

From the tractor

by Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler

January 2018 sure has rolled around quickly. It hardly seems like a year has passed since I was writing about the start of 2017 and its promise of new beginnings.

It's been a busy year at the department, and I am proud of the work we have done this year to help farmers, agribusinesses and consumers.

I wanted to share some information about training that farmers are going to want to be aware of for this year. Many of you participated in training workshops on the proper use of auxin herbicides in 2017 to ensure that crops that are sensitive to dicamba and 2,4-D were not accidentally damaged by drift.

Well, this year there will be mandatory training because of new labeling revisions for Engenia, XtendiMax and Faxapan. Even if you took auxin training in 2017, you will still need to go through training again before being able to purchase these products this year.

North Carolina fared better than some other states when it came to issues of crop damage from drift, and I believe that was due in large part to the training workshops held last year. I am hopeful that another round of training will reduce the incidences of damage even more.

Our Structural Pest Control and Pesticides Division is working in conjunction with N.C. State University and N.C. Cooperative Extension to secure locations and dates across the state for training. We'll be listing them on the department's page, in the Agricultural Review and on our social media sites as they are finalized. Be sure to watch for more information about these upcoming workshops.

I talked about it being a busy year, and you don't have to look too far to find examples of the department's work from gas stations to grocery stores to farmers markets and fields. Our work touches the lives of every North Carolinian every day and I am proud that it does.

As we were wrapping up the year, I was looking at some of the numbers of our Agronomic Services lab and saw it had a record year for testing nematode samples. The Nematode Assay Lab analyzed 43,600 samples. Of those 8,000 were tests on pinewood samples to determine the presence or absence of pinewood nematodes, which is a regulated pest.

These tests are important for being able to export this wood to China and other countries where this pest does not exist. Export markets are important to our overall ag economy, and this testing is an example of how we help ensure our products are accepted overseas.

Another impressive number was the 309,200 soil samples tested. The Agronomic Service lab continues to be a busy and productive lab, and we continue to invest the peak-season fees back into new equipment to improve efficiency and turn-around times.

I am looking forward to 2018, and continuing our work to move agriculture forward and grow into the \$100 billion industry I know it will be.

