

Commissioner's column

November is a month of reflection for many of us as we pause to acknowledge the many blessings we have and celebrate time with family.

It's also a time when I like to look back over the year and the work we have done as a department. Being able to be of service to farmers, agribusinesses and consumers is something I am grateful that we are able to do and it is rewarding to me personally.

It has been a busy year for the department, but we have accomplished some big tasks this year, too.

Chief among them have been distributing disaster relief funds across several sectors of agriculture, adding another phase of IMPEC grants to assist meat and seafood processors, working to protect the poultry industry from highly pathogenic avian influenza, discovering and treating for the highly invasive and destructive spotted lanternfly in the state and the elm zigzag sawfly, increasing delivery of USDA commodities to food banks and feeding facilities, and working to protect consumers from price scanner errors.

Those do not include many of our regular responsibilities involving food and drug protection, pesticide and structural pest control oversight, agronomic testing and soil recommendations, and protection of animal agriculture.

We have also held a successful Got to Be NC Festival, the Mountain State Fair and we are in the midst of the N.C. State Fair as I write this.

I cannot say enough about the staff behind these efforts. They have been tasked with doing more to ensure we provide good service to residents of this state, especially following the pandemic.

We have been fortunate as a state to have federal monies earmarked to help increase the protein processing capacity in the state. We have moved quickly to allow meat and seafood processors be able to take advantage of this money. The increased capacity will be especially beneficial in the event of another situation like COVID. Building local resiliency is a good thing and local production served consumers well when meat supplies were limited due to the pandemic.

Every week throughout the year, we have highlighted N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services employees as part of the WeAreAgriculture social media series. Through that series, we have introduced you to employees across the department; employees that are making a difference in the lives of North Carolinians through their work. We have also been able to showcase the scope of work the department is involved in and the types of jobs that are involved with agriculture.

You will find one of these stories on Mikaela Lee, a fuel quality inspector, on page 8. With the rising costs of many products, the work of our consumer protection divisions like the Standards Division is important to ensure people get what they pay for and that tools used in trade, such as scales and price scanners, are accurate.

I am proud of the work of the department and the service we provide. In this month of gratitude, I want to thank all the employees of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.