

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently released its latest Census of Agriculture. These are conducted every five years and are designed to give a snapshot of agriculture nationally and by state.

I don't know that there were any surprises in the Census, but a few items did catch my attention.

I think we can definitely see some consolidation with farms. Based on the farmers who responded, the actual number of farms dropped by 7.6 percent, but the land in farms and average farm size increased by 8.3 percent.

What is most interesting about that to me, is that even though farms increased in size, we are still a state made up primarily of small farms.

Of the state's 46,418 farms, 42,900 of them are less than 500 acres in size. The largest percentage of those, or 37,560 farms, are 179 acres or less in size.

Farms for purposes of the Census are considered "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold."

Our Top 10 counties by farms are: Randolph with 1,368 farms, Chatham with 1,116, Buncombe with 1,073, Surry with 1,064, Johnston at 1,063, Iredell at 1,055, Cleveland with 1,005, Davidson at 1,003, Sampson with 960, and Union at 957.

The Top 10 lineup changes when it comes to the value of agricultural production, and to some degree it speaks to the significance of the livestock industry in the state.

We saw an uptick in the percentage of income derived from livestock with these latest Census numbers. Livestock production now accounts for 71 percent of farm cash receipts compared to 66 percent in 2012. That puts crop production at 29 percent of farm cash receipts.

Our Top 10 counties in terms of value of agricultural production are: Duplin at \$1.26 billion, Sampson at \$1.24 billion, Wayne at \$592 million, Union at \$482 million, Bladen at \$446 million, Robeson at \$386 million, Wilkes at \$335 million, Lenoir at \$311 million, Anson at \$304 million and Randolph at \$282 million.

I wanted to share a few other interesting items I saw in the Census.

- The average age of North Carolina farmers is 58, up from 57.5.

- 8.4 percent of North Carolina farmers are considered young producers at 35 years old or less. Their average age is 29 years old. I hope to see this trend continue to grow, because we need young people in agriculture.
- 27 percent of N.C. farmers are considered new and beginning producers (denoting those who have farmed 10 years or less on any farm). Their average age is 47.5 years old.
- And 12 percent of N.C. farmers have served in the military.
- 33 percent of N.C. farmers are female. Their average age is 57.

I want to thank everyone who participated in the Census of Agriculture. It is important to have this kind of information, because it is useful in developing ag policy, helping determine trends and helping farmers make informed production decisions.