

I kept hearing reports that 2020 was shaping up to be a good growing year. But as a farmer, I know things can change quickly and you cannot really count on a crop, until it is harvested.

Recently I was looking at the year-end yield report from the USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service which confirmed that growers did indeed have a very good year. That crop report noted record yields for corn and peanuts, with soybeans tied with the previous yield record set in 2017.

Cotton yields were also strong at just under 1,000 pounds per acre and we saw a 21,000-acre increase in tobacco acreage and 41 percent increase in flue-cured tobacco production from the previous year.

It was good to see such strong yields because that meant growers generally had good growing conditions, but it was even better knowing that growers were also benefitting from better commodity prices.

A single year won't make up for the challenges North Carolina farmers have faced over the past few years, including low commodity prices, devastating storms and flooding, and trade battles. I hope 2021's good growing conditions continue. With significantly rising input costs right now, farmers need strong yields and strong prices.

Here's a deeper look at some of the other yield numbers reported, starting with the record yielding crops:

We harvested 905,000 acres of corn, up 35,000 acres from 2020. Yield was 149 bushels an acre, up 36 bushels. Production was 134.8 million bushels, up 27 percent.

Peanut growers harvested 114,000 acres this year, up 9,000 acres. Yields came in at 4,350 pounds per acre, up 450 pounds. Production was 496 million pounds, up 21 percent.

Farmers grew 1.64 million acres of soybeans, up 70,000 acres from 2020. The yield averaged 40 bushels an acre, producing 66 million bushels – an increase of 10 percent.

Cotton and tobacco harvested acreage was up this year. Cotton acres were up 35,000 acres and tobacco acreage was up by 21,000 acres. Yield for cotton averaged 99 pounds per acre, up 240 pounds. Production was 760,000 bales, up 46 percent.

Tobacco yield was 2,100 pounds per acre, an increase of 300 pounds per acres. Growers produced 252 million pounds, which was up 41 percent over 2020.

Tobacco numbers certainly reflect the return of trade with China, which was good news for tobacco growers.

At the recent Commodities Conference, commodity associations recognized their high-yield winners. You can find a list of winners on page XX.

Finally, I mentioned the skyrocketing costs of farming inputs that growers are seeing. You can hear more about what is happening with the fertilizer market along with an economic outlook for

agriculture at the Annual Ag Development Forum Feb. 3 at the Southern Farm Show at the fairgrounds in Raleigh. I hope to see you there.