



P.O. Box 27766
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611
919.782.1705

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Raleigh, N.C.
Permit No. 825



“HOMECOMING”



the
LEADER

“HOMECOMING”

“HOMECOMING”



Our theme for this year’s Annual Convention was based around feeling like home. Like many of our members, I was excited to be back in Greensboro for this year’s convention, a familiar place that holds a lot of special memories. Up until last year, we had gathered there for over 20 years to do the business of Farm Bureau. It is also a place where decades worth of friendships have been celebrated. I hope those of you in attendance felt that spirit of homecoming throughout our time together.

And what a great time of year to come together! After a long year of planting, growing, harvesting, and caring for animals, it’s important to pause and take a breath.

The end of the year is also a great time to reflect. As you know, my annual report to the membership is just that, a reflection of all we have accomplished and the work we still have before us.

We are growing! Just this year, I attended five different Farm Bureau office ribbon cuttings. There aren’t too many companies that are building brick and mortar locations anymore. Having a presence in all 100 counties is rooted in the foundation of how Farm Bureau was formed. We are first and foremost LOCAL. North Carolina Farm Bureau began in 1936 with a mission to improve the livelihood and quality of life for farmers and rural people in our state. In 1953 our insurance company was born out of this mission – our rural citizens were in dire need of insurance coverage. Agriculture and rural life will always be at the core of our organization and company, but as things change in our state, ultimately our shared mission is to improve the quality of life for all citizens here in North Carolina whether it is through agriculture advocacy or protecting people’s property and lives.

Farm Bureau is a unique organization. In North Carolina, our Federation efforts depend on the insurance company through increasing membership. Our volunteer community efforts enhance the work of our insurance company. It is a great partnership!

For multiple years, North Carolina has led the country in membership growth. In fact, every year since I’ve been President, I’ve led the Pledge of Allegiance at American Farm Bureau Convention, an honor reserved for the state with the highest membership gain. In 2021, we reached a significant membership milestone. We are only the second Farm Bureau in the country to achieve over 600,000 members. We will report 621,771 member families at the American Farm Bureau Convention in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

I attribute this growth to the partnership I just mentioned between our local agency force and our volunteer leaders.

Those member families help drive our ability to get the work of our organization accomplished. The power of our collective voice on agriculture issues is only as powerful as our grassroots efforts. In the last few years, your county Farm Bureaus have had to be creative and flexible in executing your advocacy and community outreach efforts. At the start of this year, as pandemic restrictions eased, I challenged everyone to, “Get back to business.” And you all answered in a big way. At our County Presidents’ Conference in July, we held brainstorming sessions about county activities. Member appreciation days, candidate forums, legislative dinners, Farm City events, Ag in the Classroom activities – there was so much discussion about what you are doing at the local level to raise the visibility of Farm Bureau and to accomplish our mission.

Our leadership development programs continue to do what they were designed to do: surface and grow the next generation of Farm Bureau leaders. We held our second VISION Conference – a joint conference of our YF&R and Women’s programs – in January with approximately 500 people in attendance. We were able to hold two traditional IFAL programs at NC State University and North Carolina A&T State University. Our LEAD Team has been very visible and involved at the local and state level as they prepare for their final year coming up. I could not be more proud of the work of our volunteers and staff in these program areas.

County Farm Bureaus continue to surface legislative and public policy issues for us to work on through our grassroots policy development process. This year we had an issue come up on how building code exemptions are applied to agricultural buildings. Agricultural structures are typically exempt from some specific codes, but we ran in to a situation where local code enforcement officials across the state were not applying the exemptions consistently. In some instances, this added significant costs to construction of buildings. We worked through our channels and ultimately went to the General Assembly and clarified the law so that the exemption is clear no matter what county or inspector you work with.

In the process of working through this issue, we collaborated with the North Carolina Cotton Growers Association, North Carolina Peanut Growers Association and the North Carolina SweetPotato Association since this issue also impacted them. It’s another

example of the great working relationship we enjoy with all different commodity groups, the Department of Agriculture, and Extension to do what is best for farmers here in North Carolina.

In 2022, we continued to build relationships and educate legislators from across the state. I am proud of our involvement in hosting three different research station tours in the mountains, piedmont, and coastal plain for our elected officials. As you all know, we had midterm elections this year. We started building relationships with all the candidates before the election. And now that we know who will be representing us in Raleigh and Washington D.C., we will continue to strengthen those relationships. We don’t care if they are D’s or R’s, as Linda Andrews says, “We are all A’s for agriculture.”

We made a concerted effort in this election cycle to provide detailed information on judicial candidates. We say it every year: it is no longer enough for us to work to have legislation written and passed that benefit our farms. We have to defend those laws in court. The judges we elect are crucial to positive outcomes for us in these legal cases. 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!

Farmers are used to the unpredictability in the weather. We are not strangers to droughts, early frosts, and hurricanes here in North Carolina. Thankfully, we were blessed with a mostly productive and good crop year in 2022. But in the last year, and looking forward to next year, farmers are facing another kind of storm, an economic one. Inflation, rising interest rates, supply chain issues, and labor shortages are all issues we have become accustomed to hearing about.

There are no silver bullets or quick solutions to these issues. What we must do is be the voice. Continue to share within your communities and with our state and federal legislators how these issues impact farm profitability and how significant that profitability is to the future. Commodity and food prices are significantly higher compared to what they used to be. Our plight as farmers ripples throughout our entire society. There is nothing more important to the security of our state and nation than having a safe, affordable, and abundant food supply.

Our organization is growing, strong, and successful. But we simply cannot afford to be complacent. The world around us is shifting in ways no one could have imagined. To remain relevant and true to

our grassroots mission, now more than ever, we have to stretch beyond our comfort zones on how we best advocate and educate about issues affecting our farmers.

Volunteerism also looks much different now than it did when our organization was formed. People today want to be a part of a cause that they believe in. An organization with a strong mission will long outlast those who founded it. If you need proof, look no further: here we are 87 years later.

As we look to the future and we recruit what will be the next generation of Farm Bureau leaders, we need to be sure that everything from our board meetings to outreach activities center on how we best advocate for Farm Bureau and the agriculture community. We need to look at people and consider ideas that may be different from anything we have considered before. I challenge you to really stretch and think outside of the box as you plan and look ahead at the goals you want to achieve in 2023.

For the first time in three years, I have been free to travel and experience all that it means to be the Farm Bureau President. I have had a fantastic time meeting volunteer leaders, members, agents, and staff from all 100 counties. No matter what part of the state I’m in, it is evident that Farm Bureau people are the best people, and that the heart of our organization is at the local level.

I want to end on a note of gratitude. I am so grateful for the support of my wonderful family, especially my wife Tracey. You cannot do a job such as this without a “rock” of support at home. She is just that for me.

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 believe they are the best Farm Bureau staff in the nation, hands down!

Finally, 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 who humbly left this organization better than they found it. They are living legacies of the significance of our volunteers’ contributions to agriculture and North Carolina Farm Bureau.

I am excited about the future of North Carolina Farm Bureau. I thank you for this opportunity.

Shawn Harding, President

