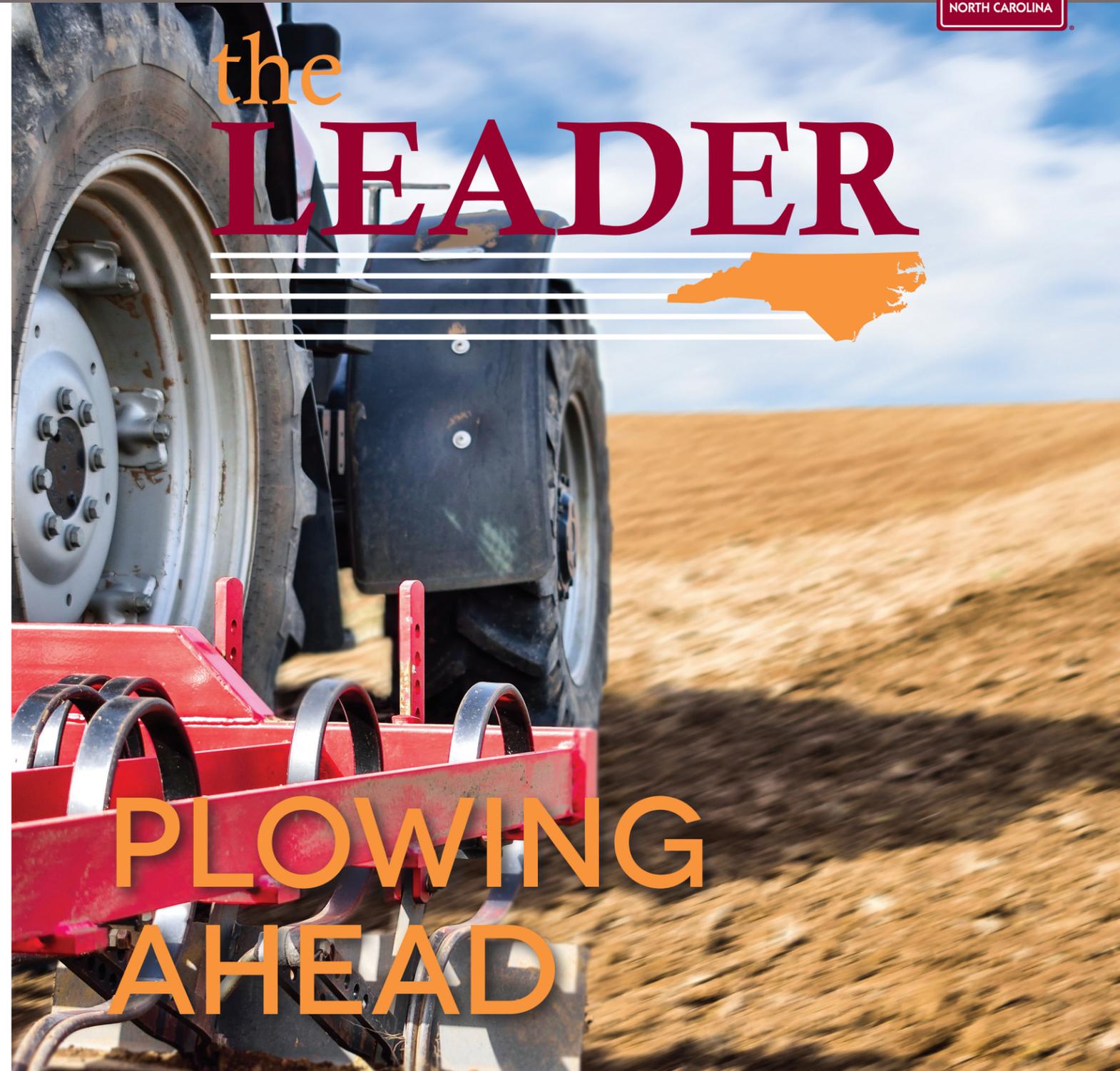




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PLOWING AHEAD

Staying committed to our grassroots policy development tradition

Speaking of this fall . . .



Election Day (Tuesday, November 3) is only a few months away, and the coronavirus pandemic has created a new set of challenges and concerns for voters this year. We want to remind you how important your vote is, and we want to share with you some important dates and information.

- You can find news and information on the NC State Board of Elections has a coronavirus resource page: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/coronavirus>
- **North Carolina voters have three options for voting: absentee by-mail, in person during the early voting period or on Election Day.**
- **Registration:** The last day to register to vote in your county of residence is Friday, October 9 by 5:00pm. Voter registration forms are available online or at your county Board of Elections; if you are a DMV customer with a NC driver's license or DMV-issued ID, you may now register

to vote or change certain parts of your registration online for free. Eligible individuals who miss the registration deadline may still register and vote at the same time during the one-stop early voting period, October 15-31.

- **Absentee Voting:** No special circumstance is needed to cast an absentee ballot by mail. You must submit a completed absentee request form no later than Tuesday, October 27 by 5:00pm. The Absentee Ballot Request Form can be found on the Board of Elections website (above) or by contacting your county Board of Elections.
- **"Early Voting":** One-stop voting allows registered voters to vote at any one-stop absentee voting site in the county. The one-stop early voting period is October 15-31. You can find one-stop voting locations at <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/ossite/> or by contacting your county Board of Elections.

PLOWING AHEAD

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NCFB Advisory Committees cover a broad range of issue areas and types of agriculture. This year, about 200 farmers from across the state participated in the committee meetings. Those committees are:

- Agritourism
- Aquaculture
- Beef Cattle
- Beekeeping
- Cotton
- Dairy
- Energy & Transportation
- Equine
- Farm Labor
- Field Crops
- Flue-cured Tobacco
- Forestry
- Fruits & Vegetables
- Law & Order
- NER (environment)
- Ornamental Horticulture
- Peanut
- Poultry
- Specialty Livestock
- Swine

For years, Policy Review Day has functioned as the unofficial kick-off to North Carolina Farm Bureau's annual policy development process. The event usually sees hundreds of farmers, elected officials, and other key leaders in agriculture gather at NCFB Headquarters in Raleigh for a day of in-person and in-depth discussions about the state of farming in North Carolina. It's a day for NCFB's farmer members to come together to talk about what's going on at their farm, and to start figuring out how to solve tomorrow's problems.

But it's 2020, and in keeping with the times this year's policy review had to be a little different. Instead of a single day gathering, the members of the 20 individual advisory committees participated in Zoom and conference calls throughout the month of July to review and discuss existing policy and to identify new areas of concern. Some of the issues discussed by the committees included:

- **Protecting the continued use of crop protection products when litigation decisions occur during the middle of a growing season.** In June, a federal court vacated the registration of certain Dicamba herbicide products after several anti-pesticide groups had filed suit. The court action was immediate and occurred during the season just as farmers had started to apply the product.
- **Changes in RMA's named storm policy.**
- **Permanent designation of "essential worker" for agriculture employees in the event of a health crisis.** Earlier this year, the COVID-19 pandemic had serious impacts on agriculture and left many farmers wondering whether their workers would be considered "essential" and allowed to perform their work.

- **Inclusion of ornamental horticulture and very small farms in USDA disaster relief programs.** COVID-19 related market disruptions left some farmers without a place to sell their crop.

While the committee meetings looked differently and the change in format impacted participation compared to previous years, the committees did a great job of continuing to carry out their important work of policy review.

The Policy Review "Event" was capped off on July 30th with a Zoom meeting for invited speakers, including American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, NC Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler, state Senator Brent Jackson, NC A&T College of Agriculture and Environmental Science Dean Mohamed Ahmedna, NC State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Dean Richard Linton, and NC State Extension Director Rich Bonanno.

The speakers covered a range of topics, but as you can imagine the impact of the coronavirus was ever-present. President Duvall updated attendees on the HEALS Act and several ag-related provisions making their way through Congress, while reminding everyone that the CFAP deadline is August 28th. Senator Jackson provided the encouraging news that despite facing a multibillion dollar revenue hit, the State is in pretty solid financial shape while the General Assembly sorts out how best to allocate federal relief funds. Dean Ahmedna shared the work NC A&T has been doing to help underserved communities and refocus research efforts in response to COVID-19, while NCSU CALS Dean Linton noted that researchers' focus on grant writing has helped the College secure the nation's fifth most research dollars.

Both deans also added that enrollment numbers for the fall are still strong. The Extension Service committed early on to keeping agents and offices working, and Director Bonanno emphasized that getting unbiased research out into the field has remained their top priority as they prepare to offer virtual field days. Commission Troxler explained his difficult decision to cancel the State Fair this year, saying "it boiled down to public safety – we want people to have a good time safely, and we just couldn't do that," but closed by saying he believes farmers have the policies in place to be successful and he is positive about the future of agriculture.

In the end, it doesn't really matter where Policy Review Day happens, or if it is in-person or virtual. What matters is that the grassroots spirit of Farm Bureau is carried out: farmers from all across North Carolina and representing all of agriculture taking a few hours out of their busy days to make their voices heard. The fact that so many took seriously their responsibility to maintain this commitment to grassroots policy development in the face of unprecedented circumstances is the reason Farm Bureau has earned the trust and respect of decision makers from little Washington to Washington, DC. AFBF President Duvall said "Since coming to DC I believe even more that engaging in the policy development process is the most important thing farmers can do to change policy in a positive way."

Thank you to everyone who gave their time to be a part of this process, even if only to listen. We urge you to continue to be involved in the policy development process this fall at your county annual meetings and at NCFB's Annual Convention in December.

