section. (1953, c. 917; 1969, c. 605, s. 3; 1975, c. 708, s. 2; 1983, c. 395; 1997-261, s. 109.)

§ 106-564.2. Further alternative method for collection of assessments.

As an alternate method for the collection of assessments provided for in G.S. 106-564, the duly certified agency representing the producers of peaches, apples or other tree fruits, is hereby authorized to establish the names, addresses and number of trees or acres of trees and certify same

to the Commissioner of Agriculture. The Commissioner of Agriculture shall then notify by registered letter such certified producers that on or before the date specified by the duly certified agency, the assessments shall be paid to the Commissioner of Agriculture by the producers. The date of collections of such assessments may be established by the duly certified agency representing the producers of any agricultural product referred to in G.S. 106-550. (1955, c. 374.)

§ 106-564.3. Alternative method for collection of assessments relating to cattle.

As an alternative method for the collection of assessments provided for in Article 50 of Chapter 106 of the General Statutes, as amended, and as the same relates to all cattle, including those cattle sold for slaughter, upon the request of the duly certified agency of the producers of all cattle, including those which are to be sold for slaughter, the Commissioner of Agriculture shall notify, by registered letter, all livestock auction markets, slaughterhouses, abattoirs, packinghouses, and any and all persons, firms and corporations, engaged in the buying, selling or handling of cattle in this State, and on and after the date specified in the letter, the assessments approved and in force under said referendum shall be deducted by the purchaser, or his agent or representative, from the purchase price of all cattle bought, acquired or sold. It shall be unlawful for any livestock auction market, slaughterhouse, abattoir, packinghouse or the administrators or managers or agents of same or for any person, firm or corporation to acquire, buy or sell any cattle, including cattle for slaughter, without deducting the assessments previously authorized by said referendum. The assessment or assessments for any month so deducted, shall, on or before the twentieth day of the following month, be remitted by such purchaser as above described, to the Commissioner of Agriculture of North Carolina, who shall thereupon pay the amount of the assessments to the duly certified agency of the producers of all such cattle entitled thereto. The books and records of all such livestock auction markets, slaughterhouses, abattoirs, packinghouses, or persons, firms or corporations engaged in buying, acquiring or selling all cattle shall at all times during regular business hours be open for inspection by the Commissioner of Agriculture or his duly authorized agents. Provided, however, that if any livestock auction market, slaughterhouse, abattoir, packinghouse, or any person, firm or corporation engaged in buying, selling or handling cattle in this State shall fail to collect or pay such assessments so deducted to the Commissioner of Agriculture of North Carolina, as herein provided, then and in such event suit may be brought by the duly certified agency concerned in a court of competent jurisdiction to enforce the collection of such assessments. (1959, c. 1176; 1969, c. 184.)

§ 106-564.4. Alternative method for collection of assessments relating to sweet potatoes.

(a) In the event the producers of sweet potatoes approve an assessment pursuant to G.S. 106-564, which assessment shall be paid by the producer based on the number of acres produced, the producer shall report the number of acres planted and shall remit the assessment due to the Commissioner of Agriculture. Sweet potato producers shall report acreage planted at a time and place determined by the duly certified agency representing the producers of sweet potatoes.

(b) Assessments shall be due on September 1 of each year. Any producer who fails to pay assessments by September 30 of each year shall also pay a penalty of ten percent (10%) of the unpaid assessment, plus a penalty of one percent (1%) of the unpaid assessment for each month the assessment remains unpaid. The Commissioner of Agriculture shall remit all assessments received to the duly certified agency representing the producers of sweet potatoes. The duly certified agency representing the producers of sweet potatoes may conduct inspections and audits of sweet potato producers in order to verify the number of acres of sweet potatoes planted and may bring an action

to recover unpaid assessments and penalties and the reasonable costs of such action, including attorneys' fees.

(c) There shall be no refund of assessments collected pursuant to this section.

(d) For the purposes of this section, "producer" shall be defined as a grower of one acre or more of sweet potatoes. (1995, c. 521, s. 2.)

§ 106-565. Subsequent referendum.

In the event such referendum so to be conducted as herein provided shall not be supported by two thirds or more of those eligible for participation therein and voting therein, then the duly certified agency conducting the said referendum shall have full power and authority to call another referendum for the purposes herein set forth in the next succeeding year, on the question of an annual assessment for three years. (1947, c. 1018, s. 16.)

§ 106-566. Referendum as to continuance of assessments approved at prior referendum.

In the event the first such referendum or any subsequent referendum is carried by the votes of two thirds or more of the eligible farmers participating therein and assessments in pursuance thereof are levied annually for the period set forth in the call for such referendum, then the agency conducting such referendum shall in its discretion have full power and authority to call and conduct during the third year of such first period or the last year of any subsequent period another referendum in which the farmers and producers of such agricultural commodity shall vote upon the question of whether or not such assessments shall be continued for the next ensuing three years or continued for the next ensuing six years. (1947, c. 1018, s. 17; 1965, c. 1046, s. 2.)

§ 106-567. Rights of farmers dissatisfied with assessments; time for demanding refund.

In the event such referendum is carried in the affirmative and the assessment is levied and collected as provided herein and under the regulations to be promulgated by the duly certified agency conducting the same, any farmer or producer upon and against whom such assessments shall have been levied and collected under the provisions of this Article, if dissatisfied with said assessment and the result thereof, shall have the right to demand of and receive from the treasurer of said agency a refund of such assessment so collected from such farmer or producer, provided such demand for refund is made in writing within 30 days from the date on which said assessment is collected or due to be collected, whichever is earlier from such farmer or producer under the rules and regulations of the duly certified commission, council, board or other agency. Provided, however, that as to growers or producers of potatoes, apples or peaches the right of refund of assessments as provided herein shall be contingent upon such growers or producers having paid said assessment on or before the end of the assessment year in which the assessment was levied. The assessment year shall be determined by the duly certified commission, council, board or agency representing the respective commodity: Provided further, that any farmer or producer of potatoes, apples or peaches who fails to make any protest against the assessment and levy in writing, addressed to the duly certified commission, council, board or agency representing the commodity concerned, within 30 days from the date such assessment shall become due and payable, then, and in such event, suit may be brought by the duly certified commission, council, board or agency concerned in a court of competent jurisdiction to enforce the collection of the assessment. Provided further that on and after July 1, 1972, as to growers or producers of apples there shall be no right of refund of assessments levied pursuant to the referendum provided for by

Article 50, Chapter 106 of the General Statutes of North Carolina. (1947, c. 1018, s. 18; 1959, c. 311; 1969, c. 605, ss. 1, 2; 1975, c. 708, ss. 3, 4.)

§ 106-567.1. Refund of milk product assessments.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Article, on and after January 1, 1982, a milk producer shall be entitled to receive a monthly refund of assessments paid by the milk producer pursuant to this Article by making written demand in the first month of each calendar quarter upon the association receiving such assessment. (1981, c. 216, s. 4; 2023-63, s. 5.4(d).)

§ 106-568. Publication of financial statement by treasurer of agency; bond required.

In the event of the levying and collection of assessments as herein provided, the treasurer of the agency conducting same shall within 30 days after the end of any calendar year in which such assessments are collected, publish through the medium of the press of the State a statement of the amount or amounts so received and collected by him under the provisions of this Article. Before collecting and receiving such assessments, such treasurer shall give a bond in the amount of at least the estimated total of such assessments as will be collected, such bond to have as surety thereon a surety company licensed to do business in the State of North Carolina, and to be in the form and amount approved by the agency conducting such referendum and to be filed with the chairman or executive head of such agency. (1947, c. 1018, s. 19.)