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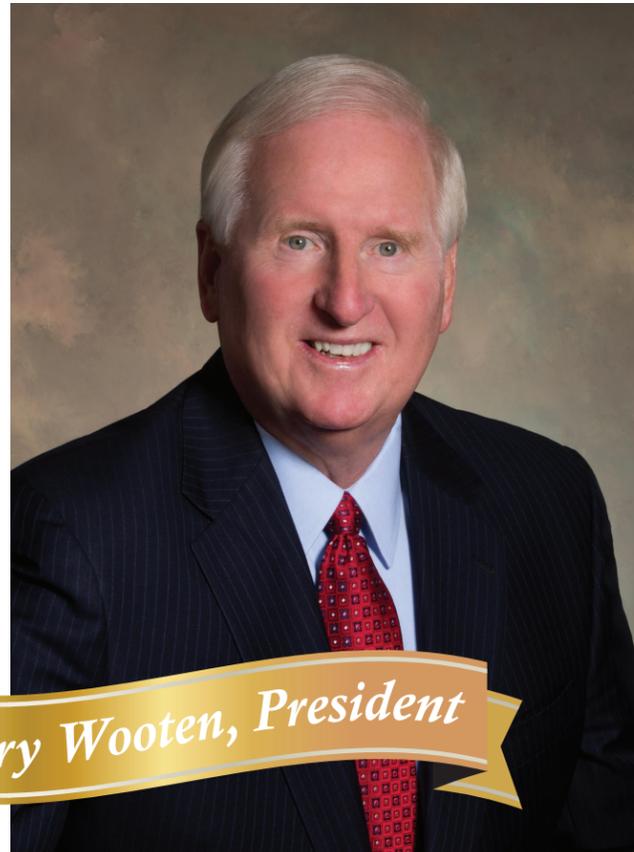
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THE LEADER



**ONE FARM BUREAU
ONE MISSION**

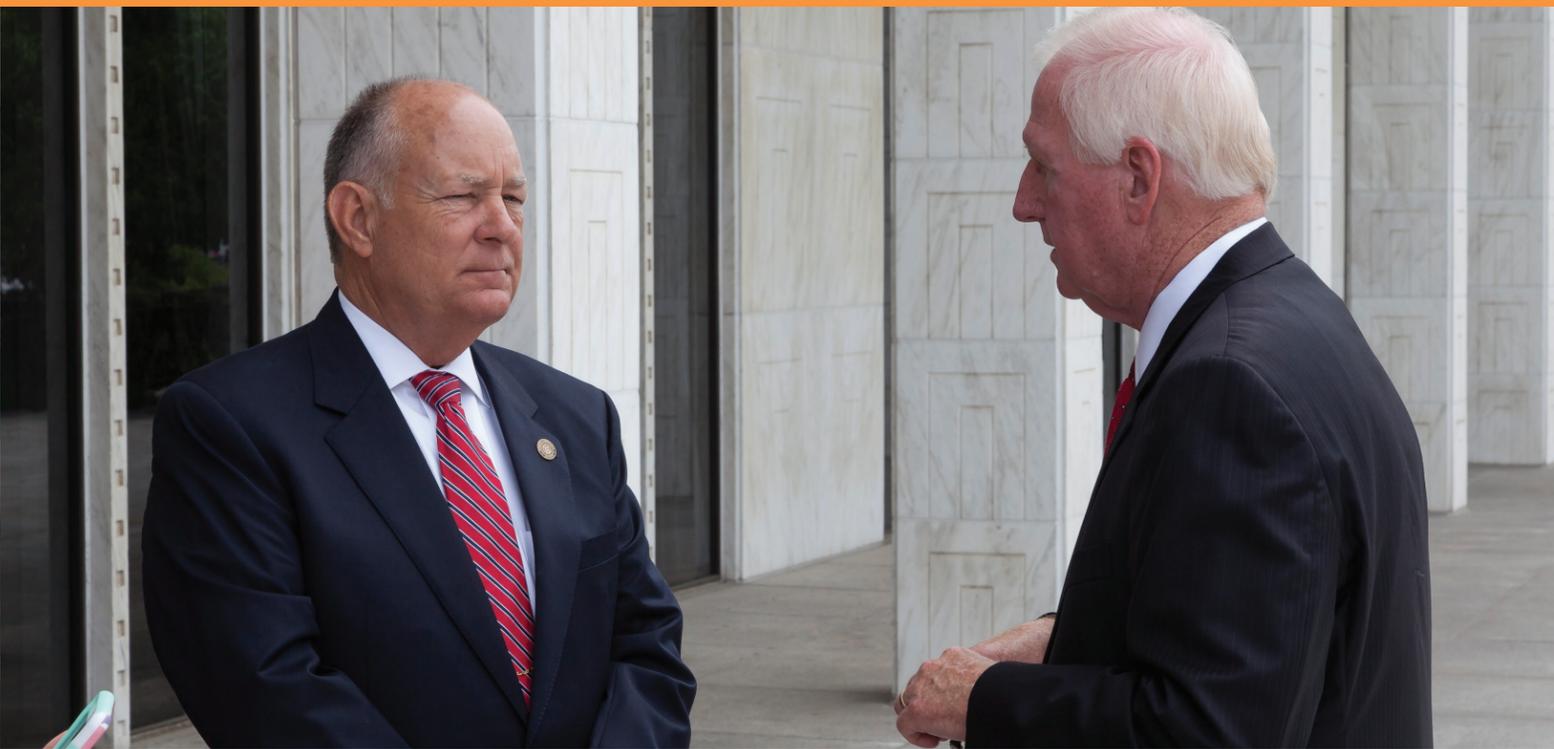
20
**YEARS of
SERVICE**



Larry Wooten, President

ONE FARM BUREAU

ONE MISSION



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Over 40 years ago, I joined this organization eager to learn about this “tool” that we know as Farm Bureau. I’ve always characterized Farm Bureau as a “tool” to address issues that affect the livelihoods of farmers and our rural communities. I learned quickly that our grassroots policy development process, our structure, and our governance sets us apart from any other agriculture organization.

As a young farmer raising a young family in Pender County, I deeply appreciated how this organization could speak on my behalf when I literally could not afford to leave that farm to speak for myself. I knew that Farm Bureau was there representing my best interest, and thus my journey began.

Over the years as a young farmer, a county Farm Bureau board member, a county president, and eventually state president I have believed, every day,

in the mission and purpose of our organization. Since 1999 when I was blessed to have been elected by you - our members - to serve as state president, it has been my purpose and passion every day to raise the visibility of Farm Bureau across North Carolina.

I have worked with all of you to be absolutely sure we had all the pieces in place to be the most respected and influential voice for our state’s farmers. We have worked together throughout the years to improve net farm income and the quality of life for North Carolinians.

It has been my goal that when the leaders of business and industry, education, manufacturing, tourism, and other sectors of our economy meet to discuss the future of our great state, that agriculture is seated at the table as an equal and working partner. North Carolina agriculture and rural communities need

Farm Bureau now as much as they did when we were chartered in 1936. Maybe even more so.

In looking back on my tenure as president, we have had legislative and public policy successes that we can all be proud of. I’m proud of the number of Farm Bills that we have successfully passed, the initiation of the tobacco buyout program, the North Carolina Farm Acts that we have passed, the preservation of the Present Use Value taxation program, and so much more. But there is still much work left to be done.

You heard me say last year that 2018 was the best of times and the worst of times. It was some of the worst of times for North Carolina agriculture. Many of our farmers are still in recovery mode from the successive years of weather disasters. Most all farmers have been faced with some difficult decisions due to a lack of profitability. From failure to make a crop, trade issues,



low commodity prices, escalating cost of production, nuisance lawsuits, and labor shortages, no one can deny that our farmers are faced with significant challenges.

Agriculture is also taking hits in our legal system. It's not enough anymore to just pass legislation that helps our farmers. We are facing some significant legal action where we have been asked to help defend the legislation that we asked to be enacted. This process is expensive and we've asked for your help through the NCFB Legal Foundation. In 2019, you have given almost \$180,000 to our Legal Foundation. 32 counties have given a total of \$69,750 in my honor, and I am genuinely touched and grateful for your contribution to this needed cause. At some point though we are going to ask ourselves, 'Do we have the appetite and the finances to continue engaging in prolonged litigation?' That answer is still to be determined.

We all know that tough times don't last, but tough people do. We have to move forward – and we will move forward. Our state and our nation depend upon a viable and vibrant agriculture industry. I firmly believe that demographics can change, the issues will change, our government can change but the Farm Bureau culture of rational, pragmatic, and fair thinking has not changed and will not change. Our statewide general farm organization is in a position to continue working on behalf of farmers for years to come.

That kind of reputation, strength, and longevity doesn't happen by accident. I thank our Board of Directors for their steady hand of leadership and adhering to the culture that has made us who we are as an organization in this great state and nation.

For the last 20 years I have delivered an annual report at this convention to the membership of our organization. As this is my last report as President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, I have been carefully reflecting this year not just on what we as an organization have accomplished in the last 12 months, and not so much even what we can look forward to

in 2020. I've been thinking about what makes our organization the most trusted voice for agriculture and what it will take for us to remain that trusted voice for generations to come.

First and foremost, I believe we must stay true to our mission. All of us know and recognize that we are living in dynamic, some would even say turbulent, times. There are more divisive issues being discussed now than there are issues that we can all agree upon.

Socially, politically, and economically, the fabric of our state and our country is changing before our eyes. Some of the most controversial topics of discussion today surround social issues: abortion, gender identity, the definition of marriage, immigration policy. These issues are important and we all have our own individual convictions about what we believe is right. But if we want to maintain the effectiveness and respect of our voice for farmers, we should continue to focus on issues impacting agriculture and rural North Carolina.

The success of our legislative program will depend on us remaining non-partisan in the midst of a highly polarized political arena. Our staff does not care if you are a "D" or a "R" – we work for the "Ag" party and that means working with both sides of the aisle. We will need that middle of the road strategy as we push our legislative and public policy agenda forward.

Secondly, we must maintain the structure of our organization by investing, cultivating, and maintaining strong county Farm Bureaus. The beauty and the strength of our organization lies in the volunteer leadership of county Farm Bureaus all across this state. I like the word relevant, and what keeps this organization relevant is how our policy and our direction come from the people who know agriculture and who live it every day.

All of you know that from a business standpoint, the structure of Farm Bureau is very unique. Over the years we have not been afraid to change our corporate structure to ensure that the North Carolina Farm



Bureau flag covers all of our affiliated corporations and all 100 counties. My mantra as president for our success has been ‘One Farm Bureau, One Mission.’

Through all of our entities working together as a team, Farm Bureau has remained financially strong and able to do the work we are charged with fulfilling. We have also experienced unprecedented membership growth. In 2020 at the American Farm Bureau Convention we will report 577,425 members. We are the second largest Farm Bureau in the nation. And I predict that the following year we will report close to 600,000 members. We would only be the second state in the history of American Farm Bureau to reach that number.

North Carolina Farm Bureau has been recognized twice, once in 2016 and again in 2019 as a Pinnacle Award winner by the American Farm Bureau. Achieving this kind of distinction would not be possible and will not happen again without all facets of the Farm Bureau team working together to promote the Farm Bureau brand. Whether it’s the Farm Bureau Federation, our insurance companies, Ag in the Classroom, our PAC – it should all represent excellence and service to our members.

We must also continue to invest in leadership training and development. Our core mission is legislative advocacy; I’ve always said a close second to that is leadership development. I am a proud product of the Young Farmers and Ranchers program, as are many of you. Your county Farm Bureaus and our state Board of Directors make a considerable investment each year in our Collegiate Young Farmer chapters, our Young Farmer and Ranchers program, the Women’s Program, the LEAD Program, the R. Flake Shaw Scholarship Program, and Institute for Future Agricultural Leaders.

We are not spending the money just to spend it. Investing in leadership development programs is also an investment into the future of our organization, and the future of leadership in North Carolina. Through

these programs we have been able to successfully grow our own leaders, and we must continue to do so. I believe in the strength and quality of our programs, and I believe in the next generation of leaders in this organization. The future of Farm Bureau is going to depend on our bench strength as much as who is playing on the field now.

We must continue to foster and protect the great working relationships and collaboration we enjoy with government agencies, commodity groups, and other non-profits. We have something special here in North Carolina. I’ve travelled across the country, and few states enjoy the close working relationship that our state’s commodity groups, land grant institutions, Department of Agriculture, Farm Bureau, and other ag interest groups share here. We are proud of our relationships and partnerships – but we must never be afraid to go alone if necessary to protect the best interests of our members.

Finally, we must retain a strong, competent, professional staff. You - our members - deserve the very best people working for you and representing you.

Our staff has grown stronger and stronger over the years. I would say today that we have the best Farm Bureau staff in the country. As issues become more complex and our organization continues to evolve, we will need to maintain and recruit staff members who are highly trained, knowledgeable, and committed to the Farm Bureau culture of integrity. One of the biggest joys of my job has been working with this group of professionals. I thank them for the professional, caring, and determined spirit they bring to work with them every day. They represent you and North Carolina Farm Bureau in an exceptional manner.

I’ve mentioned several things about the Farm Bureau culture: a culture of rational thought, pragmatic action, fairness, and integrity. But I would be remiss if I did not also mention Farm Bureau’s culture including love, friendship, and family.

I thank you for embracing my family over the years as president. And I thank my wife Laura for steadfastly being beside me every step of this journey. We are grateful for the love and the friendships we have formed over the years as a part of our Farm Bureau journey.

I believe that the best days of this organization are still ahead. The need is still there. Serving as your president has been a labor of love for me born out of a great love and passion for Farm Bureau and rural North Carolina. I will always be grateful for this opportunity, and I look forward to continuing to support Farm Bureau, our state’s great farmers, and rural communities in the years to come.

