

The new North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Ag Sciences Center recently passed a major milestone, as workers and NCDA&CS personnel celebrated the building's "topping off" ceremony.

During the ceremony, a large crowd watched as the building's final steel beam was hoisted into place, carrying with it an evergreen tree, an American flag and the signatures of many of those workers who helped build the structure and staff members who will one day work in the building.

The ceremony marked an important step in the process of getting the new building ready for use, said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler.

"A year ago, this very month, we were celebrating the groundbreaking for this building. All of us need to stop and pause and reflect that one year ago, this was an open field," Troxler said. "Next year this time, we will almost be ready to move into our new space."

Construction of the new Ag Sciences Center has been handled jointly by JE Dunn Construction Company and T.A. Loving Company. Getting to this point has taken the combined time and effort of hundreds of people, said Robert Marshall, senior project manager for J.E. Dunn.

"When complete, this building will be an incredible place of innovation, enabling the N.C. Department of Agriculture the opportunity for its lab groups to operate in the same facility," Marshall said. "During construction it has and will continue to be an amazing building. This new facility contains 6,000 cubic yards of concrete, 1,200 tons of steel, and 16,000 man hours through Sept. 26. There will be over 1,400 pieces of equipment that are operational in the new facility."

The new building will provide a major boost in efficiency and convenience to NCDA&CS lab staff. The average age of the department's lab buildings is 40 years old — the motor fuels lab is 60 years old — and have become inadequate to serve the needs of the state's growing population and thriving agricultural industry.

"Agriculture is our state's No. 1 industry. Agriculture and agribusiness account for one-sixth of the state's income and employees. Almost \$92 billion is directly contributed to our state's economy from agriculture," Troxler said. "I consider this lab to be a long-term investment in the future of agriculture."

Once complete, the Ag Sciences Center house labs, offices and training space for four of our divisions: Veterinary, Food and Drug Protection, Standards, and Structural Pest Control and Pesticides. In total, it will house more than 200 employees.

The lab is slated for completion in fall 2020. It will be located at the corner of Reedy Creek and Edwards Mill roads.