

Ohio County  
Agricultural Development Council

Update of  
**COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**Submitted by:**

List County Council Members

Chad Porter  
Shebrena Vaught  
Jordan Phelps  
Zack Cantu  
Joel Smith  
Tracy Beatty  
Rush Midkiff  
Kevin Brown  
Hannah Bratcher

Advisor: Gregory G. Comer/ County Extension Agent for Agriculture & Natural  
Resources

Updated 6/28/25

# Ohio 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

Ohio County is located in the Western Kentucky Coal Field Region of Kentucky. Historically the county had been heavily dependent upon coal mining and agriculture, until the decline in demand for high-sulfur coal in the 80's. Now, however, the economy is dependent upon a mix of agriculture and industry, with the largest employers being agriculturally related industries.

Ohio County is the fifth largest county in Kentucky, with 381,574 acres. The 2022 Census of Agriculture indicates 138,638 acres in production agriculture. A strong, diverse composition of agricultural enterprises consisting of corn, soybeans, wheat, burley tobacco, dark tobacco, beef cattle, poultry, vegetables, small ruminants, and forages exists on the 746 farms in the county. The county consists of a diverse topography ranging from level river bottoms to hilly. With the soils of the upland oscillating from gently sloping to steep. Generally, the river bottoms are utilized for cultivated crops and the steep soils are forested. Other soils, which are intermediate in slope, are cultivated, pastured or forested

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

- Traditional agricultural production

- 746 Total Farms
- 38.3% full time farmers : 61.7% Part time farmers
- Farm Economics (Top Farm Sales by Type & % of Total Farm Sales)
  - Poultry \$111,581,000 64%
  - Corn \$27,490,000 15%
  - Soybeans \$25,069,000 14%
  - Cattle \$4,855,000 2%
  - Others include sheep, goats, tobacco, vegetables, other 5%
  - Total value of crop & livestock sales = \$172,008,000

\*Based on 2022 Census of Agriculture

- Non-traditional agricultural production

Vegetable production and horticultural plant sales are increasing, utilizing local/area farmers markets and private sales for viability. Sheep/goat numbers are continuing to grow in Ohio County currently, with the largest portion being hair sheep. A limited number of producers raise cash hay and milk goats, but not at significant production levels. The pleasure horse industry, however, has seen steady interest since the early 1990's. Direct to consumer sales continue to rise slowly – beef, pork, vegetables, eggs, honey- being the primary income producers. Forestry, both hardwood and softwood production remains an income producer, for all landowners.

- New & emerging agricultural production

Turkey production is latest enterprise added to operations in Ohio County starting in 2014. There are farmers even investigating egg production houses as a possibility. Vegetable and other horticultural plant production, such as, hanging baskets, mums, etc.. remain steady over the last five years. Other enterprises which are being operated, but on a very small basis, are sweet sorghum production, beekeeping, hemp, and canola/rape grain.

- Tobacco dependency

Tobacco incomes have dwindled from being 10.75% of farm cash receipts in 2007 to less than .5% of total farm cash receipts, with the tobacco buyout in FY2000. Tobacco income has become a minor income source for those still producing but, for a more limited farmer base.

#### b. Demographic Data

- Social data

Population - 24,081

Minority population - 2.5%

% Population over 25 w/ high school diploma or GED – 76.7%

Average Annual Unemployment - 4%

% of Total Population in Poverty – 16%

Agriculturally related employment - 31%

Average age of principal producers – 57.6

- Economic data

Median household income - \$45,773

Top 5 industries – Manufacturing,  
Health Care, Retail Trade, Educational  
Services, Accomodation & Food  
Service

2021 Labor Force – 10,733

## 2. Assessments of the County

### a. Strengths

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| * Abundance of natural resources                                | * Excellent land productivity                        |
| * Potential to increase timber profitability                    | * Well educated & innovative farmers                 |
| * Capacity to increase livestock, such as beef cattle & poultry | * Agriculture/Business friendly local government     |
| * Quality transportation/utility infrastructure                 | * Stable agricultural industries                     |
| * Strong education infrastructure                               |  |
| * Excellent diversity in products offered at Farmer's Market    |  |
| * Diverse agricultural capability                               | * Potential for increased forage & grain crops acres |

#### b. Weaknesses

- \* Lack of local markets
- \* Shortage of value-added markets
- \* Absence of quality employment opportunities for youth
- \* Unrealistic expectations of landowners use of land
- \* Very poor high speed internet access county-wide

#### c. Opportunities

- \* Opportunity to expand grain, livestock and timber production & profitability
- \* Non-traditional crop & livestock production
- \* Proximity to larger urban
- \* "Changing of Guard" - new generation of farmers
- \* Value-added industries for forestry products
- \* Funding availability for agriculture development
- \* Quality transportation infrastructure to reach markets outside of local area
- \* Expand agri-tourism venues

#### d. Challenges

- \* Suppressed grain prices
- \* High input costs ie... seed, fertilizer, equipment
- \* Restrictive environmental regulations
- \* Limited number of "new generation" farmers to replace retiring farmers
- \* Under informed electorate about agriculture
- \* High start-up cost for new farmers
- \* World competition for markets

### **3. County Council Objectives**

#### a. Mission/Vision Statement

The Ohio County Agricultural Development Council shall seek to support programs which enhance and/or diversify the county's agricultural economy. The council will invest settlement monies in the agricultural community as a catalyst for adding value to agricultural products and build/diversify the agricultural base of Ohio County. We seek to foster a cooperative atmosphere among local and regional alliances which cultivate an improved quality of life for our farm families.

#### b. Short term goals

- \* Expansion/improvement in livestock & forage production
  - genetic improvement of livestock herds
  - forage quality & utilization improvement
  - equipment & facility improvement
  - market alliance building
  - herd performance evaluation
- \* Grain crops
  - improved drainage of row crop lands
  - increase use of technology to improve efficiency
- \* Support newer agricultural enterprises
  - vegetables/fruit production & other horticultural enterprises
- \* Provide agricultural opportunities for youth
- \* Improve management skills of woodland owners

#### c. Long term goals

- \* Implement research based agricultural practices which increase farm profitability & sustainability
- \* Explore new agricultural enterprises which can diversify our agricultural base
- \* Seek opportunities to add value to agricultural products thru further processing for timber, livestock, and grain commodities
- \* Promote use of value-added marketing channels, such as CSA's, Farmer's Market, feeder calf marketing alliances, etc...
- \* Improve management & marketing skills of crop, livestock, & woodland owners

#### d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional partnerships

The Ohio Co. ADC will welcome cooperative projects which meet the long & short term objectives of the county. Organizations, such as, the Green River Area Development District, Green River Beef Improvement Group, Ohio Co. Fiscal Court, Beaver Dam Farmer's Market, and local Cattlemen's Assoc., Farm Bureau and Conservation District, can be valuable assets in developing partnerships. Proposals must show evidence of matching funds of at least 50% of the project and evidence of proportional benefit to Ohio Co. producers

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

The Ohio Co. ADC will encourage Ohio County producers to utilize state ADB programs/ resources, such as , the Ky Ag Finance Corporation, Ky Ag Development Funds, USDA programs, KDA funds, University of Ky, Murray State Small Business Programs and other state programs, when applicable. Proposals should show evidence of matching funds for county ADC support and evidence of proportional benefit to Ohio County producers.

- Other local/state/federal resources

The Ohio Co. ADC will cooperate with any/all local, state, & federal agencies when applicable to the benefit of local producers. The listed goals and objectives will be the guiding principles in any and all partnerships.

### 3. Evaluation & Review

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

The Ohio County Agricultural Development Council will consider each proposal and determine its impact within the short and long term goals of the county's comprehensive plan. Proposals should show an increase in net farm income for farmers in the county; by stimulating markets for agricultural products, finding new ways to add value to agricultural products or through exploration of new agricultural opportunities for farm products.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

Applicants/ administrative groups will be required to provide timely progress reports on the status of each project in the form of financial, capital improvement, and impact upon participants operation. The overall success may be measured by the improvement to farm operations, within the county.

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

The county comprehensive plan will be updated in accordance with Ky Agricultural Development Board regulations and guidelines. The Ohio County Agriculture Development Council will seek input from county stakeholders, thru personal discussion, public forums, surveys, and interviews. All information is compiled and reviewed by the Ohio Co. Agricultural Development Council. Then final decisions will be made for changes will be made by the County Council.

**Send Via Email**