

## **Commissioner's column**

As I am writing this, we are midway of the 150<sup>th</sup> N.C. State Fair, and we had a great opening weekend of junior livestock shows. You will find photos and an article on page 8 of the newspaper about the Junior Livestock Sale of Champions that brought in a record \$182,500 for our young people.

I am proud and humbled by the support the agricultural community has shown to our youth programs, and I know their support is helping to develop our future agricultural leaders.

Money raised through the sale goes to the competitors, with a portion also going into a scholarship and education fund. All kids that compete in the livestock shows are eligible to apply for scholarships for higher education purposes. This year, \$73,000 was raised for the scholarship fund, which is a win for all the kids.

I was also honored opening weekend to induct five new members into the N.C. State Fair Livestock Hall of Fame. The five have made significant contributions to the livestock shows at the N.C. State Fair and to the industry.

This year's class included Casey Armstrong of Enfield, Jean Fish of Fuquay-Varina, Carol Turner of Raleigh, Mike Smith of Madison and Wesley Loper of Granite Falls.

Armstrong has been a member of the N.C. Horse Council for 20 years and served as president of the group in 2005 and 2006. She has also served on the N.C. Board of Agriculture. She was recognized for her support of the horse industry and the horse shows at the fair.

Fish worked at the N.C. Cattlemen's Association's fair booth for more than 30 years, answering questions on cattle breeds, cattle production, show schedules and most any other questions that fair goers had. She was always patient and gracious in her responses, and many first-time competitors, especially nervous ones, will remember her handing out lucky pennies before they stepped into the show ring. There's no telling how many pennies she passed out over the years.

Turner worked in the State Fair Livestock Office for many years, handling the paperwork and show schedules for the shows. But she was recognized for her role in starting and growing the Special Awards Show. This program gives youth and adults with special needs the opportunity to show animals at the fair. Because of her work, the exhibitors receive ribbons, medallions and fair premiums for showing, an enriching experience for the competitors and one that did not exist before Turner started the special shows 20 years ago.

Smith is the inspiration and a driving force behind the Special Awards Show. He was the first and only exhibitor the first year of the program. Smith, who has Down Syndrome, traveled across the state with his family to livestock events, but never had the opportunity to participate until 1997. After the first year, Smith brought a friend with him, also with Down Syndrome, and slowly the program grew. Today hundreds participate in the shows, so many that there are now special shows both weekends of the State Fair.

Looper has been an exhibitor and supporter of swine competitions for 25 years, exhibiting champion swine in every division of the fair. That consistency is pretty impressive. Not only has Looper provided high quality pigs to youth exhibitors, he has also served as a mentor to many youth over the years.

It was an honor to recognize each of these fine folks.

People come to the State Fair for all sorts of reasons, but I hope when they leave they have a better understanding of what agriculture means to our state. We work very hard as a department to highlight our No. 1 industry and help consumers make a connection between the farm and the food, fiber and fuel that is produced there. I am proud of our agricultural heritage at the State Fair and I am looking forward to a strong finish to the 150<sup>th</sup>.