

From the tractor

At the American Farm Bureau Federation meeting in Tennessee last month, President Donald Trump released a report from his Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity outlining ways to help rural communities.

Five key points of action were highlighted: achieve e-connectivity for rural America, improve the quality of life, support a rural workforce, harness technological innovation and develop the rural economy.

I appreciate that the task force recognizes that regulatory burdens, limited connectivity (both with physical infrastructure and with high-speed internet), and need for technological advances have stifled growth in the agricultural sectors.

It is encouraging to see the continued attention the administration is paying to agriculture and rural America, and to see the recommendations brought forth from the work of this task force.

In April of 2017, I had the privilege to be at the White House when USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue was charged to lead this task force. I was encouraged then to see that this administration was sincerely interested in understanding the needs of agriculture and rural America. I hope the release of this report signals more investment in our rural communities and agriculture, and in the infrastructure necessary to strengthen them.

Having spent my entire career in agriculture and working for agriculture and rural North Carolinians as Commissioner of Agriculture, I understand all too well that the needs in this sector are unique, so I applaud the Secretary and the task force for spending time trying to identify these challenges, even though many are well known to those living and farming in rural communities across the country.

As I look at the calls to action in the report and compare them to our state's vision for moving North Carolina agriculture forward, I see great compatibility in purpose, direction and desired results.

The United Nations predicts we will need to produce 70 to 100 percent more food by 2050 to meet the demand of a growing global population. That is a tall order, but one I believe we can achieve through advances gained by agricultural research, new technology and a recommitment to innovation and improvement.

We are already seeing how the application of technology to agriculture can pay big dividends. We need to continue to look for new ideas and innovation.

With agriculture and agribusiness being our state's No. 1 industry at \$84 billion, we recognize that we have tremendous access to raw products and that we need to look to develop and attract food manufacturing facilities to our state, particularly to the rural areas where these commodities are grown.

Through the support of the N.C. General Assembly, we are focusing economic development efforts on this, as well as developing new opportunities through the Food Processing Innovation Center at the N.C.

Research Campus in Kannapolis. Using new food manufacturing technology being developed at N.C. State University, we believe we can leverage this into more jobs and markets for farm products.

The 10,000-square-foot facility will be the only one of its kind in the country that is cGMP certified, which means that an FDA regulated system of controls will ensure a high level of quality at every step.

In North Carolina, we are also continuing to invest in agricultural research focused on meeting increasing food production. In 2017, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services inspected its first drone for aerial applications. I am certain it will not be the last, as this new technology promises to practically fine-tune production needs down to specific areas. No-steer tractor technology combined with satellite information allows farmers to maximize each field for optimum production. New, heartier plant varieties are being looked at to minimize pest and disease damage.

These two examples are in step with the directives from the task force's report.

I look forward to the administration implementing changes and bringing forth solutions to advance agriculture and rural North Carolina.