

As you can see by the lead story this month, poultry owners and poultry farmers need to remain extra diligent with their biosecurity efforts in light of the fact highly pathogenic avian influenza remains in the wild bird population in our state.

On Oct. 20 we announced the discovery of HPAI in a backyard flock in Wake County – the first time it has been found in a backyard in North Carolina. Nearly a month later and as we were finalizing the December Ag Review, veterinary testing confirmed a second case in a backyard flock in Union County.

I urge every poultry owner to remain diligent in protecting their birds, including keeping them up where they will be away from potential contact with wild birds.

Notify your veterinarian or the state veterinarian office if you have sick or dying poultry. It is imperative we stay on top of this highly spreadable disease. There are signs and symptoms to watch for in the article above, along with suggestions on ways to protect your birds. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to call our Veterinary Division at 919-707-3250, or the N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System at 919-733-3986.

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I would also like to draw your attention to page 2 of the newspaper to the story about the Tobacco Trust Fund Christmas Tree Seed Center of Excellence. This is an exciting story and one you will be hearing more about going forward.

Thanks to a \$383,685 grant from the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, we will be able to build a facility that will be a seed bank for the best Fraser fir genetics and we will be able to continue research in partnership with N.C. State University. This is great news for Christmas tree farmers in our state, solidifying our ranking as the second largest producer of Christmas trees in the country.

We will keep you posted as we move forward with construction of this Center.

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Finally, I would like to thank our farmers, agribusiness owners and everyone involved in agriculture for what you do to ensure we have a safe and abundant food supply every day. It has been a very fast year. It has been a challenging year on many fronts, but we have pushed forward as the agriculture community always does – with a spirit of purpose and determined resolve.

The agricultural community is the foundation of this state and I am grateful to everyone who contributes to make it the success that it is. I hope we continue to grow to meet the growing global need for food and I hope we continue to share the important role that agriculture plays in everyone's lives every day with those who are not involved in farming.

As this year comes to a close, I wish a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from my family to yours.