

## Column

If you look above and on page 8 of the newspaper, you will see photos from our first public viewing of the Agricultural Sciences Center. We are nearing completion of the facility, with equipment and furniture being moved into place.

The work remains on schedule and I anticipate the contractor will be turning the building over to us by the end of the year.

This building is a massive undertaking. In fact, it is the largest building project ever undertaken by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. When complete, it will be five-acres of lab space and training and office space under one roof.

There is no other building like it in North Carolina and we believe this building will likely become a national model for labs across the country.

The new facility will house labs, offices and training space for four of our divisions: Veterinary, Food and Drug Protection, Standards, and Structural Pest Control and Pesticides.

But it represents much more than the divisions that will be housed here, it is an investment in our state's No. 1 industry – agriculture, which contributes \$92.7 billion to the state's economy. The services provided by every employee who will work in this building will directly support farmers and consumers.

For example, the Structural Pest Control and Pesticides Division issues more than 42,000 pesticides and structural pest control licenses and certifications, including more than 12,552 certified private applicators.

The Division also licenses 6,900 sleep products manufacturers and sanitizers and registers more than 16,000 pesticide products annually.

The Food and Drug Protection Division is the main food safety and defense testing lab in the state. It receives nearly 20,000 samples each year.

These include environmental swabs, inspection and investigation samples, and surveillance samples.

From these samples, our staff performs about 100,000 determinations. These samples are tested for things that could lead to issues with human and animal food safety, such as harmful bacteria, pesticide residues, mycotoxins, and rodent or insect contamination. The laboratory also tests antifreeze to verify label claims.

The lab covers more types of testing (food, feed, fertilizer and pesticides) than other state agriculture laboratories.

Our Veterinary lab is our central full-service vet lab. It performs regulatory testing of reportable diseases for North Carolina's animal industry, tests to help diagnose animal diseases, and performs necropsies in an effort to determine why a farm animal or pet died.

It is our first line of defense for recognizing and identifying high consequence animal diseases that can harm animals and cause an economic disaster, such as high-path avian influenza or African Swine Fever.

The lab also is important in protecting us from acts of bioterrorism. The lab performs more than 580,000 tests and over 3,000 necropsies annually.

Our Standards lab provides accurate and reliable calibration services in mass, volume, temperature and length to North Carolina people and businesses. It calibrates more than 23,000 weights used in industry or by scale service companies. It also serves almost 500 customers from the pharmaceutical, defense, manufacturing and other industries.

When we are talking about this, we're talking about calibrating weights as light as milligrams and as heavy as 6,000 pounds. These are calibrations that industries rely on in their work and in their products.

Our Motor Fuels lab monitors fuel quality. This lab tests about 21,000 samples of gasoline, diesel, kerosene and motor oil a year and makes more than 75,000 determinations from those tests.

I hope when you read through this list, you see how the department of agriculture touches your life every day. Each of these functions is important to our residents. And putting them in a central facility will enable us to be more effective and efficient.

We wouldn't be here today without a whole lot of support, including the voters of North Carolina who approved the Connect NC Bond in 2016. A lot has been accomplished in the four years since this bond passed. We hope to hold a larger event at the completion of the Agricultural Sciences Center. In the meantime, you can find a video of the tour at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ4BJXHn6JY&t=6s>.