

Lee County
Agricultural Development Council

Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Submitted by:

List County Council Members

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Lee 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 Kentucky Office of Agricultural Policy staff may provide guidance to county councils throughout this evaluation.

1. Overview of County

Lee County, Kentucky, is a rural county with an estimated 2025 population of 7,333, reflecting a -4.94% decline since 2010. The county's economy is largely agricultural, with 127 farms covering 29,469 acres. The primary crops include hay, corn, vegetables, and floriculture, with livestock and poultry also contributing to the agricultural economy.

Lee County is well-suited for forage crops and livestock farming, given its woodland-dominated landscape, which accounts for over 15,000 acres. The county's forestry sector benefits from its extensive forested areas, supporting timber and other woodland-related industries.

The topography of Lee County is characterized by rolling hills and valleys, typical of eastern Kentucky, making it ideal for forestry, livestock grazing, and certain specialty crops. The county's agricultural economy faces challenges, including declining farm numbers and negative net cash farm income, but remains a vital part of the local economy.

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

▪ Traditional agricultural production

Lee County, Kentucky, has a strong agricultural presence, with farming playing a vital role in the local economy. Here are some key statistics and trends:

- Farm Statistics: The county has 127 farms covering 29,469 acres, with a focus on hay, corn,

▪ Non-traditional agricultural production

Floriculture, organic production, forest farming, alternative livestock production. Lee County is projected to see an increase in this area of farming

- New & emerging agricultural production
Agritourism and alternative farming

- Tobacco dependency
Lee County has no farmers producing tobacco at this time

b. Demographic Data

- Social data

Lee County, Kentucky, has a population of 7,375 as of 2023, with a median age of 43.4 years. The county is predominantly White (94%), with 2% Black and 3% identifying as two or more races

- Economic data

Lee County, Kentucky, has a median household income of \$34,182, reflecting a 7.89% increase from the previous year. The county's economy employs 2,357 people, with the largest industries being health care, retail trade, and construction

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

- The county has rich farmland and extensive forested areas, making it well-suited for livestock farming, forage crops, and timber production.
- Natural Beauty & Tourism: With its rolling hills, valleys, and waterways, Lee County offers opportunities for outdoor recreation, eco-tourism, and conservation efforts.
- Close-Knit Community: The county has a strong sense of community, with residents supporting local businesses and initiatives.
- Affordable Living: The low cost of living and high homeownership rate (75%) make it an attractive place for families and retirees.
- Economic Potential: While facing challenges, Lee County has growth opportunities in specialty agriculture, forestry, and sustainable development.

b. Weaknesses

Lee County, Kentucky, faces several challenges that impact its economic and social development:

- Economic Struggles: The county has a high poverty rate (28.9%) and a low median household income (\$34,182), making financial stability a concern.
- Limited Job Opportunities: With only 2,357 employed residents, the county has fewer employment options, leading to outmigration for work.
- Education Gaps: Only 7.5% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, which limits access to higher-paying jobs.
- Crime Concerns: Lee County ranks in the 24th percentile for safety, meaning it is less safe than 76% of U.S. counties.
- Infrastructure & Transportation: The average commute time is 42.1 minutes,

c. Opportunities

- The county has potential for specialty farming, agroforestry, and sustainable agriculture, leveraging its natural resources.
 - Tourism & Outdoor Recreation: With its rolling hills and forested areas, Lee County can expand eco-tourism, hiking, and conservation efforts.
 - Infrastructure & Business Growth: Investments in transportation, broadband, and local businesses can enhance economic development.
- Lee County has the potential to grow through job creation, education, agriculture, and tourism, making it an attractive place for investment and development.

d. Challenges

- Flooding & Weather Disruptions: The county has experienced severe flooding, including a 100-year flood event in 2021, followed by another major flood in 2025. Recovery efforts have been complicated by winter storms and road damage.
- Infrastructure & Road Maintenance: Officials have highlighted road repair delays due to flood damage, with concerns about funding for flood gauges to monitor future risks.
- Economic Struggles: The county has a high poverty rate (28.9%) and limited job opportunities, leading to outmigration for work.
- Education & Workforce Development: Only 7.5% of residents hold a bachelor degree or higher, which limits access to higher-paying jobs.

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission/Vision Statement

Our mission is to strengthen Lee County by promoting economic diversification, supporting agriculture and forestry, enhancing education and workforce development, and investing in infrastructure. We are committed to preserving our natural landscapes, fostering community engagement, and ensuring a safe and prosperous environment for all residents.

Lee County's future lies in unity, innovation, and sustainability—building on our strengths while addressing challenges to shape a better tomorrow. What do you think? Would you like me to refine it further?

b. Short term goals

Provide educational assistance and training opportunities to Lee Countians. Provide assistance for farmers and farm families such as improved production techniques. Provide Infostructure development education.

c. Long term goals

Increase to number of sustainable farms and industry within the county. Educate and assist young farmers and landowners on new enterprises.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional partnerships

Participants are encouraged to seek other funds and information to improve their projects

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

Kentucky Department of Agriculture/Kentucky Proud

Kentucky Cattlemen Association/Kentucky Beef Network

Kentucky Young Farmers Association

- Other local/state/federal resources

3. Evaluation & Review

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

The County Council reviews all proposals

- b. How is success and failure measured?

Success is measured by the development of sustainable projects that is completed

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

By the county council

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