

From the tractor

Ok folks, if you haven't filled out your Census of Agriculture yet, it's time!

Actually, it's past time, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture has extended the deadline through spring to give farmers and ranchers more time to be sure it gets the best possible information available.

So it is vitally important that you do your part. As of press time, North Carolina has had about a 40 percent response rate to the Census. I know we can do better than that and I am hopeful by the end of spring we will be closer to the target goal of 80 percent that USDA would like to see.

It is difficult to make a strong case for good agricultural policies when you do not have the numbers to back it up. Imagine if you were applying for a loan, but your banker only considered 40 percent of your income. You would want every possible consideration in the process. To ensure the best snapshot of what North Carolina agriculture looks like today, the Census needs to hear from you.

Online forms have been improved since the last Census to ease navigation and reduce time clicking through unnecessary pages. Don't delay any longer. Go online at www.agcensus.usda.gov and fill yours out today.

I talk a lot in this column and when I give speeches about the importance of buying local and supporting North Carolina farmers. I believe we can bring about change with our shopping dollars. At the very least, buying a local product makes a difference for that particular business.

An employee was recently telling me about a campaign going around on Facebook where people were being encouraged to buy an extra gallon of milk at the grocery store to try to help boost demand for milk. Some even suggested donating the extra gallon to a food pantry or homeless shelter if you couldn't use an extra gallon yourself.

I appreciated people taking to Facebook and trying to make a change for an industry that clocks in 365 days a year to produce a product that has been a staple for generations.

Like many agricultural commodities, North Carolina's dairy industry is struggling with low commodity prices.

Growing up, I believe we had a glass of milk at just about every meal. That seems to be far from the norm now, which has led to excess milk in the supply chain.

A one-time purchase is likely more symbolic than a long-term seismic market changer, but I know dairy producers in North Carolina would appreciate your support, and hopefully drinking a little more milk will help bring the supply more into balance.

So, I encourage you to drink your milk!

