

NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Strategic Plan

2025 – 2029



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NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
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A. Introduction

The NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&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 2025 through 2029. 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.

B. Mission, Vision, & Values

1. Mission

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.

2. Vision

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.

3. Values

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

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.

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.

Statewide values for the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are:

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.

C. Goals, Objectives, & Performance Measures

4. Goal 1 – Agricultural Services

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.

Performance Measures	
Objective 1.1 – To.increase.the.number.of.acres.of.land.protected.with.long_term.conserva.tion.easements-agreements.by.76% ;	Performance Measure or Milestone 1.1 The number of acres of land in NC protected with long-term conservation easements/agreements managed by NCDA&CS.
Objective 1.2 – To.increase.and.enhance.the.production.and.marketing.of.North.Carolina.agricultural.products.by.76% ;	

	<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 an 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>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 to maintain the current number of farms or minimize their reduction.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Many factors are outside the control of the</p>
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	<p>Department to minimize the number of farms lost across the state.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> All</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.2</p> <p>Annual total Farm Cash Receipts for North Carolina.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Conduct programs and marketing activities to best position our state’s farms to be profitable domestically and internationally.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Farm Cash Receipts annually as reported by USDA-NASS. <i>Trend:</i> While this number continues to decline, the Department supports all farmers, and the intent is to act to ensure farm profitability.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Many factors are outside the control of the Department to minimize the number of farms lost across the state.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> All</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 1.2.3</p> <p>Annual number of memberships in the “Got to Be NC”, Certified Roadside Stands, Certified Meat & Poultry Handlers, and NC Agritourism Networking Association programs.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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</p>
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	<p>products, they will be incorporated into this performance measure.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> The respective Divisions that manage these programs maintain databases to track program numbers.</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 programs, not all farms may choose to participate.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Marketing, Meat & Poultry Inspection</p> <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>
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	<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.
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5. Goal 2 – NC Forest Service

To protect, manage and promote forest resources for the citizens of North Carolina.

	Performance Measures
Objective 2.1 – Increase.the.protection.of.the.state's.forests.from.the.threat.of.wildfire;	Performance Measure or Milestone 2.1.1 Protect more forest land from wildfires by reducing acres impacted per wildfire by 1-3% <i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Protect more forest land from wildfire. Data provided by the NC Forest Service’s Fire Report System. <i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 5-year average. <i>Trend:</i> Previous 5-year rolling average baseline is 3.28 acres per fire. <i>Data Limitations:</i> With current resources. <i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service Performance Measure or Milestone 2.1.2 Protect forest land from wildfires by reducing wildfires caused by debris burning by 4-6%. <i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Protect more forest land from wildfire. Data provided by the NC Forest Service’s Fire Report System.
Objective 2.2 – Increase.the.management.of.forest.resources;	
Objective 2.3 – Increase.the.promotion.of.forest.resources;	

	<p><i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 5-year average. <i>Trend:</i> Previous 5-year rolling average baseline is 2,126 fires. Average debris-caused fires are trending upward.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> A heavy fire season can reduce our education and outreach efforts. Funding can influence information and educational activities related to wildfire prevention.</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service</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> 13,569 woodland plans were provided to landowners between SFY21-24. Annual numbers have varied, with a 3-year annual average of 4,523 woodland plans provided. Sunsetting of financial assistance programs that helped landowners cover management plan development costs coincided with a decrease in accomplishments.</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>
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	<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>: 70.2% of all Initial Harvest inspections during SFY21-24 were conducted while the operation was “Active”. Total FPG inspections and re-inspections conducted during SFY21-24 were 16,580 (representing a 3-year annual average of 5,527 total inspections).</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 the 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>
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	<p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Increase management of urban forest resources.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Designations are awarded on a calendar year basis. Strategic assessment includes a review of the three most recent complete calendar years of accomplishments. Trends are determined by identifying the difference in the total number of Designations for years 2 and 3 compared to years 1 and 2.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Designations are trending up, with an increase of 9 (169 designations for CY23-24 compared to 160 for CY22-23).</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> None</p> <p><i>Division:</i> NC Forest Service – Urban & Community Forest Branch</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.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 3-year average using the three most recent complete state fiscal years of data. Data provided by the NCFS Forest Management Reporting System.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Annual establishment acreages have been trending downward. Total acres established between SFY21-24 were recorded as 158,768 with a 3-year average of 52,923 acres annually.</p>
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	<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%.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Rolling 5-year average. Data provided by the Educational State Forest Reporting System and DuPont State Recreational Forest reporting.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Annual visitation across the state forest system has been slightly more than 1.412 million visitors over the last five years, averaging a 6% cumulative increase during that period</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Challenges such as economic influence on public travel and temporary closures to state forests can limit visitation.</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>
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	<p><i>Strategies/Initiatives – Increase promotion of forest resources with educational events.</i></p> <p><i>Methodology: Annual count of events. Data provided by the NCFS Information and Education Accomplishments Reporting System.</i></p> <p><i>Trend: From FY22-23 to FY23-24, forest service participation in outreach events decreased by approximately 2.5%. FY24-25 reporting is expected to indicate an even greater decline in event participation.</i></p> <p><i>Data Limitations: Challenges such as a heavy fire season and staff capacity at the local level can limit the ability to participate in educational events.</i></p> <p><i>Division: NC Forest Service</i></p>
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6. Goal 3 – Regulatory Programs

To protect the public health, safety and welfare of North Carolina through food safety initiatives; monitor, protect and maintain animal health; 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.

	Performance Measures
Objective 3.1: Improve.complaint.investigation.and.response.time;	Performance Measure or Milestone 3.1.1
	Maintain or increase the percent of complaints and investigations completed within standard time. This measure is important to demonstrate our continuing commitment to protecting public health, safety and welfare, and reducing fraud with timely complaint

	<p>investigation response and resolution.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: 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.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: 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.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: 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</p>
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	<p>programs/divisions and local, state, and federal agencies.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Emergency Programs; Food and Drug Protection Division; Meat and Poultry Inspection; Standards; Structural Pest Control and Pesticides; and Veterinary.</p>
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7. Goal 4 – Enterprise Centers

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

	Performance Measures
Objective 4.1:	Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.1
Create positive entertainment and educational experiences;	Maintain or increase attendance at the NC State Fair.
	<i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Continuously improving the marketing, programming and facilities to maintain or increase gate admissions to the annual NC State Fair (11 days).
	<i>Methodology:</i> Count of scanned entrance tickets at gate. Pre-sale tickets are divided by 11 and added to the daily total.
	<i>Trend:</i> Attendance at the NC State Fair remains strong annually.
	<i>Data Limitations:</i> Attendance is heavily dependent on the weather and economy.
	<i>Divisions:</i> State Fair

	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.2</p> <p>Maintain or increase attendance at the NC Mountain State Fair.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – Continuously improving the marketing, programming and facilities to maintain or increase gate admissions to the annual NC Mountain State Fair (10 days).</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Count of scanned entrance tickets at gate. Pre-sale tickets are divided by 10 and added to the daily total.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Attendance at the NC Mountain State Fair remains strong annually.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Attendance is heavily dependent on the weather and economy.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Western NC Programs</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.3</p> <p>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.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Count of events held at each facility throughout the year.</p>
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	<p><i>Trend:</i> These facilities faced challenges with event cancellations due to COVID-19. Western NC facilities were also challenged with closures due to Hurricane Helene.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Use of these facilities for events is heavily dependent on event space, the economy and availability of dates for events.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Western NC Programs; Marketing</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 4.1.4</p> <p>Maintain or increase the number of visitors to the State Farmers Market, Robert G. Shaw Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, Charlotte Farmers Market and WNC Farmers Market.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Facilities calculate the number of visitors annually.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Visitors to these facilities remains strong as consumers seek out local food purchase options.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Visitation is heavily dependent on the weather, economy and product availability.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Western NC Programs; Marketing</p>
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8. Goal 5 – Administrative Services

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

	Performance Measures
Objective 5.1 – To.increase.the.percentage.of.capital.improvement.projects.completed.on.time?on.budget?and.meeting.the.needs.of.the.end.user;	<p>Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.1</p> <p>Increase funding and flexibility for salary reserves to address compression, equity and recruitment for qualified employees.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives –</i> 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Data will be collected by Human Resources on an annual basis and through exit surveys.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> 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.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, budget restraints, programmatic changes, and legal restraints.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Human Resources</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.2</p>

	<p>The percentage of capital improvement projects completed on time.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Data will be collected on a cumulative YTD basis.</p> <p><i>Trend</i>: Anticipate an increase in percent of capital projects completed on time.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations</i>: 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.</p> <p><i>Divisions</i>: Property and Construction</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.3</p> <p>The percentage of capital improvement projects completed on budget.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives</i> – 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology</i>: Data will be collected on a cumulative YTD basis.</p>
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	<p><i>Trend:</i> Anticipate an increase in percentage of capital projects completed on budget.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> 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.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Property and Construction</p> <p>Performance Measure or Milestone 5.1.4</p> <p>The percentage of capital improvement projects completed meeting user needs.</p> <p><i>Strategies/Initiatives – Annual</i> 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.</p> <p><i>Methodology:</i> Data will be collected via a customer survey and will be based on a cumulative YTD basis.</p> <p><i>Trend:</i> Anticipate an increase in percent of capital projects completed meeting user needs.</p> <p><i>Data Limitations:</i> Many factors beyond the control of the division include, but are not limited to, inflation, budget restraints, programmatic changes, and legal restraints.</p> <p><i>Divisions:</i> Property and Construction Performance Measure</p>
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D. Priority Questions

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 and benefits 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. How can North Carolina farms and forests recover from economic devastation from numerous natural disasters in 2024 and what can be done to minimize impacts from future events? Hurricane Helene resulted in catastrophic damage in western North Carolina, leading to 39 counties being declared Presidential Disaster Areas. Additionally, the historic nature of this storm had devastating impacts on farmland, infrastructure and forestry, with loss estimates totaling close to \$5 billion in the region. In addition to the devastation from Hurricane Helene, growers in our state faced historic droughts statewide at a crucial stage of the growing season, excessive rainfall, Tropical Storm Debby, Potential Tropical Cyclone #8 as well as a cicada brood hatch that had localized significant impacts.
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? Are there additional practices like water parking that could help mitigate future flooding events across the state? Proactive management in clearing debris and water storage will hopefully reduce flooding and protect property before the next big flood event happens.
5. 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.