

Laurel County  
Agricultural Development Council

Update of  
County Comprehensive Plan

June 17, 2025

Submitted by:  
Hannah Owens  
Stephen Bales  
Tommy Young  
Larry Parman  
Brandon Fawbush  
Kenneth Massey  
Linda Wittenback  
Aaron Calebs  
Trent Prewitt  
Mike Calebs

Laurel County  
County Comprehensive Plan Update

1. Overview of County

a. Agricultural Statistics, Trends and Projections

Traditional Agriculture Production – Laurel County’s farm economy has for many decades been based principally on tobacco, beef production and to a lesser extent dairy production. The 2022 U. S. Census of Agriculture reported 871 farms in Laurel County, down 9% from the 2017 census. The average farm size in 2022 was 92 acres, down 2% from the 94 acre average reported in 2017.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed the total market value of products sold in Laurel County to be \$16,989,000, which is an increase of 10% from the 2017 census. Of the agricultural products sold, 57% were crop sales and 43% were livestock. The top producing crop sales reflected in the 2022 census were:

1. Vegetables – 39%
2. Other crops and hay – 31%
3. Nursery and greenhouse – 19%
4. Fruits, tree nuts and beans – 6%

Of the livestock sales, top-producing animals were:

1. Cattle and calves – 83%
2. Horses, ponies, mules and burros – 5%
3. Milk from cows – 3%
4. Sheep and goats – 2%
5. Poultry and eggs – 2%

The number of Laurel County farmers receiving government payments has increased by 209% from 2,197 in 2017 to 6,797 in 2022.

b. Demographic Data

In 2024, the U. S. Census Bureau estimated the population of Laurel County to be 63,353. Of this total, 96.5% were classified as white, 1.0% black, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.7% Asian, and 1.7% Hispanic.

The median age for all Laurel County citizens is 38.1. In 2024 there were 23,835 households in Laurel County with an average household size of 2.58.

In 2024, 61% of Laurel County citizens are rural, up from 57% in 2012. The number of citizens living in urban areas has decreased from 43% in 2012 to 39% in 2024.

83.1% of Laurel County citizens 25 and over are high school graduates. 16.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

In 2024, Laurel County showed a median household income of \$56,999. The per capita income was \$27,944. The number of Laurel County residents living below poverty level is 21.8%

## 2. Assessments of the County

Laurel County is in the southeastern part of Kentucky. It has an area of 285,250 acres. Almost all the soils in Laurel County are acid, and crops respond to applications of lime and fertilizer. The Laurel County soils are steep and formed in material derived mostly from sandstone and shale.

The elevation in the survey area ranges from about 723 to 1,730 feet above sea level. The climate is moderate and the growing season, defined as the number of days between the last temperature of 32 degrees F in the spring and the first in the fall, averages 181 days.

Farming is diversified in Laurel County. In 2022, Laurel County had 871 farms with an average size of 92 acres. The average value of land and buildings per acre was \$2,247. Of Laurel County's 871 producers, 455 are new and beginning farmers and 127 are military veterans.

One of the most important resources in Laurel County is the highway system. London is located two miles east of Interstate 75, a major north-south interstate highway. The Hal Rogers Parkway originates in London and extends to the east. Kentucky Highway 80, a "AAA"-rated trucking highway with an 80,000-pound gross load limit, serves London to the east and west. Kentucky Highway 229, a "AA"-rated trucking highway with a 62,000 pound gross load limit, extends from London to the south. London is within 600 miles of 53% of the United States population.

Alliance Packing KY, LLC received \$10,000 in funding support through the Laurel County Agricultural Development Council to help establish a local produce packaging and marketing outlet. The business was designed to give farmers a direct channel to large grocery stores and produce distributors, improving access to high-volume markets and increasing farm profitability. The funding assisted with startup costs and infrastructure needed to support this vital link between local agriculture and regional food systems.

Another council funded project that has proven to be of great benefit to area producers is the Wilderness Trail Area Beef Marketing Alliance. The facility provides a local venue for producers from an eight-county area to group and market their animals. Shorter transportation decreases fuel costs and stress on the animals, resulting in better quality product and increased profits.

## 3. County Council Objectives

Mission/Vision Statement - The mission of the Laurel County Agriculture Development Board is to help sustain existing agriculture in the county, while aiding the farmers in developing new sources of agricultural income for years to come.

- a. Short term goals - The council believes that our immediate or short-term goals are to add profitability to the already existing agricultural income in the county while helping the farmers develop and investigate new crop opportunities.
- b. Long term goals – Laurel County’s long-term goals will include assisting farmers in identifying and developing new agricultural opportunities. The Council will evaluate projects for the increased profitability of the program while continuing to educate farmers on new technologies and upcoming enterprises.
- c. Tactics for leveraging funds - The council will look for evidence that there will be matching of funds by the applicant and the level of his/her contribution will be a major determining factor for approval. All proposals will include a budget with anticipated income and expenditures.

The council will be receptive to applications that involve other areas if the applicant can show not only their contribution of funds but that other counties will be willing to match funds for a combined area enterprise. While the council is open to these kinds of proposals, they must be able to show a significant benefit for Laurel County farmers. We will also be working with the other state organizations that provide assistance to farmers to add profitability to the new and existing programs.

#### 4. Evaluation & Review

- a. How are proposals evaluated and does the process need modified? – Any applications for funding that are submitted are reviewed at the next scheduled council meeting. Regular meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month, provided there is business on the agenda to be discussed. The proposals are evaluated on the merit of the plan, matching funds, profitability for producers, feasibility for the area, and benefit to the community.
- b. How is success and failure measured? - The success or failure of a program is measured by the council based on growth or growth potential. The main determining factor for success of a program is whether local farmers have received benefit through increased profits or growth potential in the future.
- c. How will the county comprehensive plan be revised? - The county comprehensive plan will be revised as needed. If it is determined that relevant areas have been omitted and need to be addressed, amendments will be made to the plan. If a guideline contained in the plan is determined to be inadequate, the council will make appropriate modifications that are satisfactory to the members of the council and beneficial to the community.