

Column

Ok, farmers, if you haven't filled out the Census of Agriculture survey, I encourage you to do so. I understand from our state statistician that only about 35 percent of producers have filled out the survey.

We need more participation in order to get the most accurate snapshot of North Carolina agriculture. Survey information is kept confidential, but the aggregated information helps inform state and federal ag policy, infrastructure and rural development, disaster relief, research and education.

This is every farmer's opportunity to be heard and counted, so it is important they each person takes the time to fill out the survey. Agriculture risks being underserved without strong data.

Email reminders and follow-up questionnaires are being sent out to those who have not responded. You may receive a phone call as well.

Please take the survey and have your information counted in this Census of Agriculture.

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If you missed the annual Ag Development Forum, you missed an excellent program that included an economic update from Dr. Blake Brown, professor emeritus at N.C. State University, a panel discussion about the impact on North Carolina agriculture from the war on Ukraine and a presentation on national agricultural insights from Ted McKinney, CEO of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

I also presented my annual State of Agriculture address, where I shared about the department's focus for 2023 along with the legislative agenda. I'll share the following highlights:

- Farmland preservation will remain a key focus for the department as development continues to accelerate the conversion of farmland to both large-scale industrial projects and smaller housing developments and retail sites.
- Our legislative requests can be summed up by the word "investment:"
  - In our human resources, aka staff
  - In our natural resources, farmland preservation
  - In agricultural research
- I am requesting \$15 million for the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, based on the fact that North Carolina ranks third in population growth in the country and American Farmland Trust's recent report noting that North Carolina ranks second in the country for most potential farmland loss by 2040. For perspective, there are 8.3 million acres of farmland in the state today. This reported projected the loss of 1.1 million acres by 2040 based on current development with the potential to jump to 1.6 million acres if development increased.

- Ag exports will also remain another priority for the department. One point Blake Brown made was the need to diversify when it comes to export, meaning we need to also focus attention on developing trade with other countries such as Canada, Mexico and India.