

As I have been traveling across the state, I have seen some good looking crops along the roadways, so it wasn't too much of a surprise when I saw the recent production forecast from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service is projecting higher yields per acre for corn, cotton, peanuts and soybeans than in 2016.

In fact, at a projection of 140 bushels per acre, corn is just two bushels shy of the state record yield set in 2013. But, while the yield per acre is expected to be strong for corn, overall production is projected to drop to 114.8 million bushels because fewer acres have been planted and will be harvested. USDA estimates North Carolina's corn crop will be down 5 percent from the 121.3 million bushels produced in 2016.

Cotton is also having a strong showing this year, with production expected to more than double last year's 343,000-bale number. The forecast put production at 705,000 bales. That jump can be attributed in part to a nearly 100,000-acre increase in plantings. This year, USDA anticipates 350,000 acres of cotton being harvested compared to 255,000 acres in 2016.

The yield forecast for cotton is 967 pounds per acre, up 321 pounds from 2016.

We have also seen more acres of peanuts and soybeans planted this year. Harvested acres for peanuts is projected at 118,000 acres, up 19,000 from 2016, and 1.67 million acres of soybeans, up 10,000 acres from last year.

Overall peanut production is expected to be around 484 million pounds, which would be an increase of 42 percent from 2016.

Soybean production is expected to total 63.5 million bushels, a more modest jump of 9 percent from 2016. The forecast anticipates an average yield of 38 bushels per acre, up three bushels per acre from 2016.

Of course, there is still a whole lot of time between now and harvest, so I will continue to hope for a good season for producers. I know some of our growers have had two bad years in a row, particularly with the late-season damage from Hurricane Matthew.

I pray that this will be a much quieter year on the storm front.

For our soybean growers, I want to encourage you to read the story on page 8 about the completion of a recent survey by our Agronomic Services lab involving soybean cyst nematodes.

These plant pests can be highly destructive to a soybean crop and this survey confirmed they have been found in 57 of our state's 100 counties. The best advice for dealing with this pest is to use the best management tools of crop rotation and planting soybean cyst nematode-resistant varieties.

It's hard for me to believe we are entering the final quarter of 2017. It seems like just a few days ago I was talking about my optimism for the New Year and the arrival of the first fruits to the farmers markets, and now we are nine months in and there is no shortage of commodities in the markets. Let's all hope for a strong finish.