

## Commissioner's column

Farmer stress is something that has been on my mind a lot lately. Particularly as I have been meeting with farmers and farm groups across the state.

In talking with farmers, I see the worry on their faces and feel the weight they are shouldering as they look critically at their farming operations in light of last year's storms and floods, low commodity prices, trade concerns, drought conditions in some areas this year, and nuisance lawsuits.

Without question, this has been one of the most trying periods for agriculture in recent memory, with many conditions far beyond the control of farmers. It makes a challenging job even more challenging. And from a business perspective, these challenges have pushed some farms to their limits.

I've experienced some of these same situations myself and found myself wondering how we were going to make it. And that is a difficult place to be.

Being a farmer is not like a regular job. You don't have set hours, your office is your land or home, and the connection you have to the farm and land is often deeply personal, particularly if it is family land. It's a job that doesn't allow much separation between your work and private life.

When I have faced stressful times, I turn to my family, my church and my community. Farming has always been a sun-up-to-sun-down operation, but now farmers often spend their nights online doing paperwork and handling other financial business. Those long hours can be isolating, so it is important to try to take time during stressful times to reconnect with family and friends.

It is important to reach out and talk to people, and not keep that stress to yourself. The farming community is going through difficult times, there is no shame in asking for help.

Also, if you see a farmer you think may be going through a hard time, reach out to them.

The farming community typically rallies around one another in good times and bad. That is something I have always been proud to see in action. What has been more challenging lately is that we have whole communities that have experienced large agricultural losses. Still, as we work to recover, it is important we reach out to one another and check in with our neighbors.

The N.C. Agromedicine Institute offers a list of resources for farmers experiencing farm stress. You can find that list at

<http://www.ncagromedicine.org/pdf/Resource%20Guide%2071519.pdf>

In addition, the Institute is working with cooperative extension office and farmers to develop local resources and peer-to-peer farm mentors who are there to listen.

I believe we will get through these challenges and there will be brighter days ahead. At the end of the day, I know that farmers produce something that is essential to us all – food and fiber.