

Last month, we opened the N.C. Mountain State Fair in Fletcher after a year's pause due to COVID-19.

It felt good to return to the opening weekend routine – a ribbon-cutting ceremony, the gates opening to fairgoers, the swirling of rides, a Livestock Hall of Fame induction, the clogging competition and fair food. The very best part was seeing people enjoy themselves.

Our agricultural fairs are a celebration of agriculture, of accomplishment and of community. I believe events like community fairs strengthen our bonds because when we gather in a spirit of celebration and fun, we are able to see one another on a similar level. Our differences are less obvious, and our similarities are joyfully apparent.

Our attendance numbers for the Mountain State Fair were down from our average, but numbers are not always the best measure of success. Just holding the Mountain State Fair this year and preparing to open the N.C. State Fair on Oct. 14 is an accomplishment and a success.

The staff of both of our fairs and the department have worked hard to put on events to remember. We knew these fairs might not be for everyone this year, but we also know these events hold special memories for multi-generations of fairgoers who look forward to the fairs every year. As a community, we logically know we cannot shut down everything in our lives. We have to figure out how we can coexist in a world with COVID, and we have been seeing residents do that every day in their personal lives.

At the end of the day, whether to attend an event like a fair is a personal decision and one I deeply respect.

I believe things are going to get better. As of print time (9/22), state public health officials have reported a plateau in cases, with the number of new cases dropping for the second week in a row. I am hopeful we will see those numbers continue to go down in the weeks ahead.

Additionally, I hope that next year at this time, we won't be talking about COVID or the Delta variant and that it will be something we will have put behind us.

I want to continue to encourage people to get vaccinated. It is the best bet we have for getting back to normal. The percentage of North Carolinians vaccinated goes up a little bit every month, but we still need more people to get the shot. Do your part and get the shot.