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the
LEADER



3 QUESTIONS *with*
SHAWN HARDING

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1 On a scale of 1-10, how challenging was your first year as President?

I'd say an 11. Of course I had hoped my first year as president would be a smooth one – not necessarily easy, just smooth – much like we all probably hoped our first year of farming would be smooth. What we got instead was like nothing any of us have ever experienced or could have expected. But as farmers, we know all too well that experience is what you get when you don't get what you want, and that adage rings especially true in 2020.

During a “normal” year, the NC Farm Bureau President has to lead through weather disasters, farm labor shortages, commodity price fluctuations, legal cases, legislative issues, and more. And these are all issues I knew, understood, and was expecting during my first year. But COVID-19 has brought forth a set of unforeseen challenges like nothing we have seen before. Farm Bureau, just like farmers, had to adapt. We had to pivot and embrace a work-from-home model to keep our employees safe while training our employees, agents, and county Farm Bureaus on virtual meetings and a new way of doing business. This has not been easy, but we have persevered.

2 What has been your single biggest challenge of 2020?

When I was elected President of this great organization, my cornerstone goal for 2020 was to visit as many county Farm Bureaus, farmers, and leaders as possible in a single year.

So I'd have to say my biggest challenge of 2020 is not being able to hit the road and meet with members as much as I would like – or at least not in the way or under the circumstances I imagined. Everyone knows that I'm a “people” person and I'm a firm believer that the best way to understand this position, to gain a better understanding of the entirety of the organization, and to plan for its future is to talk to our county Farm Bureaus and local leaders. As the year has progressed, I've been able to get on the road more often, but not as much as I would like.

That being said, we've all had to adjust our plans and expectations this year, and that goes for me as NC Farm Bureau President too. I knew to succeed at this job I would need to work hard and be willing to learn and adapt. Despite difficult and unforeseen circumstances, I've tried to remain focused on my goals and do whatever it takes to help this organization and its members.

3 What about positives from this year?

I believe that challenging times show our true character and provide opportunities for growth, and this has been one of the biggest positives to come out of 2020 in my eyes. The disruption of COVID-19 has forced the entire organization out of its comfort zone, including me. From a business standpoint, we've had the opportunity (sometimes out of necessity) to update and modernize in ways that I think will benefit Farm Bureau in the future. As individuals, I have been encouraged throughout the year to see tremendous personal and professional growth among our staff and county leaders, and the teamwork within this organization through difficult times is unmatched. Everyone really rolled up their sleeves and pitched in to get the job done. Organizationally, our systems and institutions have been tested but we have not wavered from our goals and mission. Farm Bureau has shown its strength and resilience, and I am confident that we will emerge from this pandemic and 2020 stronger than before. And while I never doubted your grit and determination, it has been heartening to see North Carolina's farmers stand tall in the face of adversity yet again.

Ultimately, I'm proud of how our people and our organization have responded to everything this year has thrown at us. But we're not out of the woods yet. I urge all of you to continue to be safe and be smart in both your personal and professional lives. Farm Bureau needs you, and North Carolina needs you.



FARM BUREAU
NORTH CAROLINA

85th ANNUAL Convention

2020 VIRTUAL PROGRAM
Each day from December 3rd through December 6th, we'll be releasing a video that reflects on the events of this year and captures the spirit of North Carolina Farm Bureau. We hope you will join us in celebrating the achievements of our members!

Thursday, December 3rd | 12:00pm
Patriotism

Friday, December 4th | 12:00pm
The Future of Agriculture

Saturday, December 5th | 12:00pm
Diversity of Agriculture

Sunday, December 6th | 12:00pm
Faith, Family, Farming

To watch, visit ncfb.org/convention

