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STATE POLITICS BEYOND THE STATEHOUSE



the **LEADER**

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County Farm Bureaus have helped to sponsor or provide the lunches, decorate, and set up at each tour. The meals have showcased agricultural commodities featured on each tour and provide an eating experience similar to “dinner on the grounds” after church. These dining experiences have been a huge hit with legislators. County leaders have been engaged in the planning process and attended the events to network with legislators and other key stakeholders during meals, advancing one-on-one relationships and positioning the County Farm Bureau as a key agricultural stakeholder.

“These personal interactions plant the seeds of trust, understanding, and cooperation that are necessary to achieve legislative and policy successes greater than any one organization could secure on their own,” said NCFB State Legislative Director Stacy Sereno. “That said, building relationships among all the stakeholder groups requires building trust over time. That’s why we’re planning to continue hosting these tours on an ongoing basis.”

EDUCATIONAL FIELD TRIPS

Like many states, North Carolina is seeing fewer state legislators that have roots in rural America or connections to the farm. To help create awareness of the importance of agricultural research among an increasingly urban state legislature, North Carolina Farm Bureau joined with the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, NC State University, NC A&T State University and commodity organizations to conduct focused learning experiences on state-operated agricultural research stations with the legislators.

“The goal is to engage legislators intellectually and emotionally to feel as if they are part of the agriculture community and to develop a new appreciation for the role they play in that community,” said NCFB Associate State Legislative Director Laura Kilian. “The goal is to engage legislators intellectually and emotionally to feel part of the agriculture community and to develop a new appreciation for the role they play in that community.”

Thus far there have been five tours to-date with up to 15 legislators in attendance at each event. Legislators have learned about sweetpotatoes, swine, dairy, egg production, Christmas trees, and other specialty crops grown in North Carolina and have done everything from candling eggs to operating an autonomous tractor, feeding baby calves, and more.

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The tours are eye opening and incredibly informational. Legislators from urban areas, like myself, learn more about where our food comes from and how important agriculture is to all of North Carolina. I cannot express my gratitude enough for how eye opening and important these legislative tours are for our legislators.”

—Representative Allison Dahle, Wake County

A NEW CROP OF CANDIDATES

Another recent event was our two-day Campaign School. The event is for anyone thinking about running for public office. It’s also a great learning experience for those interested in working on a campaign either as a volunteer or in a staff role. Attendees learned about budgeting and fundraising, campaign tactics and communications, management of staff and volunteers, and so much more.

“I’d recommend it for anybody and everybody, not just candidates for agriculture-related office,” said Wake County Farm Bureau member Colby “Bear” Hammonds. “It really focused my understanding of what my priorities need to be throughout the process.”

Hammonds said he does intend to run for office, and the Campaign School gave him the basic building blocks of developing a campaign strategy and showed him where to invest his time and his resources.

Gates County Farm Bureau and LEAD Team member Suzanne Stallings said she wants to take what she learned in Campaign School back to her county to help Young Farmers & Ranchers get involved in politics. She said the biggest thing she learned is that a candidate has to go out and earn the vote.

“There is definitely a lot more to a campaign than just sticking road signs out there,” she said. “The vote swing [exercise] was so eye-opening. The campaign won’t be won by posting Facebook ads.”

“It has been an intense two days,” Stallings said. “The presenter did a great job and I would highly recommend that anyone who is considering a race attend. The subjects that are covered are very important and open your eyes to how to start. I learned that if you surround yourself with great people, great things will happen.”

Campaign School is also helpful for those who already hold public office, like Wake County Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor and Wake County Farm Bureau member Beth Farrell.

“Campaign season is fast and furious, but taking the time now to pause and develop a strategic plan, and to think about all the different components will not only prepare me to be a better candidate, but will also better prepare me to assist those I believe in who are running for office,” said Farrell. “I think that I’ve learned how to most effectively use volunteers, how to strategically

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“Being from a semi-rural district myself, the research station tours have been helpful for me to understand the diversity of our farms here in North Carolina. It has also been a good way for me to get to know newer members of the General Assembly in a more relaxed setting than downtown Raleigh. I am very appreciative for the work NC Farm Bureau has done to make these tours happen.”

—Representative Kyle Hall, Stokes County

communicate with them, how to reiterate messaging and key points, and the importance of making sure that you’re talking to a broad audience.”

Farrell went on to say that the most important thing she learned was “how to evaluate your fundraising campaign and strategy, and learning how to prioritize expenditures – when someone is making a contribution to your campaign, they’re showing that they believe in you and your ideas, and you want to be a good steward of their resources.”

Educating elected officials about the importance of agriculture is a great cause, but Campaign School takes the concept one step further. “We, especially those who know and understand agriculture, have to be willing to step up for leadership roles on all levels, to make sure that voice continues to be represented,” said Farrell.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, ONE MEAL AT A TIME

Finally, many County Farm Bureaus have held legislative events at home over the last several months. These events include legislative breakfasts, dinners, farm tours, ice cream socials and more. Breaking bread with legislators while discussing the most pressing issues for agriculture in their home districts is a great way to build relationships and advocate for good policy.

Effective advocacy is a team effort between Farm Bureau members and leaders, staff, and other industry stakeholders. By staying active in the periods of time between votes at the General Assembly, NC Farm Bureau continues to be engaged and working in the best interests of all North Carolina farm families.