

Commissioner's column

Historically, the N.C. State Fair began as a way for farmers to learn about new production techniques, best practices and new technology to help them increase yields. Fast forward 150-plus years and the Fair's educational mission remains rooted in agriculture BUT focused on educating consumers about agriculture and where their food comes from and what it takes to produce it.

Our state continues to attract new residents every day that are not familiar with agricultural practices or farming. Likewise, we have many residents who are two or three or more generations removed from the farm.

Much of our state remains rural, although we continue to see significant swaths of farm and forest lands be converted to residential and commercial development use around our larger cities.

As more people come to our state, these pressures on farm and forest land only increase.

But growth also offers opportunity for new consumers of local foods, and that's why having events like the State Fair, the Mountain State Fair and county and regional fairs as so important.

These events are where people see livestock, horticultural crops, farm equipment, educational exhibits and local food products. As you walk around the State Fair Oct. 13-23, I hope you will pay attention to all the places where agriculture is on display.

Here's where you will see agriculture and agribusiness at the fair:

- Livestock shows and exhibits put animal agriculture front and center for fairgoers, with competitions and displays of beef and dairy cattle, hogs, sheep, poultry, and meat and dairy goats every day. Animal agriculture accounts for around 60 percent of total farm cash receipts in North Carolina. Shows and displays take place in the Jim Graham Building, the Agri Supply Expo Center and the Poultry tent.
- N.C. Forest Service exhibits and educational programs are located in Heritage Circle near the new Gate 7 entrance. Visitors can learn more about the state's \$34.9 billion forest products industry and how the Forest Service supports and protects it.
- Sharing space with the Forest Service is the N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Association, N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Division's exhibits on North Carolina soil types and water conservation efforts to keep the soil viable and producing and protect our valuable water resources.
- Got to Be NC Pavilion in Dorton Arena will highlight a number of food manufacturers in the state who will offer their products for sale. Programmed cooking demonstrations will show how to use local products in delicious meals and snacks.
- Farm Family of the Day recognition presented by Tractor Supply Co. Eleven farm families will be recognized and celebrated during the State Fair through public address announcements and banners.
- In the North Lobby of Dorton Arena, you will find a display of decorated Christmas trees.
- In the South Lobby you will find North Carolina beer and wine being sampled.
- In Heritage Circle you can visit the Tobacco Barn to see how tobacco was traditionally flue-cured. At the Tobacco Pavilion, you will find hands of tobacco on display.
- At the Hunt Horse Complex, horse shows are held throughout the fair.

- In the Flower Show area, you can check out a brightly colored display of mums, of which North Carolina is a significant producer.
- The Field of Dreams exhibit shows a variety of crops growing to encourage youngsters to learn where food comes from.
- And you will find displays of antique farm equipment.
- Food! Every food item fairgoers enjoy at the fair has a direct connection to a farmer.