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A LOOK BACK AT 2020



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Each year, the President gives an annual report to the membership at our convention. I certainly never thought or imagined I would give my first annual report as President on camera versus standing before you in the convention hall. We all have experienced moments this year when we faced situations that seemed unimaginable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 will not be a year soon forgotten.

I think of North Carolina Farm Bureau's founding members – to some degree desperate and hurting during the great depression – struggling with low commodity prices not unlike many of our farmers today.

“Rather than give up, they joined together and found strength in one another. That is the beauty and necessity of our organization, that regardless of what commodity you grow or what part of the state you live in, we are a united team working together to get through the best and worst, and strangest of times. Our organization was built upon strong faith, a spirit of family, and a passion for farming that will continue to move us forward.”

COVID-19 has seemingly separated us all. I had made it a personal goal to visit Farm Bureau leaders in all 100 counties within my first year as President. Before the pandemic, I was able to travel and meet many of you, but not nearly as many as I would have liked to. While I would much rather for us to be able to gather together regularly – even this week for our Annual Meeting – I am truly grateful for the technology that has helped us remain connected and safe during the virus. I am proud of the way that our county Farm Bureau leaders have adapted and continued the work of Farm Bureau. If there is one thing I know about farmers it is that we play the hand that we are dealt. Whether it's a flat tire or a hurricane coming, we figure out how to pivot and get the job done. Likewise, we have figured out how to conduct County Board meetings via conference call. Some of you were brave enough to do your own Zoom meetings, and we've all learned the importance of finding the mute button.

Engagement with our elected officials and key partners did not suffer despite us not being able to physically gather together. We held numerous virtual Town Hall meetings

and conference calls with Farm Bureau leaders and the White House, Congressional leadership, and governmental agencies. Many of our volunteers and staff were able to participate in some smaller gatherings with USDA Secretary Sonny Purdue throughout the state as he promoted the, “Farmers to Families Food Box Program.” I am particularly proud of our Farm Bureau women and their advocacy efforts this year. They were a part of a “Virtual fly-in” to Washington, D.C. to talk with key congressional staff involved with agriculture policy and gain additional advocacy training from American Farm Bureau. They also organized and participated in their own White House conference call briefing where they discussed the issue of rural broadband and expressed gratitude for the Administration's COVID-19 relief efforts for agriculture.

Our legislative and Public Policy efforts have been as active as ever. In fact, we may have doubled our work this year with the extenuating circumstances surrounding the pandemic on top of the typical regulatory and policy issues that we work on each year.

Our focus for most of 2020 has been on doing whatever is necessary to provide relief to our farmers in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. When early discussions about relief programs came about, Farm Bureau actively worked to ensure that farming operations were recognized and eligible to participate in the “Paycheck Protection Program” implemented by the U.S. Small Business Administration. We wanted key administrators to understand that farmers and agribusinesses faced the same challenges to meet payroll as any other sector of business when most of our country was shut down this spring.

We also engaged with legislators and federal agencies in executing the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). This program provided direct payments to farmers who suffered reduced commodity prices and market losses due to COVID-19. When USDA asked for comments regarding specialty crops that were not included under CFAP, we collaborated with the Commissioner and his team, Cooperative Extension, and other commodity associations to craft comments on behalf of North Carolina's key specialty crop producers resulting in these farmers getting some much needed assistance. We are thankful and proud for the great working relationship that exists between North Carolina Farm Bureau, the Department of Agriculture, our land grant universities, and our state's commodity organizations.

A second major focus of 2020, was preparing for this year's historic election. Our legislative and legal staff have spent time educating candidates on agricultural issues, and have also spent time giving you – our members – credible information on candidates' policy positions so that you could make an informed choice at the polls. Now that the election is over, we will all turn our sights to getting to know our newly elected officials, and connecting them with our volunteer leaders and Farm Bureau policy positions.

Another aspect of Farm Bureau that has been very active this year is our Legal Foundation. As you know, the last several years we have become involved in key litigation cases defending our farmers' right to farm, protecting farmers' property rights, and battling precedent-setting nuisance lawsuits against our state's hog farmers. It is no longer enough for us to work to have legislation written and passed that benefits our farms. Now we inevitably will have to defend those laws in court. Our legal team and their partners have done an outstanding job in representing the best interests of agriculture and North Carolina farmers. Thank you for your past and continued support of the Legal Foundation!

Our advocacy and legal work is never finished. I am proud of our grassroots leadership and all of our efforts in the public policy and legislative arenas. But the brightest spot for me in 2020 has been witnessing the heart and compassion that our volunteers have exhibited in their local communities. Leaders are those who see challenges and look for solutions. This year, many individuals and families have suffered tremendous loss and are fearful and hurting. In those moments, you stepped up, and looked for ways to help others. Our local and state women's committees made masks and care packages for essential workers. Our young farmers constructed community blessing boxes to provide for neighbors in need. Our Ag in the Classroom program shifted their focus to create and share virtual resources to assist overwhelmed teachers with positive activities and support. None of this comes as a surprise to me. These aren't just things that we do, but it is who we are as an organization. The best part of Farm Bureau is our people.

The twists and turns of 2020 are not quite over yet, and there is still more uncertainty ahead of us. I close with five things I AM CERTAIN of going into 2021....

- First, if there is anything that 2020 has shown us it is that food production and safety are essential. Our general

public has come to realize how blessed we are to have an abundant and safe food supply, and yet how fragile that system can be. Now more than ever, people are curious about where their food comes from, how it's produced, and who produces it. Farmers have a unique and great opportunity to start conversations about what we do.

- Secondly, North Carolina Farm Bureau has solid leadership in a Board of Directors that have the best interests of this organization at heart, and strive to conduct business with vision and integrity.
- Third, you have a dedicated staff that have worked extremely hard on your behalf and I have enjoyed getting to know them and work with them over the past year. I knew that we had a great staff, but this year has really allowed me to appreciate their individual talents.
- Fourth, none of us could survive through a pandemic or any other trial without the love and support of our closest family and friends. I would be remiss if I did not sincerely thank my family, especially my wife Tracey, for being by my side through this journey this year.
- And finally, I am certain and confident in our ability as an organization and as farmers, the providers of our state and our nation, to adapt and overcome whatever may lie ahead. Handshakes may be fist bumps or elbow rubs for a while. You have to double check that you have a mask in your hand when you get out of the car. We may not be able to meet as a body of 1,000 but we can meet locally with 70 or 80 delegates.

I know we all hope to return soon to what we considered “normal” prior to the pandemic. I think when that day comes, we will have developed new skills that will serve us well in the future. But most importantly we will have a strong sense of gratitude for the bond of fellowship that we so often take for granted. Circumstances can and will change, but our foundation of faith, family, and farming sprinkled with some ingenuity, hope, and love will continue to guide us, no matter what the future holds.

Thank you for the work you will do in determining the direction of North Carolina Farm Bureau in 2021. I look forward to seeing you all again in person in the near future. Until then, I wish for you and yours a wonderful Christmas season and a blessed start to the new year.