

From the tractor

At press time, I am on a trade mission to Brazil, touring factories, farms and other ag facilities to learn more about agricultural production there. I am joined by representatives from the North Carolina Farm Bureau, N.C. commodity groups and farmers, along with a N.C. Board of Ag member.

At the Ag Development forum in January, N.C. State University economist Blake Brown talked about North Carolina's competition when it comes to agriculture, and Brazil is the largest head-to-head competitor on the agricultural market.

They are a major exporter of grain, soybeans, cotton and corn. Brazil is also the world's largest poultry producer and the second-largest tobacco producer behind China.

Those commodities should all sound familiar to North Carolina farmers, because those commodities are grown here, too, and several are exported as well.

This trip is a learning trip. We want to understand Brazilian agricultural production firsthand and walk away knowing how to use this knowledge to strengthen and grow North Carolina agriculture and our export opportunities.

Brazil faces some of the same challenges as the United States. Namely, improvements needed in infrastructure. And as agriculture continues to trend towards a global marketplace, I want North Carolina to have the commodities, infrastructure and trade partners to grow. Like the United States, Brazil's infrastructure needs include regional airports, construction of major rail lines and broadband internet service.

Brazil is Latin America's largest and most populous country. It is seeing a gradually improving economy and increased trade opportunities, just like the United States.

Interestingly, Brazil and the United States share a similar climate make up. South Florida and Santa Cruz, Brazil are geographically at 30 degrees latitude, giving them a similar climate profile. However, the seasons in Brazil are opposite of those in the Northern Hemisphere. July is mid-winter and January is summertime.

Just like the United States, Brazil is looking for ways to expand production and increase trade. In 2016, Brazil's major export markets were China, the European Union and the United States.

North Carolina's largest trade partners are China, Japan, Canada and Mexico. Top exports include pork, tobacco, poultry, soybeans and cotton. Exports will continue to play a significant role in the future success of North Carolina agriculture. More than \$4 billion is exported annually, not including \$1.5 billion in wood products. The potential for growth is tremendous since 95 percent of the world population lives outside the United States.

I don't love being away from my farm and North Carolina, but as we work to develop greater trade opportunities for North Carolina agriculture, we have to be aware of what our competition looks like in order to be better prepared to market ourselves and our products.

I hope to have more reports from our trip in future issues of the paper.