

Dr. Mike Walden at N.C. State University recently released his annual update on the impact of agriculture in North Carolina and I am pleased we saw an increase in both economic impact and jobs supported by agriculture and agribusiness from the previous year.

The latest numbers put the economic impact at \$91.8 billion, which is up from the \$87 billion we most recently used.

That figure breaks down into \$77.8 billion in agriculture and food industries, \$4.8 billion in natural fiber industries and \$9.2 billion in forestry industries.

The industry accounts for 728,000 jobs or 17 percent of the workforce, up from 686,000 jobs. These job numbers really speaks volumes about the contributions of agriculture and agribusiness to our state.

We want to see the job numbers increase even more and are actively working to recruit and develop more food manufacturing to the state.

It is important to recognize how many people are employed through agriculture. In rural areas in particular, food processing and manufacturing jobs are important to whole communities. The trickle-down effect of those jobs help sustain other businesses in town and add to the tax base for local governments.

I am proud the economic contributions of agriculture continue to grow, but realistically, I know we are likely going to see very different numbers next year when the cash receipts from agriculture are determined.

In those numbers, we will see the massive losses from Hurricanes Florence and Michael in 2018.

We'll just have to wait and see what those numbers looks like, and hope for the best.

As an update about disaster assistance, we are continuing to work on distributing disaster assistance checks from Hurricanes Florence and Michael, and are making good progress. To date, we have distributed over \$151 million in assistance. I have heard from many farmers who have already received payments and who were grateful for this help. I am reminded whenever I hear from folks that many not only lost their crops, but their homes, too. We still have a long way to go in recovery and rebuilding, particularly when it comes to homes and other flooded structures, but I know we are going to get through this.

