

As the year comes to an end, it looks like farmers have had a pretty good year with yields, good harvest weather and stronger commodity prices. In fact, it is possible we could be looking at record yields for soybeans and corn. Time will tell.

All of this is very welcomed news after five years or more of devastating floods and hurricanes, low commodity prices and trade issues. I wish we could just leave it at that, but unfortunately that good news has to be tempered by ongoing concerns about the rising costs of inputs and limited availability of products and equipment as farmers are planning for 2022.

As consumers we have been hearing about shortages with computer chips, we have seen shortages of some types of products in the grocery store and in retail stores, and we have certainly seen higher prices on many items as a result.

Farmers are not immune to these supply chain disruptions or rising costs. Computers are integrated into so many areas of agricultural production from tractors to greenhouse operations, to soil science and drone technology.

Fertilizer prices are around 300 percent higher today than this time last year. In addition, crop protection inputs like herbicides and insecticides are also much higher and unavailable in some cases.

As a result, we anticipate a decrease in planted wheat acres.

As farmers plan for the upcoming season, it's safe to say the 2022 crop will be much more expensive to produce than the 2021 crop. And that's frustrating because just when you think you are making some headway on past losses, these higher costs eat into the bottom line.

Like a lot of industries, agriculture has seen a steady trend of consolidation of companies that provide seed, fertilizer and crop protection to farmers. So, farmers do not have a lot of choices anyway, and it becomes more of a concern when we see a sharp rise in prices and limited availability of these inputs for farmers.

Farmers are one of the few occupations expected to purchase at retail and sell at wholesale. Farmers also deal with the unpredictability of weather and markets all the time to feed the world and make a living doing it. The volatility we're seeing in the seed, fertilizer, and crop protection business only adds to the risk farmers assume every day.

This is an issue we are concerned about and we will continue to watch closely as we prepare for the 2022 season.

I encourage consumers to continue to shop local to help support our agriculture industry in North Carolina. Access to local producers was a great benefit during the pandemic, but supporting local producers year-round is the best way to ensure they stay in business and can continue to provide access to the freshest foods available.

The holidays are a great time to choose local because our state produces so many of the traditional food items served over Thanksgiving and Christmas. North Carolina farmers produce turkey, ham, sweet potatoes, greens, apples, pumpkins, Irish potatoes and more.

You can prepare a great meal shopping local in North Carolina, so I encourage you to look for local products in your favorite grocery store or farmers market.

I am grateful for so much this year personally and professionally. I think the pandemic has helped remind us of the fragility of life, the blessing of community and the foundation of support family and friends provide. As we look toward 2022, I continue to pray for health, happiness and success for our farm families. Despite constant challenges and often being taken for granted, our farmers continue to show up and produce so that we can eat and thrive. Thank you and best wishes for 2022!