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## Troxler Comments

Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 3/14/19

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler spoke to a joint agriculture committee meeting on Wednesday, and he laid out some of his concerns for the current legislative session. One of the bigger topics of interest in recent years has been industrial hemp. Troxler said interest continues to grow. Last year, he said, the state had licensed about 2,400 acres for industrial hemp. This year it's close to 8,000 acres. Greenhouse square footage has also grown -- from about 2 million licensed square feet last year, to more than 3.4 million so far this year. "We have learned that we can grow industrial hemp. We think we can do it well in North Carolina," he said. "We think we can adapt it to the production practices that we're really good at, but there are caveats."

Troxler said the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will be coming to the General Assembly and asking for changes to the state law regarding industrial hemp in order to mirror federal regulations. It'll also ask for the state Board of Agriculture to have regulatory authority over rule-making to regulate CBD oil production.

Another perennial topic on the front of Troxler's mind is raw milk. "I have personally been against the sale of raw milk since I've been here ... It's a public health issue," he said. Troxler told lawmakers the department will ask them not to allow raw milk to be sold in retail stores, and to "repeal the cow share law that was passed almost in the middle of the night" last session. The "cow share" bill Troxler refers to was an amendment to the 2018 Farm Bill which allows individuals to consume raw milk from any animals they own. They cannot sell the raw milk under that law.

After farmers experienced several natural disasters last year, Troxler told lawmakers that about 94 percent of the initial applications for disaster relief have been processed, and about \$93 million has been paid out. "Our intent is to get through the first round, step back and look at where we are. And then sometime later in the spring we will be issuing another check," he said.

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## Collaboratory Update

Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 4/10/19

After receiving more than \$5 million from the state budget, the North Carolina Policy Collaboratory met with members of the House Environment Committee to brief them on its work to study GenX and other chemical compounds found in the state's water supply. On Tuesday, Jeff Warren, the research director of the Collaboratory and former adviser to Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, outlined progress being made by the research teams the Collaboratory oversees.

The Collaboratory has five research teams -- and three other support teams -- that are working to take water samples and analyze per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, including looking at private well risk modeling, performance testing PFAS removal and air emissions. "We're the first state to do this. We're the first state to have a mechanism like the Collaboratory for the General Assembly to utilize the researchers," Warren said, adding that we're also the first state to do a baseline water testing effort, which is a "Herculean" task. The Collaboratory has been helping the Department of Environmental Quality after the federal government shutdown impacted the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to test samples.

Warren said the funding it received from the state was for 18 months of research and will be gone in December. Warren said there is a concern that December is too early to finalize the report with "statistical certainty around the baseline." The advisory committee working on studying PFAS has requested a one-year extension. There has not been a formal request for additional funding, but a letter to Warren from the advisory committee noted it would cost \$1.5 million for additional testing and project logistics.

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## Resurrected Bills

Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 4/26/19

In the spirit of the Easter holiday, the House Transportation Committee resurrected two bills that previously died in the committee. House Bill 267 and House Bill 87 have both had rocky committee hearings so far this session -- with HB 267 receiving a tie vote earlier this month, and HB 87 getting voted down. HB 267 would allow motorcycle riders who are at least 21 years old to ride without a helmet. HB 87 would allow automatic license plate readers to be placed on state roads. House Bill 267 sponsor Rep. John Torbett, R-Gaston, said it's not a matter of "wearing a helmet or not wearing a helmet," but rather if the state allows riders to choose to wear helmets or requires them. "I profess that the state should not tell you, but we should actively and aggressively let people choose to either wear a helmet or not wear a helmet based on their own wants," he said. The bill would mandate that anyone younger than 21 would have to wear a helmet. Rep. Deb Butler, D-New Hanover, who has been a vocal opponent of the bill, moved for a roll call vote on the bill. The bill passed the committee this time on a 14-12 vote. It now goes to the House Health Committee. House Bill 87 sponsor Rep. John Faircloth, R-Guilford, had previously tried to resurrect his proposal by amending it into another bill, after the transportation committee voted it down in 10-11 in February. "This is just more tracking of people who haven't done anything, who are minding their own business, and sooner or later more information will be added to it," Rep. Dana Bumgardner, R-Gaston, said during Thursday's meeting. "It's akin to facial recognition software at airports ... I hope we don't do this." Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle raised concerns about the license plate data being kept for 90 days, which is currently state law. On Thursday, the bill received a favorable report on a voice vote, despite strong bipartisan opposition. It now moves on to House Rules.

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## Plate Readers

Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 5/07/19

In a series of procedural moves that kept heads turning, House Bill 87 lived, then died, then lived again only to be sent back to the House Rules Committee. The bill would allow license plate readers to be placed on state-owned roads and highways and to be used as a law enforcement tool. But opponents worry about what that would mean for privacy rights and personal liberty. This isn't the first time the bill has been in trouble -- previous committee meetings have seen it voted down.

On Monday, bill sponsor Rep. John Faircloth, R-Guilford, said license plate readers have been used in North Carolina for about 15 to 20 years, but they can't currently be used on state roads and streets. The bill would allow for agreements to allow for the readers to be used, and Faircloth said "lots of rules" would need to be followed for them to be placed. Records of the plates would be kept for 90 days, and then destroyed unless a search warrant has been executed or a request for preservation has been made, said Rep. Allen McNeill, R-Randolph. "The legislature has already dealt with this issue," he said.

Rep. Michael Speciale, R-Craven, a staunch opponent to the bill, said while the bill would help law enforcement, it would infringe upon personal liberty. "I don't want to give up my liberty and give up the liberty of the people I came here to represent," he said. While the intent of the bill isn't to track drivers, there is the possibility that private citizens could be tracked. "It's not what that machine can do today, it's not what that software can do right now. It's about what it can do tomorrow," he said. The bill initially passed the House on Monday in a 59-57 vote, but was then brought back for another vote in which it was rejected 47-69, and then was sent to House Rules.

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## Marine Fisheries

Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 5/02/19

It's been more than 20 years since the last overhaul of the state's marine fishery laws, but Sen. Norm Sanderson, R-Pamlico, is hoping Senate Bill 554 will update it and "bring it into line" to help protect the resources the state has. "Every year that I've been here we've had issues with fishery management plans, with Division of Marine Fisheries, with recreational fishermen and with commercial fishermen," Sanderson said. "It's time we stop playing politics with a natural resource that belongs to all the citizens of this state." The bill repeals the current fishery management plan laws, and recodifies it with several changes, including requiring plan modification to be made only through plan amendments, and have plans and management measures be implemented based on fishery management standards and the best available "scientific, technical and economic data." It also reconstitutes the nine-member Marine Fisheries Commission -- removing two at-large members and replacing them with scientists and adding an additional commercial fishing seat. Changing the make-up of the board, Sanderson said, ensures an even split among commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen and scientists. It repeals the provision allowing the spouse of a commercial fisherman to serve in the commercial fishing seat. The changes also increase transparency for the board by requiring written agendas for the meetings and prohibiting adding items to the agenda once the meeting has begun, and the bill clarifies that conference call meetings are official meetings. Sen. Tom McInnis, R-Richmond, noted that for years it's been hard to bring together commercial and recreational fishermen and the state to "negotiate in good faith." "Does this bill do that? And are these parties prepared to sit down and sing kumbaya?" he asked. Sanderson said SB 554 "is a giant step in the right direction." The two fisherman groups aren't quite in agreement, but Jerry Schill, director of government relations for the North Carolina Fisheries Association, said in his 32 years this was "most positive (he's) felt in a long, long time." David Sneed, executive director at Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina, said his organization has some concerns with the bill. "There's very little in the bill that would actually serve to protect or enhance our state public trust fishery resources," he said. "Rather it's an attempt to shift policymaking authority" from the commission to the state. He said what is needed is changing current management standards from "maximum exploitation to one of responsible exploitation." The Senate Judiciary Committee didn't vote on the bill on Wednesday since it was a PCS.

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