

COVID-19 is challenging us in many ways and I am proud that our farming community is adapting and responding to these challenges. Throughout this pandemic, we have worked with many partners to try to come up with the best solutions possible to each and every challenge.

I believe partnerships can produce bigger results and we have certainly seen examples of that in work with our Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, through our Research Stations, and Soil and Water Conservation Division, just to name a few.

By partnering with the military, we have greatly expanded the resources available for farmland preservation and we have helped preserve farmland near military bases that help the military operations with their readiness training.

Our research station sites work in cooperation with researchers from N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University to develop new plant varieties, new production techniques and new technology that will help improve the bottom line for farmers.

I was recently at the A&T farm near Greensboro and met a small farmer who is growing moringa, an herbal plant that grows in Africa and India, because he learned about it through a research project at the university.

Likewise, our Soil and Water Conservation Division has worked with farmers to increase water resources on the farm through our AgWRAP program, helped fund high tunnels for minority and limited resource farmers and worked with local governments on conservation projects with cost-share funding.

The other day I received an unexpected and nice letter from Michael Regan, Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality, that drives home to me the broader value of partnerships.

Secretary Regan and I have worked together following Hurricanes Florence and Michael in 2018, even flying together over Eastern North Carolina surveying flood damage following the storm.

His letter started with, “On behalf of the Department of Environmental Quality and the State of North Carolina, I would like to thank you for your strong and dependable partnership with this agency. You have contributed to protecting the health and safety of all North Carolinians, and for that, we are proud and grateful.”

North Carolina farmers are committed to doing their best to provide a safe and abundant food supply and to protecting the natural resources they depend on for their livelihood. They are proud of their farming operations and proud of the farming legacy of their families.

At the department, we understand agriculture and agribusinesses better than any other state agency. By sharing our knowledge and working in partnership, I believe we will end up with better outcomes for agriculture and for the residents of this state.

Throughout the pandemic, we have kept our focus squarely on farmers, consumers and agriculture, and we will continue to do that as we move forward.

You can read more from Secretary Regan's letter on page 4 if you are interested.

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I also wanted to mention that we should be celebrating agriculture at the State Fair this month and it is odd not hosting this event of the Mountain State Fair. I intend of the 2021 Mountain State Fair and N.C. State Fair to be the