

Commissioner's Column

The first of the year is always a busy time for me and the department, but it is a time that I greatly enjoy. With all the commodity meetings taking place across the state, it gives me a good opportunity to catch up with a lot of people I don't see too often. It helps me get the pulse for what is going on with farmers, in our ag communities and with the industry.

There are some meetings that overlap with other meetings and commitments, but I try to make as many of them as I can. Traveling and trying to be at as many places as possible is one of my greatest challenges as Commissioner.

As a farmer, I always valued my time at commodity meetings, because it gives you the opportunity to catch up on the latest industry information. As a grower, you want to be aware of changes in legislation, trends and emerging issues. And things change so quickly in a global marketplace these days. Having that information helps you make the best business decisions you can.

In addition to attending some recent commodity meetings, I also visited a couple of food manufacturing facilities in January, including D'Vine Foods in Elizabethtown, Mt. Olive Pickle Company in Mount Olive and Smithfield Foods in Kinston. These were good visits, especially as we work on ways to develop more food manufacturing opportunities in the state.

Knowing the concerns of farmers and agribusiness owners and knowing what issues they are facing helps me make better decisions on their behalf as well. That helps me do the best job I can. I appreciate the feedback I get whenever I am visiting with the commodity groups.

Last month in my column, I mentioned the N.C. Ag Awareness Day coming up on March 20. We are counting on our farmers, agribusiness leaders and farm advocacy groups to join us that day in thanking our legislators for their support in 2018 and to remind them of the importance of agriculture to the state's economy.

Too often agriculture is taken for granted, but we have to be our own advocates and ambassadors. We have to tell our story, and I happen to believe that is a pretty good story and one we should all take great pride in.

Agriculture and farming feed the world, and food is essential for life. We need to help people understand that core concept, which is something that a farmer or a person in agriculture just takes for granted.

As we begin 2019, I encourage each of you involved in agriculture to make it your mission this year to share agriculture's story every chance you get. Engage people in conversation. Ask them if they know where their food comes from. Ask them if they know a farmer. Ask them if they buy local food products when they shop or eat out. Let's make this the year that agriculture becomes personal for everyone, not just those of us in the farming industry. Because agriculture is personal for every single person, whether they farm or not.

March 20 will be a great day to rally together, to show people the dedicated men and women who help grow the food that we all enjoy, and to share the message that farmers feed us all.

I hope you will join us. I hope you will bring your neighbors and friends. This is too important to miss.