

Spring is officially here, and I am more than glad to welcome it's return. It is always a busy time on the farm.

Crops are going in the ground, plus you will begin to find fresh local strawberries and early season crops at farmers markets and grocery stores and agritourism activities kicking off for the year.

As this paper is coming together, we are celebrating National Ag Week—something I'd be happy to celebrate every week. This marks the 49th year of this effort to draw attention to the many contributions of agriculture and agribusiness.

If there is one thing I hope the pandemic has taught us, it's the importance of local farms and a local food supply.

Shopping with local farms and food businesses is the best way to ensure they will be here when we need them. Every person who reads this newspaper is a consumer and I encourage you to support North Carolina farmers and agribusinesses by shopping with them. Look for products with the Got to Be NC logo on them and make it a point to try something local.

It is important that we all do our part to support local producers because less than 2 percent of the world population feeds us. We need farmers to be successful. We need to show young people that there is a future in agriculture, and we need to ensure as a state and as a country that we can feed ourselves.

If everyone reading this article purchased one local food product, it would make a big difference at the farm level.

We are blessed in our state that just about any crop can be produced here – citrus being an exception. It is why agriculture and agribusiness is our leading industry at \$95.9 billion and the reason we are the fourth most agriculturally diverse state.

We also lead the nation in the production of many agricultural commodities. Here's a brief run down:

- No. 1 in flue-cured tobacco, producing 78.7 percent of the total U.S. crop
- No. 1 in sweet potatoes, growing 61 percent of the total U.S. crop
- No. 1 in poultry and egg cash receipts at over \$4.7 billion
- No. 2 in pig crop at 19.6 million head
- No. 2 in turkeys at 31 million head
- No. 3 in hogs and pigs at 9.5 million
- No. 4 in cucumbers at \$25.4 million in production
- No. 4 in broilers at 916 million head
- No. 5 in peanuts at 443 million pounds or \$92.9 million
- No. 5 in upland cotton in over 1 million bales produced
- No. 5 in bell peppers at 552,000 cwt.

I can tell you that farmers across our state are working hard every day to be sure we have food products to enjoy. I hope you will read the story on Page 8 about James Shackelford, a Snow Hill farmer who continues to raise food at 79 years old. He is an example of the many small farms we have in the state. Did you know that nearly 68 percent of farms in North Carolina are 100 acres or less?

And finally, agritourism activities and on-farm events continue to increase in popularity and availability. You will find Spring events planned at farms across the state listed on pages 3, 4 and 5. Visiting an agritourism farm is another way to support your local farmers.

I said Spring is a busy time on the farm and it is. As we celebrate agriculture and small farmers, I hope we all remember the important connection between the farm and the table and are grateful for all that farmers do to feed us.