

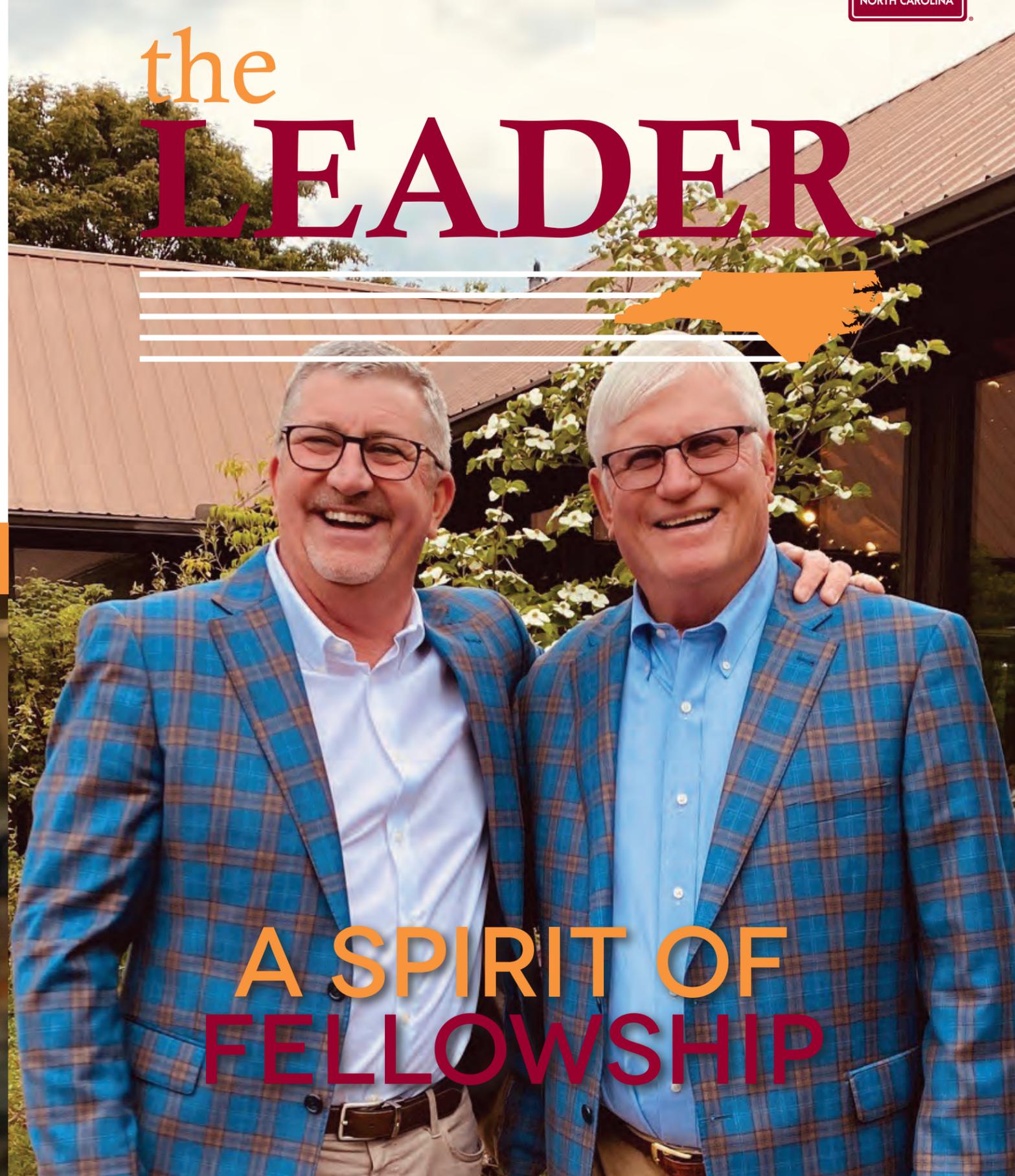


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# the **LEADER**

## A SPIRIT OF FELLOWSHIP



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Each year, I have the responsibility to give an annual report to the membership at our convention. Much has changed in the last 12 months. We did what we had to do for our annual meeting last year – together but apart – and it was successful. However, frankly I hope we never have to do that again! Our convention has always held a spirit of fellowship and reunion, but this year feels even more special as we are able to gather again to celebrate all of our accomplishments.

And there is much to celebrate. I've been carefully following county Farm Bureau activities over the past year and a half. Given the circumstances, any activity or contribution to your local communities, big or small, did not go unnoticed. It has been overwhelming to me how generous and innovative

many of you are. Every county found a way to be creative and continue the mission of Farm Bureau while keeping each other safe.

It is also evident to me that our county Farm Bureau leaders have several priorities in common. You prioritize service by honoring public servants, giving to those who are hurting or are less fortunate, and advocating for policy priorities that impact agriculture across the state. You prioritize the future – investing in local FFA chapters, giving scholarships to local students, and sharing our Ag in the Classroom program resources with local schools. You also prioritize farm safety. I am so proud to see the billboards from our 2020 safety campaign – See a Tractor Slow Down – still out there across our state.

I'm really excited at the number of counties who are participating in the 2021 campaign by purchasing bumper stickers and signs to spread even more awareness about tractor safety on our highways.

Reflecting back on all that we have been through – I am so grateful and proud of how our organization has remained true to itself even during the most uncertain of times.

Another accomplishment I am very proud of is our growth in membership. North Carolina Farm Bureau will report 598,267 members at the American Farm Bureau Convention in Atlanta, Georgia next January. Our state grew by about 8,000 members even with the Covid-19 pandemic. I attribute this to the excellence of our North Carolina Farm Bureau Mutual agency force, and your efforts locally to encourage and retain membership. Another factor is North Carolina's population growth. The 2020 census revealed that we are now home to 10.5 million people. With our family memberships, we touch 1.5 million North Carolinians, a tenth of our state. We anticipate we will cross over 600,000 members before 2023. No other state Farm Bureau has accomplished that besides Tennessee. This is a noteworthy and significant milestone in the history of North Carolina Farm Bureau.

We have accomplished much, but now it is time for us to look ahead. What does the future look like for North Carolina Farm Bureau? What lessons did we learn and how can we continue to grow from the experiences of the last two years?

One area of growth for our organization has been in utilizing technology to communicate with one another. I know that some of you may still feel more comfortable than others when it comes to Zoom or other platforms we have had to use in the past 20 months. Still, we collectively learned a lot even if our lessons were born out of necessity. Just as we continue to adopt technology on the farm, we will continue to make Farm Bureau more efficient through these tools.

Speaking of technology tools, I want to take the opportunity here to say great job and thank you to



everyone who took the time to participate in our action alert on the elimination of Stepped Up Basis. Action alerts are a great way to communicate with elected officials about issues affecting our farms. The proposed tax changes would have stopped the generational transfer of many family farms. All of the e-mail messages sent made a difference. The proposal was removed from the most recent legislation, and we will be diligent to make sure it does not return.

We will continue to look for ways to train our leaders on how to utilize technology to accomplish our advocacy and outreach goals. We have come this far, there isn't any going back. We do have to bear in mind that we are in the business of people and meaningful relationships are cultivated with handshakes and hugs, not over a screen. We can use these new tools to make ourselves more nimble, but they are not a replacement for the face-to-face meetings and events that we are known to hold.

When I think of the future of Farm Bureau, I think of our leadership development programs and how we grow our own leaders. Our Young Farmers & Ranchers Program, LEAD, our Women's Leadership Program, R. Flake Shaw Scholarship, and IFAL are important investments in the direction of our organization. I've asked some of our leaders this year, "What are you doing to better yourself?" And "Who are you looking to come behind you in the future?" Grooming and preparing prospective Farm Bureau leaders is CRUCIAL for us to remain relevant and true to our grassroots mission.

North Carolina Farm Bureau requires strong advocates given the issues that agriculture faces. Our public policy, legal, and legislative agenda has not slowed down despite disruptions related to the pandemic.

In 2021, we continued engaging with legislators and federal agencies in securing more Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) funds. These funds



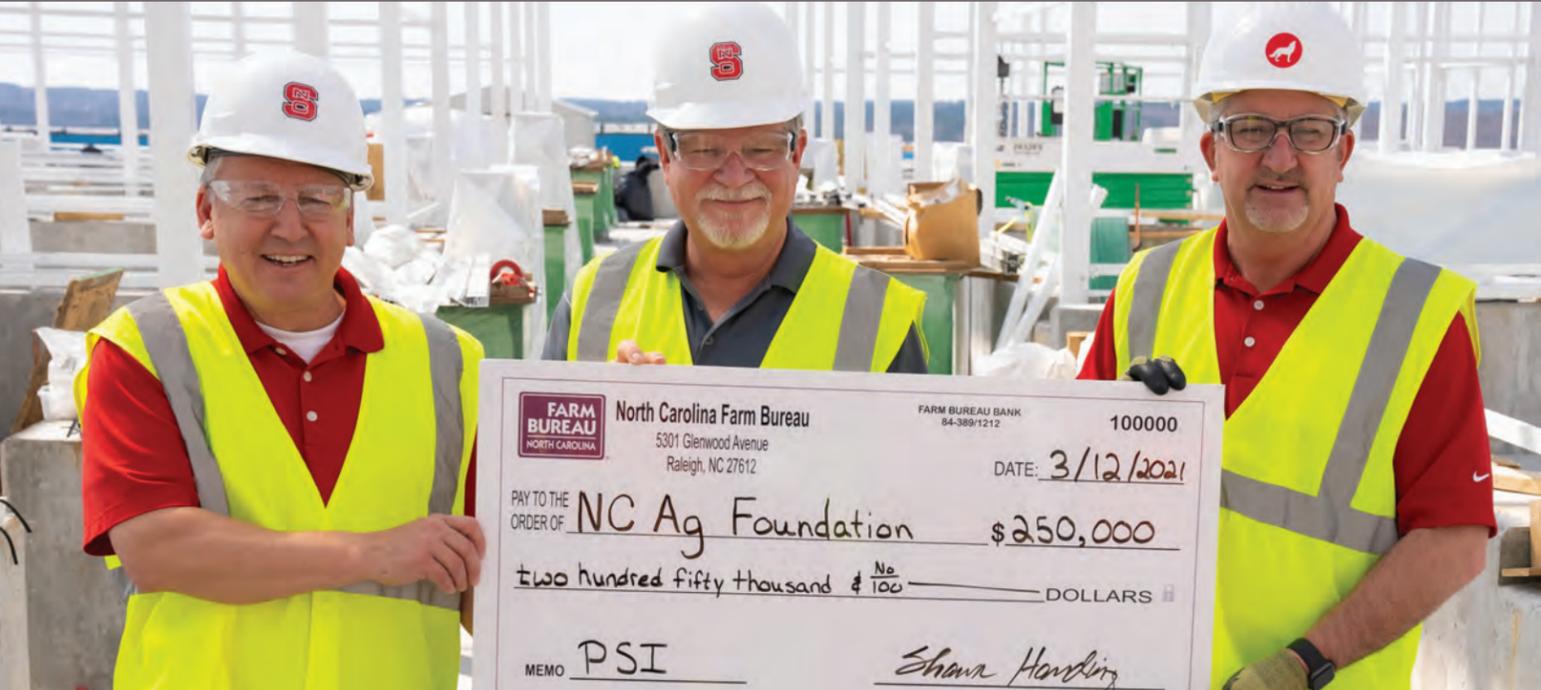
provided direct relief to farmers who suffered reduced commodity prices and market losses due to Covid-19. We also collaborated with the Commissioner, North Carolina Cattleman's Association, and others to secure funds for the North Carolina General Assembly to implement a grant program to relieve some of the strain placed on small meat processing facilities due to Covid-19. We are thankful and proud for the great working relationships that exists between North Carolina Farm Bureau, the Department of Agriculture, our land grant universities, and our state's commodity organizations. All of these efforts, along with your hard work, helped to keep our nation fed during this crisis.

We also continued another program to help communities recover after disastrous weather events. While our coast escaped a devastating storm this year, our beautiful mountain farms suffered when Tropical Storm Fred moved up from the gulf in August. We quickly activated our Farm Assistance Recovery Mission program established after Hurricane Florence to provide needed relief to farmers quickly. Thank you to all county Farm Bureaus who helped support this program.

Last year we were preparing for a historic election. This year our focus has been on building connections with the new administration. We are fortunate to have several friends – Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Michael Regan – who we have enjoyed a great working relationship with in the past. American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall told our Board of Directors in May that no matter which side of the aisle was in control, Farm Bureau always had a seat at the table. That is a credit to our volunteer leaders and our sound policy development process.

We have another great example this year of our grassroots process in action. Our state's farmers know better than anyone the importance of well-maintained roads and bridges, high-speed internet access, and flood protection. That is why we were proud to support a bipartisan effort to provide much needed funding for our state's infrastructure. Over five years ago, the issue of the impact of future interstate designations was raised in a county Farm Bureau meeting – Chowan County. Farmers enjoy several allowances related the size and weight of trucks when hauling ag products. Many of those allowances apply on state roads and highways but are





not allowed on interstates. When a state highway is converted to an interstate, which is happening all over North Carolina, farms lose those allowances that are critical to getting products to market.

Based on that initial discussion in Chowan County, the issue moved through our policy development process and a policy was adopted at the annual convention. For five years, staff and volunteers have been working with our congressional delegation to find a solution to this issue. We found allies in many other commodity organizations to help along the way. For one reason or another, we continued to run into roadblocks due to opposition from the railroads, safety organizations, or commercial vehicle enforcement groups.

Finally, this year, our language was inserted into the Senate version of the bipartisan infrastructure bill and our House delegation helped keep it in. After months of negotiation, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed both chambers of Congress and was signed into law by President Biden, bringing billions of dollars to North Carolina for infrastructure

improvements. I am pleased to announce that our farm size and weight allowances are now grandfathered in and will be allowed whenever an existing highway is converted into an interstate.

Our grassroots policy development process is what makes Farm Bureau so special. An issue rises from the county level, staff and volunteers build coalitions, leverage relationships with policy makers, and while it may take some time, YOUR issues get addressed.

In 2020 and 2021 we have continued our work on several key litigation cases defending our farmers' right to farm and protecting farmers' property rights. We are also intervening on a permits case that would create additional burdens on our hog and cattle 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!

As Covid restrictions have eased, I picked back up on my goal from 2020 to visit Farm Bureau leaders in all 100 counties. I haven't quite hit them all yet, but one thing that has struck me during my travels is how beautiful our state is – mountains to coast. Prior to becoming President, I thought I had visited most areas of the state, but this past year I've driven down backroads, wound through fields and through hills that few may get to see. North Carolina is changing. As our state's population continues to rapidly increase there are going to be unique opportunities and challenges for agriculture. The pandemic and current supply chain issues have seemingly opened a door between farmers and consumers to discuss the importance of food production, and even boost local economies by supporting local farmers. At the end of the day, our organization must continue to advocate for the best interests of ALL of our farmers and ranchers. We have the best job ever being the original stewards of this magnificent land.

I want to end on a note of gratitude. I am so grateful for the support of my wonderful family, especially my wife Tracey who stands with me on the best days and the not so best days.

I am grateful to our staff for the professionalism and talent they bring to work every single day. It is a pleasure working with them.

I'm grateful for the leadership and vision of our Board of Directors. I'm also thankful for the countless Farm Bureau leaders that came before us. There is a famous quote, "Not many of us here today are drinking water from wells that we dug. We are drinking from those that came before us."

Farm Bureau would not be the organization that it is today without the leaders who paved the way. There is strength and wisdom in our past, and we have much to look forward to in the coming days, months, and years. I am excited about the future of North Carolina Farm Bureau. Thank you for this opportunity.

