**Standard 8-6:** The student will understand the impact of Reconstruction, industrialization, and Progressivism on society and politics in South Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Enduring Understanding:**

South Carolina’s response to national crises during the first half of the twentieth century brought it back into full participation in the national experience. To understand the state’s changed status, the student will…

**8-6.3** Explain the reasons for depressed conditions in the textile mills and on farms in South Carolina and other regions of the United States in the 1920s and the impact of these conditions on the coming of the Great Depression.

**It is essential for students to know:**

During the war years, the United States exported food to feed the troops and war-torn Europe. This produced a brief period of prosperity in South Carolina as the state’s farmers supplied food and cotton for uniforms to meet the wartime demand. Once the war ended, the troops came home and Europeans were able to resume farming to feed their own populations. South Carolina farmers suffered as demand for their crops plunged and so did prices. The agricultural economy sagged further when the boll weevil, an insect pest, attacked the cotton crop. In some years, the boll weevil destroyed one half of the crop. Prices improved a little in 1922, because of the plunging supply due to the boll weevil, but never reached prewar levels. By the end of the 1920s, cotton, like rice before it, was no longer a viable crop in the Lowcountry. Farmers turned to other crops such as peaches and livestock. Drought, erosion and soil depletion further exacerbated the dire conditions in the farming sector.

During the boom of the war years, farmers had borrowed from their local banks to expand, buying land, equipment and later, in a desperate attempt to salvage their crops, pesticides to kill the boll weevil. With plunging prices for their increasingly lower crop yields, farmers were unable to make payments on these loans. Banks foreclosed on delinquent mortgages or farms were taken by the state because the farmers could not pay their taxes. Because they could not make money on their loans or sell the devalued land that they had foreclosed on, banks were failing in South Carolina even before the stock market crash of 1929 marked the beginning of the Great Depression. Dispossessed farmers became sharecroppers or tenant farmers or left the state to seek opportunities in the factories of the North. White farmers and sharecroppers moved to mill towns to find work in the textile mills.

The textile industry also experienced changes during the 1920s. High demand during the war years was followed by declining demand in the 1920s. Synthetic fibers such as nylon replaced cotton in the fashions of the era and short skirts used less material. International competition also increased as tariffs that had protected the domestic textile industry were reduced. Despite these challenges, the textile industry in South Carolina grew throughout the 1920s as New England textile mills closed in response to these poor economic conditions and moved south. Northern industrialists were attracted to South Carolina because of the ready supply of cheap labor. Mill owners improved living conditions in the mill villages by adding electricity and running water. They also tried to combat continued economic competition and increase their profit by using methods such as the ‘speed-up’, where machines were set to run faster, and the ‘stretch-out’, where fewer workers were used to tend a larger number of machines. Workers’ wages remained low which affected their purchasing power. As mills produced more cloth than was demanded by a weakening economy, reductions were made in the work week or workers were laid off. This compounded the effect on the economy of South Carolina. By the end of the 1920s, the South Carolina textile industry, like agriculture and industry throughout the United States, suffered from declining demand and overproduction.