

Commissioner's column

As you look through the pages of this paper, I hope you will pay especially close attention to several assistance programs we are overseeing here in the department.

We have information on Phase II of the Swine and Dairy program on page 1, there is Tropical Storm Fred relief for 11 Western NC counties included on page 2 and the Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program on page 3. Together these three programs total \$118 million in assistance.

If you qualify or think you qualify for any of these programs, I encourage you to apply as quickly as possible. If you are missing information, we will have time to review your application and request the additional information.

With federal COVID monies and strong legislative support in the budget, we have a lot on our plate at the department – in fact we are overseeing close to a half a billion dollars between departmental funding (\$225 million) and grants and disaster assistance programs (\$227.6 million).

We are working hard to get money out to farmers and agribusinesses as quickly as possible. In addition to the projects noted above, we also have several programs ongoing including the following two:

- Various Block Grants to support farmers impacted by storms in 2018 and 2019 - \$79.6 million
- Improving Meat Production, Efficiency and Capacity, or IMPEC, grants - \$17 million. These grants have helped 69 different companies across the state. We are already seeing a positive impact from these grants in improving our facilities and expanding production capacity.

The Tropical Storm Fred Relief program for Western NC opened February 11 and we are already seeing tremendous interest from farmers and producers in the covered counties. If you think you are eligible, I encourage you to get your application in before the April 15 deadline.

Collectively, these efforts will keep us on our toes. There is lots of information going out and online about these programs. Be sure to check out our website at www.ncagr.gov for the latest information, deadlines and links to these programs, and, of course, keep reading your Ag Review newspaper.

Looking ahead, please be sure to mark your calendars for May 20-22 for the Got to Be NC Festival at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. This will mark the return of this popular event after a two-year break due to COVID.

We are looking forward to welcoming people back to the festival, our Got to Be NC members are looking forward to showcasing their products at the Homegrown Marketplace

during the event and we are ready to celebrate North Carolina agriculture and agribusinesses in a big way. I hope you will join us for this fun, family event.