Dr. Mike Walden, professor emeritus and a retired William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor and Extension Economist at North Carolina State University, recently released his latest agriculture and agribusiness economic impact numbers. While they were not what I had hoped for, they were certainly not unexpected.

The figures are factored on 2020's agriculture numbers, which reflected the impact of the pandemic.

I'll rip the Band-aid off and tell you we did not top $100 billion in economic impact, but agriculture and agribusiness continued to account for one-sixth of the state's income and employment. And agriculture and agribusiness remain North Carolina's No. 1 industry.

Dr. Walden's figures pointed to over $92.9 billion in economic impact. That is down around $3 billion from the previous year.

Agriculture and agribusinesses continued to work and work hard throughout the pandemic, but there were challenges along the way, and those challenges were reflected in the overall impact numbers.

To be a farmer, you've got to be pretty optimistic going into every season. Throughout the season, you work to manage the risks – not enough rain, too much rain, late frosts, plant pests, crop nutrient needs and many others.

When I planted a crop, I always went into the season thinking it was going to be a good one. I had hoped this would be the year we saw the economic impact top $100 billion, but it is not.

Regardless, I am undeterred in my belief that we will reach the $100 billion mark shortly.

Employment numbers in agriculture and agribusiness remained steady at 668,000 of the state's 4.3 million employees and agriculture's percentage of the state's income remained about the same.

I am confident we are going to hit this milestone and that will be a good day, but it's important to remember that it is just a number. In fact, these numbers reflect years that are already completed.

It's the farms and farmers, it's the long days of hard work and determination behind those numbers that are what really matter.

And it is the food and fiber that our farmers produce that is most important.

I am proud of the diversity of North Carolina agriculture and I am proud of the resiliency of our farmers. Our agriculture industry makes us a better state for it.

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I want to thank everyone who came out to the Got to Be NC Festival after a two-year break due to COVID-19. Attendance was good despite the very warm weather, North Carolina food and beverage vendors showcased and sold their products and we recognized several of Junior Livestock scholarship recipiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiireocoi