

# **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF THE GALLATIN COUNTY AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

## **OVERVIEW OF COUNTY**

Agriculture in Gallatin County has for several decades revolved primarily around the production of burley tobacco and beef cattle. This is still the case today. There is also an increased amount of grain production (2,800 acres in 2012). Hay production is very important to Gallatin County farmers (nearly 7,000 acres grown in the county); most hay grown is utilized on farm, but several producers have been successful in marketing surplus hay.

While still an important cash crop, tobacco production is not nearly as widely grown as it was even ten years ago. In 2012, Gallatin County grew just over 480 acres of tobacco worth approximately 1.8 million dollars.

There is some non-traditional agriculture taking place in Gallatin County. Gallatin, at one time, was known statewide as the “nursery county” due to all the acreage dedicated to in-ground nursery production. At this time, only one in-ground nursery remains in the county. But recently, other non-traditional interests have sprung-up.

One producer is successfully growing and selling landscape trees and shrubs in containers for the wholesale. Retail floriculture is still popular; Gallatin County has one retail garden center, and four retail stores that also carry a wide variety of seasonal flowering and vegetable plants. A few farmers are growing and selling vegetables, both for the retail and wholesale markets. Several individuals are supplementing their income by producing and selling honey. One producer is raising and selling organic meat and eggs; he markets his products off the farm and through farm markets in Boone County. And, more and more firewood is being harvested and sold both in and out of the county.

If one were to chart agricultural trends in Gallatin County over the past decade, the lines on the chart would certainly point upwards. Total farm cash receipts have raised by over \$2 million. This is primarily due to an increase in grain production. Since 2002 grain receipts have risen by 1.3 million dollars.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

With a land area of only 99 square miles, Gallatin is the smallest county in the state. In 2013, the estimated population of the county was approximately 8,500 residents. This represents an increase of nearly 1,000 since 2000. The county seat is Warsaw with Glencoe and Sparta comprising the other major towns within county boundaries.

Gallatin County is situated on the Ohio River in Northern Kentucky. The county is located only 75 miles from either Louisville or Lexington, and less than 40 miles from

Cincinnati, OH. Gallatin County is poised within what many call the “Golden Triangle” formed by Interstates 71, 75, and 64. This locale has figured heavily into the county’s recent industrial and residential expansion to be discussed later.

Prior to the 1970's, the area economy was tied heavily to agriculture production and marketing along with sales and earnings in related agricultural industries. Conversely, in 1997, farm earnings made up less than 1.5% of total county earnings with less than 13% of the total number of wage earners claiming full- or part-time farm employment as an occupation.

As mentioned earlier, the economic landscape has changed dramatically since the middle of the last century, even more so during the decade of the 1990's. During that time, Gallatin County saw the influx of big steel and steel related industries, the coming of an aluminum foundry which manufactures automotive wheels, and the completion of a 2,000 acre motorsports racing complex which has hosted several NASCAR Sprint Cup races. Add to this the addition of a resort hotel with a gaming boat directly across the river in Indiana, and it is apparent that Gallatin County is quickly losing its rural identity.

## **REVIEW OF THE PROCESS**

The Gallatin County Agricultural Development Council sought input from all sectors of our community in developing its comprehensive plan. By way of newspaper articles, feature stories, and direct mailings, local residents were invited to attend any, or all, of three public forums which were conducted. Not only did the forums inform the public as to what the Phase I settlement is all about, they also allowed for open discussion and the opportunity to bring forth project concepts. In addition, questionnaires were developed and distributed at these forums, and at other opportunities, for the purpose of soliciting project and funding ideas.

## **ASSESSMENTS**

### **Strengths**

Once again, our geographic location must be listed among our greatest assets. With our close proximity to three metropolitan areas and the transportation infrastructure already in place (i.e., Interstates 71 & 75, the railway system, and the Ohio River) the potential is incredible for marketing most any agricultural commodity.

Gallatin County now has established planning and zoning regulations, and a planning and zoning board which is very sympathetic to agriculture interests.

However, our greatest strength lies in our people. We have well-established family farms operated by highly competent farm families. As the county has changed, our

farmers have been forced to change with it. They have learned to be flexible in many ways while still holding steadfast to their belief in the farming way of life.

## **Weaknesses**

Many of our weaknesses as they pertain to agricultural development are common among Kentucky counties. There is a tremendous shortage of agricultural labor; without migrant help, it would be next to impossible for our medium and large farms to plant and harvest.

The average age of farmers in Gallatin County is over 58. Few young men or women have entered into farming as their vocation. Human nature being such as it is, these older farmers are less likely to experiment with new alternative crops.

Another weakness is a lack of marketing opportunities for other than traditional agricultural commodities. County producers have few problems selling livestock, grain or tobacco. But if any should have a truckload of tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, or shrimp, their chances of marketing those locally are practically non-existent.

## **Opportunities**

There are opportunities available to the farming population of Gallatin County. The rapid industrial, commercial, and residential growth the county has experienced has greatly increased traffic flow on the county highways. All this traffic increases the potential for roadside fruit and vegetable stands, farm markets, and other direct marketing ventures. In some cases, this traffic flow could make the concept of "entertainment farming" an attractive alternative.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity lies not entirely in the "new" or "alternative", but instead in learning to be more creative and efficient in our traditional farming enterprises. Improved grazing practices could help streamline the livestock/forage industry in Gallatin County. Utilizing modern equipment and labor sharing could improve tobacco profitability. Likewise, improved techniques and innovative equipment could greatly improve the yield and quality of our hay and other forage crops.

## **Threats**

One of our greatest strengths has also contributed to many of our greatest threats. This prime geographic location has, as aforementioned, caused significant industrial, commercial, and residential growth in the county. As a result, there has been a significant loss of agricultural land in the county. This same development has also increased land values to the extent that the tax liabilities have become much more

burdensome. A young person simply could not start-up a new farm operation in Gallatin County today.

Another threat lies in the seemingly unending stream of government regulations targeted at farm families. Farmers bear the brunt of one environmental issue after the other. Unless common sense at the government level begins to prevail, fewer and fewer farmers will be willing to put up with these issues.

Lastly, many Gallatin County farmers are concerned about the potential for litigation against them. With more and more residences being located near, or adjoining, established farms, the potential for accidents and misunderstandings has greatly increased.

## **COUNTY COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

### **Mission/Vision Statement**

The Gallatin County Agriculture Development Council seeks to promote and encourage projects that will expand the overall agricultural base of our county. We feel farm families can do this by preserving and expanding existing farm enterprises and/or exploring new enterprises. The Council hopes to encourage profitable examples that may be used as models for other farm families. Our vision of agriculture in Gallatin County is one that is diversified and prosperous while being economically and environmentally sustainable.

We believe we can best accomplish this by: continuing our proud heritage of tobacco production while at the same time de-emphasizing our dependence on that crop; by improving the quality and quantity of our beef and forage production; and by taking full advantage of horticultural and niche markets that prove themselves to be profitable.

### **TACTICS FOR LEVERAGING FUNDS**

Private groups or individuals applying for county Phase I funding will be required to cost-share at least 50% of the expenses incurred in the project. But, the county council has the discretion to waive this cost share requirement for non-profit agriculture related groups.

County Phase I funds may be used to help leverage funds from other local, state, or federal agencies or lending institutions.

County Phase I funds may be used to participate in regional or multi-county partnerships IF the council agrees that such a partnership is deemed the best way to approach the project, and IF the project is in unison with the county comprehensive plan.

## **PHASE I COUNTY FUNDING PRIORITIES**

Based on the opportunities that exist in Gallatin County and on the vision of the future that we believe is in store for Gallatin farm families, the following priority areas need to be addressed by the Phase I Tobacco Settlement funding.

The C.A.I.P. program is the main vehicle used for cost-sharing funds to Gallatin County Producers.

## **EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

The Gallatin County Agriculture Development Council will review and prioritize submitted applications based on criteria as determined by the State Agriculture Development Board. The county council may ask applicants who received grant money to report back on the success of the project after one year. The goals for the project submitted in the application may be used to help judge project success.

The county council will review, and if necessary revise, the comprehensive plan every two years or as the need dictates.