

Marion County
Agricultural Development Council
Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

March 26, 2025

Submitted By:

Angela Rakes

Anthony Mattingly

Charles Clark

Greg Morris

Jason Wade

Makenzie Thomas

Rebecca Hill

Roger Hardin

Tommy Glasscock

Marion 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 the County

Marion County has a population of around 20,000 and is fortunate to have a good mix of agriculture and industry. Industries include distilling, auto parts manufacturing, plastics among others. Tourism has grown in importance with the Kentucky Bourbon Trail that has brought many visitors to the county and helped create other tourism opportunities. Marion County also hosts Ham Days in September which is a fall festival held in Lebanon. Ham Days draws many visitors to the area each year and provides a connection to Marion County agriculture.

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

- Traditional agricultural production

Marion County has approximately 955 farms encompassing about 168,205 acres. Traditionally, tobacco and cattle have been Marion

County's primary enterprises, but tobacco has declined in importance and row crops; corn, soybeans and wheat have grown in popularity. The number of Dairy farms has fallen substantially, but the remaining farms have become larger.

- Non – traditional agricultural production

Marion County farmers have tried new products. Some are raising sheep and goats. Marion County has an alpaca farm starting up from newcomers moving here from out of state. Several small farmers grow and sell their produce at the Lebanon Farmers Market or via direct marketing. Many tracts in the county are heavily wooded and there are some active loggers in the county.

- Hemp Production

- Chukars, Peasants and Quail

- New and emerging agricultural production

Small farms and small ruminant production is increasing in our area. There has been an increase in out-of-state people moving in and starting small farms less than 30 acres.

Small ruminant production has increased in our area due to the low input cost and less dependency for facilities compared to large animals.

- Tobacco dependency

Tobacco production has fallen in importance in the county. There are less than 1,000 acres in Marion County.

B. Demographic Data

-Social data

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Marion County has 955 farms on 168,205 acres averaging 176 acres. There are about 43,324 head of cattle in the county. 89,538 acres are cropland, with pasture totaling 35,082 acres. There are 485 female farmers in the county as reported from the 2022 Ag Census. Over 500 farmers in the county are 65 and older.

- Economic data

Total market value of agricultural products sold in 2022 was \$81,642,000. Net cash farm income in Marion County was \$22,064,000. The average per farm net income was \$23,104.

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

High quality land in much of county

Diversity in commodities

Strong farm organizations- Soil Conservation, Cattlemen's Association

Local government supports agriculture

Strong support network of feed/seed/equipment dealers

Strong public and private Ag lenders

Strong livestock markets-choices of locations to sell livestock

b. Weaknesses

Limited opportunity for expansion or beginning farmers due to high land prices and input costs

Lack of farm labor

Limited commercial processing facilities

c. Opportunities

Development of new markets

Processing facilities

Distribution facilities

Programs for young and beginning farmers into farm business education

d. Challenges

Instability of tobacco, crop, dairy and beef market

Input costs and little (if any) ROI

Obtaining labor

Limitation on ability to transfer to next generation

Breaking up farms into small tracts

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission/Vision Statement

To use County Agriculture Development Funds in the most efficient way to provide successful farming practices for new agricultural production and to enhance established agricultural production.

b. Short- term goals

Continue CAIP program

Continue to improve livestock education and programming

Create opportunities for diversification

Enhance financial position of farms

c. Long-term goals

Continue to improve livestock education and programming

Continue CAIP program

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional Partnerships
 - Green River Beekeepers Association
 - Partner with other counties
 - Soil Conservation – Shared Use Equipment
 - Loretto Motherhouse
 - South East Kentucky Sheep Producers Association

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

Use county funds to support KADF funded projects

Use KADF loan programs

- Other local/state/federal resources
- UKY Extension
- County Government
- KY Dept. of Agriculture
- USDA Grants
- Marion County Cattlemen Association
- Kentucky Cattlemen Association
- Kentucky Goat & Sheep Development Office
- Central KY Goat and Sheep Producers

Evaluation & Review

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

Projects will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with priority given to projects which meet the goals of the Comprehensive plan. CAIP applications will be submitted each year according to guidelines established by KADF with funds held back for supporting anticipated non-CAIP projects. If applications are submitted after funds for a specific year are allocated, the applications will be held for consideration when the funds are necessary the following year.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

Success:

High turnout for CAIP application process

No improper use of CAIP funds

All money expended

Lack of complaints

New opportunities created

Failure:

CAIP funds not used for adequate purposes

Projects funded do not survive long term

c. How will the county comprehensive plan be revised?

The plan will be reviewed once each year or as requested by a Council member.