

I was part of a television interview recently with N.C. Farm Bureau President Larry Wooten and during the interview he said “I don’t like to wish my life away, but I will be ready for 2018 to be in the books. It’s just been a hard year for so many people.”

I couldn’t agree more.

As I was writing my December column last year, I would have never imagined the year ahead; the challenges or the catastrophe the year was to become. Our agriculture community is incredibly resilient. Time and time again, we have weathered hardships and setbacks only to return stronger and more determined.

I certainly don’t have a crystal ball, but I worry about farmers and the year ahead. I have heard from far too many people this year who don’t see a way forward to plant next year’s crop. I worry we will lose a generation of farmers that we can ill afford to lose, but I understand their situation.

Many of our growers have weathered two, three and even four financial “storms” in a row, and haven’t been able to build any cushion for recovery. Tropical storms, Hurricane Matthew, break-even years with low commodity prices, trade tariffs and then hurricanes Florence and Michael this year have exhausted their resources and left them wondering what’s next.

I continue to push our legislators to fund the agricultural disaster recovery program that is mentioned in the article at the top of page 1. If our state is willing to invest money to attract companies to this state, then I believe we should be willing to invest money to help stabilize our agricultural industry and the rural economies it supports through these unprecedented events.

I told members of the legislature that this is the most important issue I have worked on in my time as Agriculture Commissioner. In looking at the counties affected, 72 percent of our farm cash receipts or \$8.3 billion in cash receipts come from these counties. Our agricultural losses are estimated at \$1.1 billion from Hurricane Florence alone.

I hope that resonates with them. I hope they understand how much our growers have lost and what we as a state stand to lose, too. Whether they represent a rural district or an urban area, when our leading economic driver takes a hit, our economy takes a hit.

If you are a farmer in one of the 51 counties with a presidential or secretarial disaster declaration and you suffered losses, please fill out an application by the Dec. 10 deadline. If this program is funded, I know it will not come anywhere close to making you whole for your losses, but I hope it will be the gas that starts the agriculture engine again.

I know agriculture is a growth industry – our population continues to grow and a small percentage of people farm. I believe it is only a matter of time before we see a turnaround on prices and trade issues, but we need to get to that day soon.

The farmer in me cannot help but look to 2019 with hope and optimism. My prayer and wish for each of you is that we find the spirit of determination and strength to move forward, that

we continue to help one another rebuild from this devastating event, and that 2019 will be the year of recovery we all need.