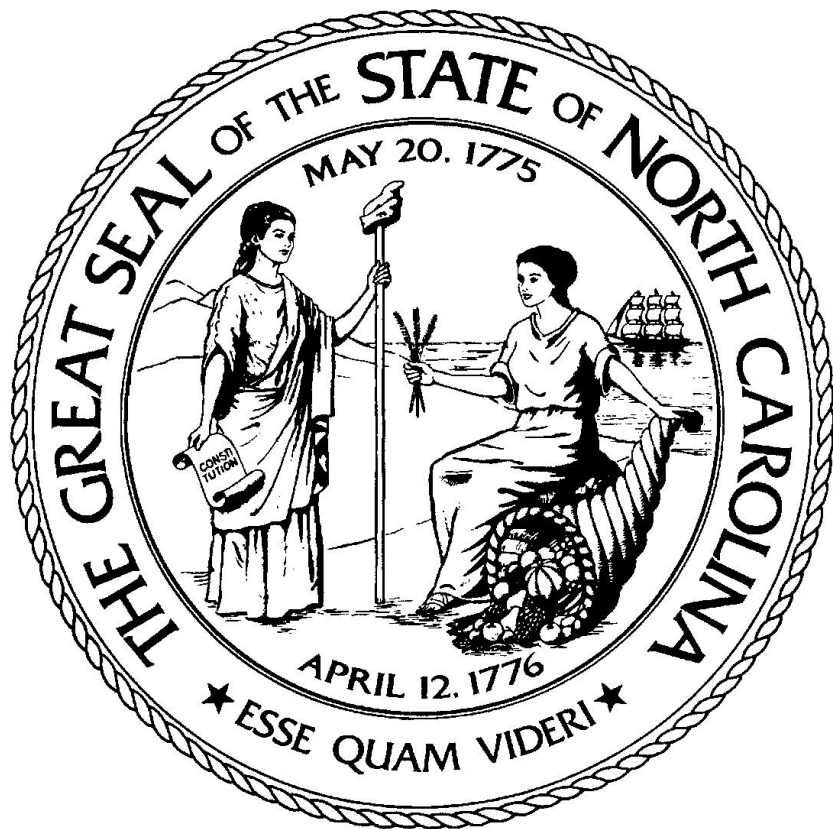


NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Strategic Plan

2023 – 2025



Steven W. Troxler, Commissioner

February 17, 2023

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1. NCD&CS Strategic Plan Executive Summary

(Insert a high-level summary of your agency's strategic plan here. This should be a 1-2 page section that touches on the scope of your agency's work, the process for creating your strategic plan, and a brief summary of what your agency aims to accomplish over the next biennium).

The NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCD&CS) strives to provide services that promote and improve agriculture, agribusiness and forests; protect consumers and businesses and conserve farmland and natural resources for the prosperity of all North Carolinians. To accomplish this mission, the Department plans to provide services to promote and enhance the production, marketing, and distribution of safe and healthy agricultural products and to ensure the sound stewardship of farmland and natural resources for all North Carolina citizens; to protect, manage and promote forest resources for the citizens of NC; to protect the public health, safety and welfare, and preserve environmental quality by monitoring and managing risk for those activities associated with production and marketing of agricultural products in NC and to prevent fraud, deception and unfair business practices for those activities within the Department's regulatory scope; and to promote NC agriculture and agribusiness by creating positive entertainment experiences and fostering economic opportunities through the management and operation of available state facilities.

This plan covers state fiscal years from 2023 through 2025. This strategic plan was developed in coordination with Departmental leadership and is based on current and anticipated agency needs as it works to fulfill its mission.

2. NCDA&CS Mission, Vision, and Values

NCDA&CS Mission Statement

The mission of the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is to provide services that promote and improve agriculture, agribusiness, and forests; protect consumers and businesses; and conserve farmland and natural resources for the prosperity of all North Carolinians.

NCDA&CS Agency Vision Statement

The vision of the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is to be a globally recognized leader in agricultural promotion; sound stewardship of forests, farmland and natural resources; plant and animal health; food safety and consumer protection that is committed to quality leadership, fiscal responsibility, and empowering our dedicated employees to excel in agency operations.

NCDA&CS Values

The NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's organizational values are:

ACCOUNTABILITY: We believe in accepting full responsibility for oneself and contributing as a team member and demonstrates a commitment to organizational success and to inspire others.

ETHICS & INTEGRITY: We maintain a culture of integrity by being fair, honest, knowledgeable, and trustworthy in every situation; following through on commitments and obligations; and interacting in ways that build confidence in the intentions of individuals and the organization.

TEAMWORK & COLLABORATION: We believe in cooperation and working together for the common good of the people we serve and the agency's mission by treating each other with dignity and respect.

SAFETY & HEALTH: We share a personal and professional commitment to protecting the safety and health of employees and the citizens that we serve.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: We focus on prompt responses, consistent communication, quality information and providing superior interactions with internal and external clients.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: We respect everyone as individuals and the unique contributions each contributes to the organization.

3. NCDA&CS Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures

<p>Goal 1 – Agricultural Services</p> <p><i>To provide services to promote and enhance the production, marketing, and distribution of safe and healthy agricultural products and to ensure the sound stewardship of farmland and natural resources for all North Carolina citizens.</i></p>	
<p>Objective 1.1 – <i>To increase the number of acres of land protected with long-term conservation easements/agreements by 10%.</i></p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 1.1</p> <p>The number of acres of land in NC protected with long-term conservation easements/agreements managed by NCDA&CS.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Annual measurement of land in NC protected by NCDA&CS provided by specific NCDA&CS Divisions/Programs. With increased appropriations and financial resources, there is an opportunity to conserve additional acreage across N.C.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Non-cumulative sum of acres protected with long-term conservation easements/agreements managed by NCDA&CS.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Anticipate increase in the number of acres protected through long-term conservation easements/agreements managed by NCDA&CS.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: Ability to protect additional acres may be limited based on availability of funds from state and federal sources.</p> <p><i>Program</i>: Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund; Soil & Water Conservation</p>
<p>Objective 1.2 – <i>To increase and enhance the production and marketing of North Carolina agricultural products by 10%.</i></p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.1</p> <p>The number of farms in NC on an annual basis.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Conduct programs and marketing activities to best position our state’s farms to be successful.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Number of farms annually as reported by USDA-NASS.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: While this number continues to decline, the Department supports all farmers, and the intent is to act</p>

to maintain the current number of farms or minimize their reduction.

Data Limitations: Many factors are outside the control of the Department to minimize the number of farms lost across the state.

Divisions: All

Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.2

Annual total Farm Cash Receipts for North Carolina

Strategies/Initiatives – Conduct programs and marketing activities to best position our state’s farms to be profitable domestically and internationally.

Methodology: Farm Cash Receipts annually as reported by USDA-NASS.

Trend: While this number continues to decline, the Department supports all farmers, and the intent is to act to ensure farm profitability.

Data Limitations: Many factors are outside the control of the Department to minimize the number of farms lost across the state.

Divisions: All

Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.3

Annual number of memberships in the “Got to Be NC”, Certified Roadside Stands, Certified Meat & Poultry Handlers, and NC Agritourism Networking Association programs.

Strategies/Initiatives – Conduct programs and marketing activities to grow these programs by 10%. If new initiatives are needed to further increase the production and marketing of NC agricultural products, they will be incorporated into this performance measure.

Methodology: The respective Divisions that manage these programs maintain databases to be able to track program numbers.

Trend: These programs have seen increased participation and that is expected to continue.

Data Limitations: As these are voluntary programs, not all farms may choose to participate.

Divisions: Marketing, Meat & Poultry Inspection

	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.4</p> <p>Increase number of attendees at Department-sponsored workshops, outreach programs and educational opportunities focusing on production, marketing, research and educational activities by 10%.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Conduct workshops, programs and educational activities that are of interest and relevant to farmers.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> The respective Divisions that manage these opportunities maintain records of number of attendees registered to participate.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> These programs have seen increased participation and that is expected to continue.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> As these are voluntary opportunities, not all farms may choose to participate.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Marketing; Small Farms; Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund; Research Stations; Food & Drug Protection; Meat & Poultry Inspection; Structural Pest Control and Pesticides; and Veterinary.</p>
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Goal 2 – NC Forest Service
To protect, manage and promote forest resources for the citizens of NC.

<p>Objective 2.1 – Increase the protection of the state’s forests from the threat of wildfire.</p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.1.1</p> <p>Protect more forest land from wildfires by reducing acres impacted per wildfire by 1-3%</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Protect more forest land from wildfire. Data provided by the NC Forest Service’s Fire Report System.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 5-year average.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Previous 5-year rolling average baseline is 6.16 acres per fire.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> With current resources.</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service</p>
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	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.1.2</p> <p>Protect more forest land from wildfires by reducing wildfires caused by debris burning by 4-6%</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Protect more forest land from wildfire. Data provided by the NC Forest Service’s Fire Report System.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Rolling 5-year average.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Previous 5-year rolling average baseline is 1,937 fires. Average debris caused fires are trending downward.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: A heavy fire season can reduce our education and outreach efforts. Funding can influence information and education activities related to wildfire prevention.</p> <p><i>Division</i>: NC Forest Service</p>
<p>Objective 2.2 – Increase the management of forest resources.</p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.2.1</p> <p>Increase the number of woodland management plans provided to landowners by 1-3%.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Increase acres of forest land under management. Data provided by NCFS Forest Management Reporting System.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Rolling 3-year average using the three most recent complete state fiscal years of data.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Annual numbers have varied, with a 3-year average of 3,871 woodland plans provided to landowners between SFY 2018 to 2020.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: There are woodland management plans provided to woodland owners (ex. by Consulting Foresters) that are not always reported to the NC Forest Service</p> <p><i>Division</i>: NC Forest Service</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.2.2</p> <p>Achieve a percentage of 60% or higher for initial Forest Practices Guidelines Related to Water Quality inspections that are conducted on active forest harvest operations.</p>

	<p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Prevent adverse impacts to water quality. Data provided by NCFS Forest Management Reporting System</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Rolling 3-year average using the three most recent complete state fiscal years of data.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Percentages amongst each of the three state fiscal years of data have remained steady with a 3-year average of 75% of harvest inspections occurring on active forest harvest operations.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: Not all forest harvest operations across the State have FPG inspections conducted on them. Inspection numbers can also be impacted by availability of NC Forest Service staff.</p> <p><i>Division</i>: NC Forest Service</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.2.3</p> <p>Increase Tree City USA, Tree Campus USA and Tree Line USA recognitions by 2-4 designations.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Increase management of urban forest resources.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Annual recognitions.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Designations have declined by 10 (212 to 202) due to NCFS Urban & Community Forestry staff vacancies and impact of COVID-19 on communities to meet annual designation standards.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: None</p> <p><i>Division</i>: NC Forest Service – Urban & Community Forest Branch</p>
<p>Objective 2.3 – Increase the promotion of forest resources.</p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.3.1</p> <p>Maintain or increase the acres of forest establishment.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Promote new forest establishment through reforestation, afforestation and natural regeneration. Data provided by the NCFS Forest Management Reporting System.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Rolling 3-year average using the three most recent complete state fiscal years of data.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Annual numbers have varied, with a 3-year average forest establishment of 62,943 acres between SFY 2018 to 2020.</p>

	<p><i>Data Limitations:</i> The NC Forest Service does not receive forest establishment information for every project. One example includes private woodland owners whose tree planting projects did not have a NC Forest regeneration plan or cost share financial assistance associated with it.</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.3.2</p> <p>Educate more of the population in forest resource management.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Increase attendance at State Forests by 3-6%. Data provided by the Educational State Forest Reporting System and DuPont State Recreational Forest Reporting.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 5-year average.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Attendance has been increasing.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> The economy can influence the public traveling to State Forests</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 2.3.3</p> <p>Increase number of educational events by 3-6%</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Increase promotion of forest with educational events. Data provided by NCFS Information and</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Annual count of events.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Increasing.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> A heavy fire season can limit the ability to provide educational events.</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service</p>
<p>Goal 3 – Regulatory Programs</p> <p><i>To protect the public health, safety and welfare, and preserve environmental quality by monitoring and managing risk for those activities associated with production and marketing of agricultural products in NC and to prevent fraud, deception, and unfair business practices for those activities within the Department’s regulatory scope.</i></p>	
<p>Objective 3.1 – <i>Improve compliant investigation and response time.</i></p>	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 3.1.1</p> <p>Maintain or increase the percent of complaints and investigations completed within standard</p>

time. This measure is important to demonstrate our continuing commitment to protecting public health, safety and welfare, and reducing fraud with timely complaint investigation response and resolution.

Strategies/Initiatives – Protect public health, safety, and welfare by promptly responding to consumer inquiries, concerns, and complaints. Data provided by each regulatory division’s complaint/investigation case files and tracking logs.

Methodology: Each regulatory division maintains a system for determining if their response to complaints and investigations are within the division’s and management’s expectation, also known as “standard time.” The combined division response is the average of the individual division responses.

Trend: As consumers become more aware of issues potentially impacting their health and safety with respect to agricultural production, food safety, animal welfare and other allied industries regulated by the Department, calls for assistance and complaint response increase. The Department strives to increase the percentage of cases completed and resolved within standard time. The standard time will be determined separately for each regulatory program based upon its statutory authorities, commitments, and resources.

Data Limitations: Many factors beyond the control of the Department’s regulatory divisions affect response time: vacancy rate; laboratory capacity and sample analysis times; access to necessary departmental and Attorney General’s Office legal counsel; difficulties in determining and contacting responsible parties; and the need to coordinate response and investigation among multiple programs/divisions and local, state, and federal agencies.

Divisions: Emergency Programs; Food and Drug Protection Division; Meat and Poultry Inspection; Standards; Structural Pest Control and Pesticides; and Veterinary.

Goal 4 – Enterprise Centers

To promote NC agriculture and agribusiness by creating positive entertainment experiences and fostering economic opportunities through the management and operation of available state facilities.

Objective 4.1 – *Create positive entertainment experiences.*

Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.1

Maintain or increase attendance at the NC State Fair.

Strategies/Initiatives – Continuously improving the marketing, programming and facilities to maintain or increase gate admissions to the annual NC State Fair (11 days).

Methodology: Count of scanned entrance tickets at gate. Pre-sale tickets are divided by 11 and added to the daily total.

Trend: Attendance at the NC State Fair remains strong annually.

Data Limitations: Attendance is heavily dependent on the weather and economy.

Divisions: State Fair

Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.2

Maintain or increase attendance at the NC Mountain State Fair.

Strategies/Initiatives – Continuously improving the marketing, programming and facilities to maintain or increase gate admissions to the annual NC Mountain State Fair (10 days).

Methodology: Count of scanned entrance tickets at gate. Pre-sale tickets are divided by 10 and added to the daily total.

Trend: Attendance at the NC Mountain State Fair remains strong annually.

Data Limitations: Attendance is heavily dependent on the weather and economy.

Divisions: Western NC Programs

Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.3

Maintain or increase number of events hosted at the NC State Fairgrounds, Western NC Agricultural Center, Senator Bob Martin Agricultural Center, and Southeastern NC Agricultural Center.

Strategies/Initiatives – Continuously improving facilities and marketing efforts to maintain or increase usage of these facilities for events with a special emphasis on those that benefit any aspect of NC agriculture.

Methodology: Count of events held at each facility throughout the year.

Trend: These facilities faced challenges with event cancellations due to COVID-19.

Data Limitations: Use of these facilities for events is heavily dependent on event space, the economy and availability of dates for events.

Divisions: Western NC Programs; Marketing

Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.4

Maintain or increase number of visitors to the State Farmers Market, Robert G. Shaw Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, Charlotte Farmers Market and WNC Farmers Market.

Strategies/Initiatives – Continuously improving facilities and marketing efforts to maintain public awareness of these facilities and their ability to directly connect consumers to local producers and products.

Methodology: Facilities calculate number of visitors annually.

Trend: Visitors to these facilities remains strong as consumers seek out local food purchase options.

Data Limitations: Visitation is heavily dependent on the weather, economy and product availability.

Divisions: Western NC Programs; Marketing

Goal 5 – Administrative Services

To provide services and support that help the Department achieve its mission and vision.

Objective 5.1 – To increase the percentage of capital improvement projects completed on time, on budget, and meeting the needs of the end user.

Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.1

Increase funding and flexibility for salary reserves to address compression, equity and recruitment for qualified employees.

Strategies/Initiatives – Appropriations and flexibility is needed to address recruitment and retention needs across the department, regardless of job classification, to be able to retain a skilled workforce in a competitive environment.

Methodology: Data will be collected by Human Resources on an annual basis and through exit surveys.

Trend: There is an increased need for salary reserve funding and necessary flexibility to be able to recruit and retain a talented, skilled workforce for the department. Current vacancy rates are approaching 20% across the department and continuing to trend upward. Low salaries are impacting recruitment and retention at an alarming rate.

Data Limitations: Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, budget restraints, programmatic changes, and legal restraints.

Divisions: Human Resources

Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.2

The percentage of capital improvement projects completed on time.

Strategies/Initiatives – Annual measurement of percent of capital projects completed on time. Data collected through reporting of the Property and Construction Project Engineer utilizing input from the design professional, the general contractor, and the division.

Methodology: Data will be collected on a cumulative YTD basis.

Trend: Anticipate increase in percent of capital projects completed on time.

Data Limitations: Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, inflation, weather, hidden conditions, approval issues, unexpected financial constraints, and material availability. With aging facilities and the cumulative effect of delayed maintenance, these factors may be further compounded.

Divisions: Property and Construction

Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.3

The percentage of capital improvement projects completed on budget.

Strategies/Initiatives – Annual measurement of percent of capital projects completed on budget. Data collected through reporting of the Property and Construction Project Engineer utilizing input from the design professional, the general contractor, and the division.

Methodology: Data will be collected on a cumulative YTD basis.

Trend: Anticipate increase in percent of capital projects completed on budget.

Data Limitations: Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, weather, hidden conditions, approval issues, unexpected financial constraints, and material availability.

Divisions: Property and Construction

Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.4

The percentage of capital improvement projects completed meeting user needs.

Strategies/Initiatives – Annual measurement of percent of capital projects completed meeting user needs. Data collected through reporting of the Property and Construction Project Engineer utilizing input from the design professional, the general contractor, and the division.

Methodology: Data will be collected via a customer survey and will be based on a cumulative YTD basis.

Trend: Anticipate increase in percent of capital projects completed meeting user needs.

Data Limitations: Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, inflation, budget restraints, programmatic changes, and legal restraints.

Divisions: Property and Construction

4. NCDA&CS Highlights, Collaborative Opportunities, and Priority Questions

NCDA&CS Highlights

(Insert success stories or operations that your agency wants to highlight. This section is an opportunity to demonstrate results or best practices that might be useful to share with other agencies. Include strategies or performance related initiatives that have yielded results).

COVID-19 shed light on the complexity of our nation's food supply, highlighting the interconnectivity and fragility of the existing system. The pandemic restricted traditional supply chains. As a result, more pressure was put on N.C. protein processors to fulfill customer demand usually fulfilled by larger operations in the Midwest. Waitlists grew to a year or more. A backlog ensued, and it became nearly impossible to get more meat processed in the state.

In July 2020, Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler announced the creation of the Increasing Meat Production Efficiency and Capacity (IMPEC) grant program, administered by NCDA&CS. Funded by the NC General Assembly with federal CARES Act funds, initial appropriations for the program were \$10 million; later it was expanded to a \$20.25 million grant program focused on strengthening the meat supply chain and ensuring consumers have adequate sources of protein. IMPEC has continued to receive funding from the NC General Assembly to further expand efforts based on continued need.

One of the biggest challenges facing local meat and seafood processors was outdated technology and older facilities which limited capacity. Many smaller operations had technology that was 40-50 years old and did not have the financial resources to upgrade to more modern equipment or expend. Through the IMPEC grants, meat and seafood processors are improving their production capacity and increasing efficiencies to better serve North Carolina farmers and fishermen. For some, the improvements could double their production capacity.

The grant funds provided a cash infusion to these processors but are not a handout. All applicants paid for at least one-third of their project's cost. In many cases, the companies contributed even more. It is important for the businesses to be part of the solution and stay economically viable for the future. By observing the situation, having conversations with farmers, processors and other stakeholders, and the support of the NC General Assembly, IMPEC is helping to expand economic opportunity in our state and provide additional capacity for local food.

NCDA&CS Collaborative Opportunities

(Insert any identified opportunities for statewide or inter-agency collaborative initiatives that would yield significant efficiencies or improve effectiveness in State programs).

NCDA&CS maintains excellent working relationships with many local, state, and federal partners as well as other stakeholders. While there are no specific initiatives identified for collaboration at this time, the Department will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to identify any areas for improved efficiencies and effectiveness in State programs as they arise.

NCDA&CS Priority Questions *(Insert 3-5 priority questions to answer. Consider adding a brief explanation for why the answers would be important and what decisions or actions they will inform).*

1. What actions can be taken either through appropriations or flexibilities in policy to ensure that NCDA&CS can pay fair market and competitive salaries to recruit and retain employees necessary to carry out the mission and legislatively mandated programs and services provided by the department to the citizens of North Carolina? High vacancy rates create a challenge. Many positions are posted numerous times before a suitable candidate is hired – not because of lack of talent pool, but because of the inability to provide competitive salaries with the structures currently in place.
2. How can North Carolina improve and enhance farmland preservation efforts and what additional financial resources may be available to facilitate these efforts? A 2022 report by American Farmland Trust projected that North Carolina is ranked #2 in the nation in acres of farmland projected to be converted by 2040; the state could lose an additional 1.1 million – 1.6 million acres of farmland in the next 15 years. Recognizing that the state is #3 in the nation for population relocation, a statewide strategy is needed for balancing growth and development while maintaining agricultural production necessary to feed this growing population.
3. What investments are needed to ensure that the NC Research Station system is equipped to be the platform that is essential to evaluating new crop varieties and animal husbandry practices, exploring emerging crop opportunities for farmers, best practices for managing forest resources, and technology enhancements to best prepare farmers in our state for the future? Studies show that every dollar invested in agricultural research returns more than \$20. With a growing population and increased demand for food, fiber and fuel, these investments will build resiliency in food security, help rural communities stay viable and enhance the state's economy.
4. Recognizing the devastating impacts that flooding has in our state, how can the Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program (StRAP) be funded and leveraged to protect and restore the integrity of additional drainage infrastructure of North Carolina waterways? Proactive management in clearing debris will hopefully reduce flooding and protect property before the next big flood event happens.