

Clark County
Agricultural Development Council

Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Clark County

Comprehensive Plan Update

County Agricultural Development Councils have the responsibility to evaluate the needs of the local agricultural economy. The updated County Comprehensive Plan should identify programs and projects best suited for agricultural development fund investments in the County.

The Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy staff may provide guidance to county councils throughout this evaluation.

1. Overview of County

Agriculture in many forms has always been the backbone of Clark County. It once prided itself on being the industrial hemp production capital of the world, producing champion sheep and cattle, quality Burley tobacco, and other row crops. Today, Beef Cattle, hay and forages, grain, and tobacco production still dominate the agricultural landscape. Clark County is also home to many agriculture industries that not only serve the county, but the region as well. These include a grain elevator, two fertilizer plants, a corporate feed mill, and a host of agricultural businesses. In the decline of the tobacco industry, agricultural entrepreneurs continue to explore new potential avenues such as industrial hemp, wineries, agritourism, and other alternative crops. Like most counties, Clark County is not without its challenges. The number of farmers, farms, and farm acreages have all declined demonstrating the difficulty of replacing Burley tobacco that has been such a large provider of farm income for generations.

a. Agricultural statistics, trends, & projections (i.e. Census Data)

- Traditional agricultural production

In recent years agriculture has focused largely on raising beef cattle, hay and some tobacco. The average annual value of all farm products sold in 2017 totaled 34 million dollars. Crops accounted for 15.4 million, while livestock accounted for 18.5 million. There are approximately 871 farms in the county at an average size of 169. Tobacco is now estimated at less than 1,000 acres.

- Non-traditional agricultural production

There are two vineyards, a limited amount of commercial horticulture, and two agritourism venues (bison, and a fruit orchard) in Clark County. Bee-keeping, equine, timber, cut flowers, nursery, sod production, Christmas Trees, direct retail meats and vegetables for farmers markets, and non-traditional grain crops such as rye have also been a part of the Clark County agricultural landscape in recent years.

- New & emerging agricultural production

Breweries and distilleries offer potential for hops, rye and a variety of other crop production; as well as livestock feeds. With Clark County's close proximity to Urban Lexington and Winchester's metropolitan population, agritourism ventures continue to be an emerging possibility, as well as the production and sales of local, farm fresh products to these populations.

- Tobacco dependency

Tobacco production is still a major crop in Clark County that many farming families rely on. Current trends in the tobacco industry will continue to have a negative impact on the agricultural economy. However, many farmers will need to put more emphasis on other avenues of production, or look to new opportunities, to further decrease dependence on tobacco.

b. Demographic Data

- Social data

Clark County has approximately 35,872 residents with a little more than half the population living in the City of Winchester. The county is composed of approximately 252 square miles with 85% dedicated to farmland. Poverty rate is approximately 15.6% while the under 18 poverty rate is 23%. Percentage of the population that is non-white is 10% and approximately 17% of the population is over the age of 65. The average farmer age is 56.

- Economic data

There are approximately 871 farm operations in Clark County with a per farm average of \$39,067 of products sold annually. Median household income is \$52,938 with an unemployment rate of 4.8%. The largest employers are in the sectors of manufacturing and industry, retail trade, public administration, and healthcare. Job numbers are projected to remain constant, or increase slightly by 2022.

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

An abundance of farmland throughout most of the county. Good soils. Location- have access, or within a short distance of accessing two interstates, and the Mt. Parkway and located near 3 cities -Lexington, Richmond, and Mt. Sterling. An abundance of supporting agricultural industries and markets- fertilizer plants, agricultural supply stores, feed mills, grain elevators, timber markets, and processors (bioenergy, hemp). Supporting groups and agencies such as the Clark County Extension Service, Clark County Soil and Water Conservation Service, Cattlemen's Association, Clark County Kentucky Farm Bureau and more. Support and awareness of agriculture by local government. Close access to several livestock markets in neighboring cities. Willingness of producers to diversify and try new things.

b. Weaknesses

Inability to manage market volatility for major crops and livestock due to lack of infrastructure- little grain storage capacity, degrading marketing facilities, not enough market for agricultural expansion, lack of diversified marketing avenues, limited rail space for grain elevator, etc. More vertical integration needed of all locally produced Ag products. A lack of interest in younger generation to continue or begin farming operations. Increasing average age of the farmer. Dwindling labor supply, as well as additional cumbersome paperwork processes for H2A migrant labor. Lack of public knowledge about the agriculture industry in general. High land prices.

c. Opportunities

- Good Soils and abundant farmland mean allow for much potential diversification of production.
- Expansion of the agriculture economy because of supporting suppliers, services, and existing markets.
- Creation of new markets due to good location (proximity to urban areas). Niche markets, and potential for direct sales.
- Increasing demand for agricultural products, especially local.
- Farmers can capitalize on competitive regional beef markets, and knowledge base.

d. Challenges

- Expand to new markets and create marketing avenues for products that aren't currently being produced.
- Increasing regulations, and existing regulations on farming and emerging farming industries.
- Get more youth involved in farming.
- Increase productivity, efficiency, or expand given dwindling labor supply, and increasing expenses.
- Maintain support of the public for the farming industry
- Compete, and maintain farm viability despite high market volatility and limited room in existing markets

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission/Vision Statement

To enhance the economy of the agricultural community of Clark County. The mission is to develop programs to achieve this goal with keeping agriculture a competitive and thriving entity.

b. Short term goals

- Assisting producers with further diversification of farming operations, and making further transition for less dependency on tobacco.
- Promote environmental stewardship by supporting and promoting the Dead Animal Removal Program
- Promote Youth involvement in agriculture, and increase youth involvement in agriculture.
- Support and invest in shared use equipment that will provide the greatest benefit to the county, and further promote agricultural production.

c. Long term goals

- Assist and support in developing new agriculture crop alternatives to tobacco and enhance existing markets such as horticultural crops, local meat markets and others.
- Promote the development of Niche Markets, or the creation of new marketing opportunities.
- Work toward agricultural infrastructure improvements that will further promote and expand existing agricultural production in the county.
- Support the development, and advancement of the local farmers market.
- Promote environmental programs that will help to sustain Clark County Agriculture resources such as advances in cover crops and crop rotation.
- Include all facets of Clark County agriculture in agricultural investments, and assist as many different Clark County farmers as possible.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional partnerships

- Governors Office of Agriculture Policy
- Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund
- Regional agricultural lender opportunities
- Neighboring County Agriculture Development Councils
- Industries supporting regional farming operations
- Kentucky Agricultural Finance Cooporation

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

- GOAP staff
- Feasibility analysis/discussion
- Guidance regarding compliance and implementation
- Matching State Funds for county projects

- Other local/state/federal resources
Clark County Soil and Water Conservation, Clark County Cooperative Extension Service, Clark County Farm Bureau, Clark County Cattlemen's Association, Clark County 4-H and FFA, NRCS, FSA, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, local lending Institutions, Clark County local government, City of Winchester

3. Evaluation & Review

- a. How are proposals evaluated and does this process need modified?

Those submitting proposals for funding follow the application procedures provided by the Kentucky Agriculture Development Board, and GOAP. Proposals must be presented to the Clark County Agriculture Development Council where all parties have opportunity to submit input in an open town hall style meeting. Proposals will be evaluated by the County Agriculture Development Council for consistency with the Clark County Comprehensive Plan and investment priorities. State requirements shall prevail in the case of any inconsistencies between this plan and state guidelines. Any modification to this process shall be made within state guidelines.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

Success and failure is measured based upon reported outcomes required by state guidelines (i.e. dollars generated, businesses created, impact upon the agricultural community, etc.). Formal evaluations are not typical, but successful projects have been those that have created new markets, increased production efficiency, decreased necessary expenses over time, or increased market prices.

- c. How will the county comprehensive plan be revised?

The Clark County Comprehensive Plan will be revised based upon input for the Clark County Agriculture Development Council, agriculture leadership groups (i.e Extension Advisory Boards, Cattlemen's Board, Farm Bureau Board, etc.), agricultural producers in the county, and many other local regional stakeholders as required by the GOAP and Kentucky Agriculture Development Council directives.

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