



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

September 17, 2024

2024-2025 Board Members

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Past Pres Edwin Peacock

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Dena Diorio

Stuart Hair

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Virginia Owen

Membership John Cantrell

Foundation Joe Morris

Programs Luther Moore



Commissioner of Agriculture, Steve Troxler

by **Bill Bartee**

Steve Troxler regaled the Charlotte Rotary with the importance of North Carolina agriculture in our region, nation, and world. He proudly shared that North Carolina ranked number one in the United States in two particular products (sweet potatoes and poultry). We also celebrate being in the top ten in the U.S. in twenty-one different commodities. This diverse yield in North Carolina is due to the diversity of climate and geography. It only increases the importance of agriculture to our well-being, he explained.

Troxler included that not only does agriculture bring us the nutrients of life but also directly impacts our environment and our freedom (both, for the better). Regarding the environment: agriculture provides open and green spaces, allows water to disperse into the ground, and manages the storm run-off that asphalt and concrete do not allow. Regarding freedom: our state and country's access to relatively affordable food helps us remain free as a people to pursue other interests.

However, he reminded us that these attributes of our food supply are fragile due to the just-in-time nature of distribution. An upset in the chain of food supply can affect our access, which occurred during the Pandemic. A lack of workers, difficulties in production, processing and transportation

created a national protein shortage which provided challenges but also allowed the team to learn.

The fragility showed the necessity to create a robust, local food supply and increase the ability to be direct-to-consumer. These initiatives have been led by the Department of Agriculture in North Carolina as they seek new partnerships, ideas, and education. One of these is making the state farmer's market more engaging for the citizens. Ironically, development has brought more people to the area near Charlotte's Farmers Market. This has created an upcoming renovation that will potentially include a new restaurant and bakery.

Agriculture is a \$103 billion industry in North Carolina. This makes it the number one economic driver ahead of tourism and the military. However, it has major challenges moving forward, he explained. The loss of farmland to development in North Carolina has the ability to change our state's success in agriculture. He shared that the Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Act has protected 36,000 acres thus far, but we could lose 1.2 to 1.6 million acres of farmland in the state by 2040 without exercising it more frequently.

Labor is another challenge within agriculture. The rise in labor costs, the politicization of foreign workers, and the inefficiencies of solutions regarding legal workers and the H2A program continue to create problems. These costs have been increasing 18-20 percent over the past recent years and continue to rise.

Solutions to these challenges are continuing to educate and pursue the successes within food supply, production, research, and safety. It is also why the commissioner is seeking his 6th term in this year's election.

There are twenty divisions under the NC Department of Agriculture. This includes Consumer Services, the scanners, scales, inspection of bedding and their compliance. The NC Forest Service is also under the Department; they manage the state forests and are the first responders to floods, fires, and natural disasters within the state. Also under his department, the inspection and mandates of food safety in restaurants, stores, hotels & more.

Lastly, Commissioner Troxler stated that in all his travels, grand openings, and conferences he most enjoys sharing the benefits of agriculture with the people that he meets. We're glad he included the guests and members of Charlotte Rotary in that group.

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/1010435365>

The presenter's introduction begins at approximately 17 minutes.