

Kenton County  
Agricultural Development Council

Update of  
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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# Kenton County Comprehensive Plan 2015

## Overview of Kenton County

Kenton County is located in the northernmost section of Kentucky and is bordered on the east by the Licking River and on the north by the Ohio River. Kenton County consists of approximately 103,680 acres, of which 38,144 is classified as farm land. This amount is in 459 farms averaging approximately 84 acres per farm. The soils within the county are basically one-half Eden clay loam and one-half Faywood clay loam with Eden clay loam being the predominant soil in the agricultural area of the county. Due to the steepness of the land, cultivated crops are limited to a small number of acres with most land being best suited for pasture or hay. Kenton County ranks third in the state in population (167,000) with 95% of the county's residents living in urban communities.

Traditional agriculture production in the county includes beef cattle, forages (includes some cash hay), alfalfa, corn silage, meat goats, tobacco, and commercial horticulture production. Based on Kentucky Agriculture Statistics, Kenton County's 2012 agriculture production included:

### Crops as follows:

- |            |     |
|------------|-----|
| • Corn     | 9%  |
| • Soybeans | 39% |
| • All hay  | 52% |

### Livestock as follows:

- |                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| • Cattle and calves        | 79% |
| • All other horse & equine | 21% |

2012 Kentucky Agriculture Statistics indicated the agriculture receipts for Kenton County as:

- |                               |             |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| • Total value of all products | \$5,267,000 |
|-------------------------------|-------------|

Kenton County has always had a tradition of commercial horticulture production. There are approximately 30 commercial horticulture producers who sale their product at farmers' markets or by wholesale and an energy trend toward timber and firewood. Horticultural producers continue to take steps to strengthen the commercial horticulture infrastructure in the county.

As the tobacco program has changed, there has been strong interest in increasing traditional agricultural enterprises such as beef cattle, hay production, and nontraditional produce and wine, as well as exploring new alternative agricultural enterprises such as floriculture, agri-

tourism, and vineyards. Taking advantage of being part of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Area, traditional as well as alternative operations have an opportunity to provide sustained economic growth. The addition of four farmer's markets in Kenton County has provided an outlet for retail sales of farm goods. There's a recent trend toward agri-tourism operations such as vineyards, farm tours and on-farm direct sales.

- Tobacco dependency

There is a trend to less tobacco production in Kenton County. It appears there are more alternative (non-traditional) enterprises. The loss of tobacco base program and open market contracts are dictating declining tobacco trends.

- Demographic Data

Social data.

66,000 total households

95% urban

3,300 households in unincorporated (Kenton County farm areas)

Economic data.

1074 people that receive income from farm operations in Kenton County (1.4% of total county employment)

29% of farm operations externally owned

4.6% of farm operators are non-white

52% have 1 operator

40% have 2 operators

4% have 3 operators

3% have 4 operators

1% has 5 operators

## **Review of the Process**

One of the goals of the Kenton County Agriculture Development Council was to seek input from the local community in identifying needs and opportunities that would be included in the comprehensive plan. Information was gathered using two community forums, feature articles, newsletters, and surveys. At the two community forums, a comprehensive agriculture survey was distributed, which allowed the agriculture community the opportunity to evaluate and prioritize individual projects that could be funded by Phase I funds and therefore help to revitalize the agriculture community. Results of the community forums and the agriculture surveys were instrumental in the development of the Kenton County comprehensive plan.

## **Strengths**

Kenton County is part of the Greater Cincinnati Metropolitan area, which has in place an extensive highway, rail, and water transportation system along with an international airport. These resources, coupled with a high per capita income consumer base, provide Kenton County producers with a tremendous opportunity to market agriculture products locally.

Kenton County has an underutilized forage base that, if managed correctly, could provide increased income to our farmers. We also have diverse agriculture and horticulture enterprises that have a tradition of producing crops other than those produced on traditional tobacco and livestock operations. Kenton County now has grape production and meat goat production and market produce operations. Many of the farmers have off-farm jobs and most have a sincere interest in maintaining a viable family farm.

Agriculture agencies such as the Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, and Kenton County Farm Bureau and other associations including Northern Kentucky Cattle Association, Northern Kentucky Horse Network, Northern Kentucky Goat Producers, and farmers' market organizations, work closely to improve the productivity and profitability of Kenton County's agriculture community while conserving the county's natural resources.

## **Weaknesses**

One of Kenton County's greatest weaknesses is its lack of tillable land. Much of our land is too steep to cultivate and has limited productivity due to its high clay content and shallow depth of topsoil. While reliable water sources are decreasing, the logistics and costs of municipal water service are cost prohibitive and raising an appropriate crop on our topography to replace the return of tobacco reduces the opportunity to diversify. Even though there is a diversity of agriculture production in the county, many farmers are reluctant to make changes in their farming operations that could improve profitability. A lack of participation in educational programs and insufficient on-farm field demonstrations are recognized as problems. There is an opportunity to sell agriculture products at existing farmers' markets. Distance to lime quarries, distance to traditional livestock stockyards, and lack of county water has also been identified as a concern in Kenton County. The distance from feed mills and other farm suppliers creates premium price points for agriculture producers. Lack of reliable labor to work on farms (seasonally) limits expansion of farm operations.

## **Opportunities**

Possibly one of Kenton County's greatest opportunities lies in its underutilized forage base. Increase revenues are possible if farmers would implement best management practices such as pasture renovation, improved fertility, grazing management, and water development. By increasing our forage capacity, revenues from our beef and cash hay enterprises could be increased. Kenton County's large population and its proximity to Cincinnati provide an excellent opportunity to market agriculture, horticulture and specialty crops directly to the consumer. There are additional opportunities in agri-tourism, (horse boarding, riding trails, petting zoos, pay lakes, bed and breakfasts, etc.) and farmers markets.

## **Challenges**

Lack of public knowledge about the importance of agriculture continues to threaten existing farming operations. Kenton County has experienced rapid urban growth and will continue to see urban development encroaching on agriculture enterprises. This has impacted traditional county agriculture in two ways. Land values have escalated to the point where their costs are prohibitive for potential producers to initiate new farming enterprises or existing farmers to expand. As urban expansion escalates, environmental concerns will become more of an issue. For example, cattle farmers will need to manage more closely their waste handling procedures, while crop producers will be strictly scrutinized for potential pesticide and fertilizer runoff and pesticide drift.

## **Mission**

The Kenton County Agriculture Development Council is committed to enhancing the economic viability of the family farm. We propose to accomplish this with short- and long-term projects and programs that will expand our production and marketing potential. The Council's unified goal is to foster a creative atmosphere which will enable existing farmers as well as potential producers to initiate agricultural enterprises that offer sustained economic growth.

## **Short-Term Priorities**

During recent years, leadership groups, such as the Northern Kentucky Cattle Association, Kenton County Farm Tour, NKHN, Northern Kentucky Meat Goat Association, youth programs such as 4-H and Simon Kenton FFA, FFA Alumni, Kenton County Farm Bureau, and the Kenton County Agriculture Advisory Council, have worked to improve the productivity and profitability of existing agriculture enterprises. One of our short-term goals is to support these leadership groups as they develop projects that will strengthen the agriculture economy in Kenton County. Kenton Agriculture Development Board is conducting a study of the viability of a regional commercial kitchen and Kentucky proud store. Specific livestock/forage projects that would be given top priority during the short term are: Intensive grazing, pasture renovation, cattle genetics improvement, fencing, hay and grain storage, and cattle handling facilities. Individuals establishing new or alternative agriculture enterprises, such as fresh produce, goats, organic farming, grapes, or agri-tourism, cheese making, poultry, and value-added products would also be considered for funding. We encourage the cooperation among farmers as they develop projects and also for the purchasing and marketing of agriculture products. The Council also encourages continued educational programs that will support the above-mentioned projects. Educational programs should focus on production and marketing as well as increasing the public's awareness of the importance of agriculture.

## **Long-Term Priorities**

One of the long-term goals of the Council is to continue supporting the grassroots leadership groups, educational programs, and the above-mentioned projects that are vital to our agriculture economy. Continued support of farmers' market(s) would provide a viable market for a wide range of agriculture products. Cooperation among farmers and developing direct marketing outlets for agriculture crops are long-term goals of the Council. A sustained effort to

engage young people in agriculture production and careers is also a long-term priority.

## **Tactics for Leveraging Funds**

Based on the projects that have been identified by the local agriculture community, we anticipate that a majority of the applications will be asking for county funds. The Council has set a minimum of a 50% cost share by all applicants requesting either county or state funding. This percentage could increase based on the number of applicants and the availability of funds. Applications must clearly show the individual or groups contribution to the project and the project's potential benefit to the individual farmer(s) or to the agriculture community. Every effort will be made to coordinate like projects as one application. Funding sources other than county funds and individual contributions will be encouraged, especially projects requesting state funds.

- Regional partnerships.
  - Kentucky Farm Bureau, Farmers' Market, producers, encourage farmers to diversify their operations
  - Administration of CAIP Programs in Kenton County
  - Encourage all residents to apply for CAIP program
- State Agricultural Development Board resources.
  - Encourage farmers to seek low interest loans through ADF from GOAP
  - Seek funding for non-model projects at State Ag Development Board

## **Evaluation and Review**

- a. How are proposals evaluated and does this process need modified?
  - CAIP applications are evaluated according to state guidelines.
  - CAIP program is administered by Kenton County Farm Bureau.
  - All projects are inspected to ensure they are complying within guidelines.
- b. How is success and failure measured?
  - By percentage of unfinished projects.
- c. How will the county comprehensive plan be revised?
  - By committee of Kenton County Ag Development Board.

These organizations will assure unbiased evaluation of each application. Proposals with clear goals and objectives, strong business and cost share plans, and having the opportunity to increase farm profitability will be given strong consideration. Applicants will be encouraged to share their projects with other farmers through field days, tours and written reports.

Kenton County Ag Development Board will meet as needed to gather ideas on improving the comprehensive plan and accepting non-model projects on a case-by-case basis.

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