

Bracken County Comprehensive Plan

Revision Date: June 2020

OVERVIEW

Located in the Licking River Area, Bracken County is approximately 50 miles South-East of Cincinnati and 15 miles West of Maysville. Bracken County is bordered by the Ohio River and is serviced by the AA Highway as well as by Rail. With a population of 8,488 citizens, Bracken County is a rural community that has a rich agricultural heritage.

Tobacco production has been the cornerstone of the Bracken County economy for generations. Although Bracken County has depended on tobacco production, it has tremendous potential in other agricultural enterprises. Many of these enterprises have coexisted with tobacco for many years, however tobacco production has over shadowed these ventures limiting their utilization and reducing their profit potential in the past.

BRACKEN COUNTY TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION BASED ON 2017 CENSUS OF AG

BURLEY TOBACCO PRODUCTION 2017

- 815 Acres
- 60 Farms

BEEF – MAINLY COW/CALF OPERATIONS

- 12,048-HEAD TOTAL
- 7,017 COWS
- 318 Farms producing cattle
- 38 head average / farm

DAIRY- HERDS (*5 listed in 2017, now only 2*)

- Less than 60 head now
- Less than 500,000 LBS OF MILK PRODUCED

HAY

- 19,159 total hay acres, includes baled silage
- ALFALFA – 3,792 acres, 135 farms, 2.7 tons / acre
- OTHER HAY – 14,504 acres, 296 farms, 1.95 tons / acre
- GRAIN – CORN, SOYBEANS
 - CORN – 732 grain acres, 151 bushel average, 502 silage acres
 - SOYBEANS – 796 acres, 46 bushel average

TOTAL LIVESTOCK INCOME 2017 *\$4,267,000*

TOTAL CROP INCOME FOR 2017 *\$6,454,000*

TOTAL CROP AND LIVESTOCK *\$10,720,000*

Value of Farm / Land / Buildings *\$408,483*

A readily available resource for Bracken County farms is their beef cattle base that numbers at 12,048 head. Due to the topography of the land, and the small acreages of the farms, these are mainly cow calf operations with an average of 38 head per farm.

Currently, numbers of Dairy Farms in Bracken County have been significantly reduced over the past 20 years. Currently, 2 herds remain in the county with less than 60 head. These farms produce less than 500,000 lbs. of milk.

A virtually untapped enterprise in Bracken County is forage production. Harvest has been limited to supplying the existing herd needs with little or no concern for quality. Total forage production for the county is 19,159 acres annually. Farms produce 3,792 acres of alfalfa yielding 2.7 tons per acre and 14,504 acres of other hay yielding 1.95 tons per acre.

Grain production has expanded in the county in both corn and soybeans. 3 large grain operations are based in the county utilizing acreage in neighboring counties.

Total crop income including tobacco for Bracken County is \$6,454,000. Total livestock income is \$4,267,000. Total Crop and Livestock income is \$10,720,000.

BRACKEN COUNTY NON-TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION

- TIMBER
- HONEY
- ORCHARD
ORNAMENTALS
- HEMP

BRACKEN COUNTY'S NON-TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

For many years, we have been worried about the future of tobacco, and some producers have looked for alternative crops and markets to supplement their farm income. Commercial vegetable production has been tried for many years in both Bell Peppers and Cabbage. Disappointments and failures plagued these efforts due to the lack of infrastructure for marketing. Also, distance from the markets further reduced the potential profits because of transportation costs.

Hemp rolled into Bracken County in 2019 with high expectations. Many growers signed on to grow for a market in Maysville that required high priced inputs with cloned plants and plastic culture production. Due to market declines, and industry growing pains, many producers have not received payment and another alternative crop failed expectations. Still, many hope that once the market stabilizes, that hemp could serve as a future crop for us.

One additional enterprise that is ongoing here in Bracken County is Timber. Logging takes place on many farms with very little knowledge of the true value of the trees. Loggers make offers to land owners from which they receive only a small portion of the trees' true value. Prior to the invasion of the Emerald Ash Borer, timber harvest increased. Now, after the loss in millions of dollars of ash trees, more emphasis in utilizing the woodlands is taking place. With a cedar market in the adjoining county, small loggers are taking advantage of our abundant source of cedar trees and utilizing that commodity.

- NEW AND EMERGING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION
- SMALL SCALE VEGETABLE AND FRUIT PRODUCTION
- FARMERS MARKET
- GREENHOUSE FLOWER PRODUCTION
- FIELD FLOWER PRODUCTION
- AGRITOURISM
- CASH HAY SALES
- EQUINE BOARDING AND TRAINING

TOBACCO DEPENDENCY (based on 1997 information)

- Bracken County was the 3rd most dependent county in Kentucky and the nation relying on the income from tobacco.
- Tobacco income was 13.3% of the total income for Bracken County in 1997.

BRACKEN COUNTY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DATA (2018 estimates)

- Current Population – 8,239
- Number of Households – 3,858
- Median Income - \$45,827
- Education Level - % College Degree – 14% High School Diploma – 84.4%

FARM DATA (Based on 2017 Census)

- Number of Farms –531
- Average Size of Farms – 164 acres
- Number of operators showing Farming as the principal income -322
- Farm Sales Value—Under \$10,000 – 352, Over \$10,000 – 179
- Average Farm Operator Age – 56.2
- Number of Farmers
 - Under 25 12
 - 25-34 85
 - 35-44 106
 - 45-54 167
 - 55-64 241
 - 65-74 193
 - Over 75 96
- 27% of the farms list a female as the principal operator

REVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The goal of all 3 organizations in nominating members to serve on this council was to find individuals that had the willingness to seek out the best possible solutions to improving the agricultural situation here in the county. The members nominated represent the county geographically with membership spread throughout the county. Most of the members are from tobacco/beef farms, which represent over 95% of the producers here in Bracken Co.

The council utilized information received from Bracken County citizens via county information forums and county wide surveys to prioritize the agricultural areas that demonstrate the greatest potential for improving agriculture sustainability in Bracken County.

BRACKEN COUNTY'S STRENGTHS

Early in the process of gathering information, the council discovered a very interesting bit of information. It seems as though Bracken County's long history of tobacco production has not only provided an economic basis, but it has also instilled a strong work ethic that has been passed down through the generations. Because of this quality, many employers outside the county wish to employ our residents, as opposed to others. Although off-farm employment opportunities are favorable for our youth, they have indicated that many of them would rather stay on the farm. Their biggest drawback is that farming alone does not provide enough income to support a family. Without the youth to employ or renew the labor pool, a seasonal migrant labor force has been recruited to aid in the crop production.

Through surveys, public forums, and general conversations, the residents of the county have indicated that improving agriculture in Bracken County would be best served by increasing livestock production and forages. Most agreed that this would be the easiest transition for the majority of our farmers. The county has a forage base of 90,000 acres of pasture and 19,159 acres of hay. There are currently 7,017 beef cows and 12,048 beef cattle in all. Most feel these enterprises could easily move forward with improvements in production and marketing. These figures show that livestock numbers could easily double, or triple, with better utilization of current resources

Our county is uniquely located on the Ohio River, 40 miles south east of Cincinnati. It is also just 60 miles north of Lexington and 15 miles west of Maysville. This puts Bracken County within a 60 miles radius of 2.6 million people and we are also within a 24-hour drive of 75% of the nations population. The AA highway that has made us more accessible to urban areas and truck transportation serves our county. The CXS rail system also runs through the county and can provide inputs for both agriculture and industry.

The county school system offers some of the newest facilities in the state to educate our youth. This includes an expanded agriculture program and shop along with a greenhouse for teaching. The high school also has interactive video conferencing capabilities to enhance educational opportunities not available in the county. Strong youth programs in both 4-H and FFA has been and will continue to be a cornerstone to the success of developing our future leaders. The annual agricultural fair also offers many opportunities to youth through shows and sales of livestock. Bracken County also has:

- Two farm equipment dealers – providing sales and service.
- Two farm supply dealers – providing fertilizer, seed, chemicals and services.
- Three financial institutions – banks, one of which is locally owned.
- Thirty five greenhouses – could be used for alternative plant production Hundreds of Tobacco Barns – could be used for hay and equipment storage.
- Large farm equipment base – most farms have hay and tillage equipment. Developing Industrial Site – might attract an agricultural processing plant.
- One of our most precious resources is the Natural beauty of the county. Many visit the county because of the scenery along with an abundance of wildlife. The county rich Historical heritage also attracts many tourists through the year expanding the local business for services and goods.

BRACKEN COUNTY'S WEAKNESSES

Because of our dependency on one crop (tobacco), there has been a lack of market development for alternative products. Due to the lack of markets, producers that did try alternative crops have failed and are now resistant to try new agricultural ventures. The average age of the farmer (56) is another reason that new ventures are not readily accepted.

Due to the escalating prices for land and the lack of monetary resources, the feasibility for young farmers to start and or stay in business is challenging.

Having cattle Market Ready is probably the biggest weakness we have in Bracken County. Even though we have made great strides in genetics, most calves are not pre conditioned for the market. Most calves are sold as bulls and not steers which greatly discounts the prices received. Very few take advantage of pre conditioning programs such as CPH-45 that not only attracts market premiums but allows additional weight gain after weaning.

Environmental concerns for the county include wildlife damage from a growing deer, turkey, and raccoon population. Soil erosion from continuous cropping of sloping land has reduced the fertility of many farms. Many older farms don't have sewage systems adding to water quality concerns.

A lack of industry has meant that employment has been sought outside the county causing many residents to move off farms. Limited water and sewage systems have limited growth.

THREATS

Bracken County, like other counties near urban areas, will be faced with the continued pressure of urban growth. Loss of agricultural land and pressure to reduce or eliminate certain agricultural practices will be a challenge in the future.

Unless the trend changes, our producers are aging with no one to take over family farms. This is compounded due to the lack of jobs that would retain youth in the community who could live on the family farm. For the most part, the family farm can no longer sustain these families without work from off farm employment to provide health coverage and benefits.

Environmental issues, along with increasing regulations, will make small scale farming impractical for many producers. Because of previous pollution, many watersheds may reduce or limit production agriculture.

Invasive Pests

Weeds – Poison Hemlock, Canadian Thistle, Bush Honeysuckle

Black Vultures

Emerald Ash Borer

As agricultural activity is reduced, the need for agricultural support businesses is slowly eliminated. Farm supplies and equipment dealers will struggle to stay in business.

As production agriculture trends change in Bracken County, producers who are apathetic or refuse to work with these changes will unfortunately face situations such as loss of the family farm, bankruptcy, or finding work outside of agriculture to sustain the family and way of life.

MISSION/VISION STATEMENT

The mission of the Bracken County Agricultural Development Council is to stabilize and improve existing farming enterprises; increasing opportunities for new and existing farmers by enhancing old markets, creating new markets, and developing new value added farm products. Successful quality farming in our county will help maintain our rural identity as well as provide an ideal place to live and raise our families.

SHORT TERM PRIORITIES: LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION

Due to the topography and size of Bracken County farms, Cow Calf Operations hold the most potential for success. Beef Cattle Programs have been identified as the best opportunity to improve Bracken County's Agriculture Potential. With a largely underutilized resource of 70,000 acres of pasture, county cattle numbers could easily double and possibly triple. Through pasture and forage improvement programs, the council plans on helping Bracken County reach its potential stocking rates. Possible programs include fencing improvement for quality pasture utilization, rotational intensive grazing education, and no-till seeder leasing.

QUALITY

The Council has also recognized the need to improve the quality of calves marketed. Incentives through group marketing efforts will encourage producers to adopt herd health practices that will improve calf quality including reduction of illness and death loss, increased weight gain, and a more uniform product. An additional incentive to participate in group marketing will be a group purchasing program for calf inputs, including vaccines, vitamins, wormers, minerals, etc. all at a reduced rate. Genetic improvement to meet market demands is a key to producing quality calves. Through programs that provide training and equipment necessary to perform artificial insemination on the farm, producers will be empowered to improve the quality of their herds now and in the future. Other projects such as bull leasing and heifer sales will be reviewed for their genetic improving potentials.

MARKETING

The success of increasing overall livestock production will rely on increasing market options and potential through a regional effort. The surrounding 6 counties have a total of 138,000 head of livestock with over 250,000 head in a 60-mile radius. These numbers, united together, offering larger lots of similar calves that include size, color, breed, and criteria that meet buyers demands, should command higher prices through more competitive buying. To offer increased profits for all livestock, we will utilize our USDA Processing Facility to add value to the non-fed and cull animals through products that can be marketed locally and regionally. Higher prices received for these animals will result in culling practices that will ultimately improve the overall quality of the herd.

CATTLE RELATED ENTERPRISES

With improved forages being a key component to the success of increasing cattle profits, the sale of excess, high quality hay to other livestock producers or enterprises can offer another way to increase income generated from the farm. Farms that achieve stocking rates can now further cattle profits by selling quality breeding stock.

SHORT TERM PRIORITIES – HORTICULTURE

Because of our familiarity with labor-intensive crop production and the need for high returns on a per acre basis, horticulture production has tremendous potential for Bracken County. Production of these types of crops has been successful in the past with large yields of high quality fruits and vegetables. The challenge has been finding a fair and reliable market for the products grown. Our small farmers market has a growing demand for products and there is room for more growers to meet the demand. If producers are willing to travel to Northern KY, the market potential is unlimited.

Direct to consumer beef has opened up tremendous demand for a small number of producers and one is supplying local restaurants. The limitation is due to the lack of USDA processing facilities in the state. Growth in this area for small producers could be huge if a processor could locate here.

NEW ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITIES

The County Council will consider any new crop or enterprises that exhibit the potential for profit along with a viable market for the product grown or produced. Funds will be available to producers that meet criteria set by the council for new enterprises.

LONG TERM PRIORITIES

The long-term goal of the Bracken County Agricultural Development Council is to create a diverse agricultural community, enabling producers to select the enterprise that is best suited to their farm, facilities, and interest. The key to success will be the development of markets and educational programs that will give producers the necessary tools to produce and sell a wide variety of products at a profit.

The desire of the council is that Bracken County will be able to continue its strong rural traditions for many years into the future.

TACTICS FOR LEVERAGING FUNDS

We will support programs and proposals that include cost share funds equal to or greater than 50% of the total cost for each application.

The criteria set by the application process will encourage producers to seek other funds such as grants as well as using their own capital investment in projects. Proposals should show fund recipients and responsible parties. Applications should contain the necessary accounting information to show the feasibility of the project. All regional projects must show equal participation among counties involved as well as strong support from state funds and the potential of alternative funding sources.

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The proposals will follow the criteria set forth by the application using the points for each category. Applications will be accepted and reviewed the following month. These will then be forwarded monthly to the state board for review. Reports that show the status of the projects or proposals, financial, growth, and community impact will be required on a semi annual basis. The County Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed by the council on an annual basis to determine if revisions are needed. A complete plan revision will take place every 5 years.