

**Nicholas County
Agricultural Development Council**

**Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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Submitted by:

List County Council Members

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Nicholas 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

Traditionally, Nicholas County's agriculture has been made up of tobacco, livestock, and forages. Tobacco has historically been the top revenue source in the agriculture economy. With the loss in tobacco revenues, the small family farm has suffered tremendous economic hardship.

Beef cattle has become the leading agriculture economic producer bringing in \$11,787,000 according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Nicholas County, though near the bottom in land size, ranks 32nd in beef numbers within the state. The January 2017 inventory shows an excess of 24,421 head of beef cattle in the county. With nearly 19,000 acres in pasture and forage base, beef cattle seems to be an area where our production has begun to peak. Areas that would help in maintaining this would be adding new fences, water systems, and pasture improvement.

Forages is the other important piece of the agriculture picture. Most all of the forages produced in the county are utilized by the livestock operations on farm.

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

- Traditional agricultural production

Traditional agriculture in Nicholas County includes but is not limited to beef cattle, dairy cattle, forages, and last but not least tobacco. At the 2017 census of Agriculture, we rank 32nd in the state for beef cattle numbers, 35th in the state for forage acres, and 9th in the state for total tobacco acres.

- Non-traditional agricultural production

Non-traditional agriculture production in Nicholas County includes berry production (four farms). Greenhouse and horticulture production for local farmers markets (very popular with the Amish population). Numerous purebred beef operations (have been provided by better genetic opportunities).

- **New & emerging agricultural production**
Although there is no solid statistical value on these claims, we have many producers who are venturing into the commercial organic market. Along those same lines we also have producers who are seeking more interest into the local food movement and large scale farmers markets.
- **Tobacco dependency**
Tobacco dependency is still very prominent in the Nicholas County agriculture community. According to the 2017 agriculture census data, 68% of all crop sales in the county were from tobacco which accounted for some \$8,657,000 brought into the county by this crop.

b. Demographic Data

- **Social data**
Since there are only 391 people who live and work in Nicholas County, and 354 in-commuters for a total of 745 regular employed individuals, there is not much momentum in the county during the traditional work week hours. A total of 2,474 people commute outside of the county for employment which is good because they are working, but this is where they also tend to spend their paycheck which is detrimental to the local economy. In summary, more citizens work and spend outside of Nicholas County than in it.
- **Economic data**
With a total county population of around 7,166, Nicholas County can not afford a decreasing population if we are to maintain a workforce. The county's poverty rate is well below the state rate at 28%. This is due much in part to the loss of the county's industrial strength and the crash of the tobacco market in the early 2000's. Economic recovery has been slow since those events.

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

One major strength that Nicholas County holds is its emotional ties to the farm and more particularly the family farm. Nicholas County producers are willing to find a way to stay on the farm, even if that means holding on to a commodity that could not be profitable, or alternatively and more strategically adapt and find new way to make the same parcel of land profitable. This strong tie to family land comes from a long standing connection to tobacco production that people in the county are but reluctantly giving up.

b. Weaknesses

A lack of willingness to adapt to new enterprises is a major concern in the Agriculture industry of Nicholas County. Historical tradition has created vicious cycle of Ag production here in the county and with out proper diversification, producers and the agriculture industry as a whole in Nicholas County will begin to suffer.

c. Opportunities

One area where Nicholas County producers could easily find success is the niche/organic agriculture market. There is an up and coming local food movement where consumers want to know where their food comes from, how it was made, and what types of things they are putting into their body when they eat. With our rural land mass and relatively close proximity to Lexington; with the assistance of large farmers markets and online marketing, Nicholas County has potential to have a huge local food market.

d. Challenges

Nicholas County is a rural area that seemingly has been identified as a new development opportunity by outside investors. They seem to feel they can attract new citizens by offering urban conveniences in a rural setting. Due to this new activity we are seeing land prices escalate. Small producers already experience difficulty in securing land at prices that could be repaid through agricultural enterprises. New development creates additional liability issues that must be addressed by producers.

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission/Vision Statement

The mission for the Nicholas County Agricultural Development Council will be to promote and encourage agriculture programs and projects that will expand the agricultural industry of Nicholas County. The Nicholas County Agricultural Development Council fully believes that agriculture must be preserved as a vital segment of Nicholas County's economy.

b. Short term goals

1. Allow access to the KADF funding to every producer in Nicholas County, with priority given to those producers suffering the greatest hardship from the tobacco reduction.
2. Provide the necessary proposal forms to producers on a timely basis.
3. Assist producers in development of proposals.
4. Review proposals on a timely basis.
5. Work with other county groups on potential regional proposals.

c. Long term goals

1. Accept proposals that assist Nicholas County producers and create healthy agricultural economy.
2. To stimulate the agricultural economy of Nicholas County.
3. To promote additional opportunities for marketing agricultural commodities produced in Nicholas County.
4. Develop a working relationship with neighboring counties for exploring future projects.
5. To protect the Family Farm.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

▪ Regional partnerships

Although I do not know of any instances since my time of employment in Nicholas County. Our Agricultural Development Board would always be interested in regional investments with or without other counties being involved if the investment were sound and would have a direct positive impact on Nicholas Counties producers.

▪ State Agricultural Development Board resources

Our resource from the State Agriculture Development Board is its willingness to help use Nicholas County KADF funds to support county level projects.

- Other local/state/federal resources

Local resources for funds include but are not limited to. All 4-H based Clubs, Nicholas County Fiscal Court, Nicholas County Cattleman's Association, various government based and private grants, and sponsorships/donations from local businesses.

3. Evaluation & Review

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

The Nicholas County Agricultural Development Council will expect proposals to show evidence of in-kind, matching money, or other support equal to 50 percent of the total cost of the project. Proposals should clearly outline who the funds will be directed to and who will be responsible for the expenditures. A budget, outlining expenses, expected revenue sources, and expected potential impact on overall farming operation will be required. For projects utilizing multi-county funds or state funds, a request of Nicholas County funds must show evidence of the expected benefits to the citizens of Nicholas County, or the increased agricultural economy of Nicholas County.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

Success and failure of the Nicholas County Agriculture Development Board Funds will be measured in a number of ways. One of which will be a word of mouth, non-formal communication. Communication from local producers to the Agricultural Agent, the Fiscal Court, and the Agriculture Development Board. One must keep in mind with this usually only the negative issues are brought up. Also there will be annual surveys in the agricultural newsletter to gather opinions and views of the KADF programs in Nicholas County.

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

The county comprehensive plan will be revised by by the thoughts concerns and opinions provided by a combination of Nicholas County citizens, including but not limited to, the County Agriculture Agent, the Agriculture Development Board, and other concerned Nicholas producers. This seems like the most well suited group to revise this plan as it will affect them the most. This will be done in a timely as needed fashion as determined by the KADF office.

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