

Agricultural Development Council

Update of  
**COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**Submitted by:**

List County Council Members

# 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

Pendleton County encompasses approximately 180,480 acres of land, with 91,304 acres designated as farmland as of 2022, representing an 18% decrease from 2017. The average farm size is 104 acres, a 14% reduction over the same period of time. (blueprintkentucky.ca.uky.edu)

The county's topography includes river bottoms suitable for crop production and the Eden Shale hills, which are more conducive to livestock grazing. Agriculture remains integral to the local economy, although many residents commute to jobs outside the county.

Falmouth serves as the county seat and economic center, with many small, locally owned businesses. Small businesses with less than 20 employees constitute 96% of all businesses and employ 41% of the workforce in the county. (CEDIK business profile)

Located in Northern Kentucky's Licking River Valley at the southern edge of the greater Cincinnati urbanized area, Pendleton County is conveniently situated on the outer boundary of the golden triangle (Cincinnati, Lexington, and Louisville). Steeped in an abundance of natural resources and an agricultural based heritage, Pendleton County offers great potential for agri-tourism and local food markets.

### a. Agricultural Statistics, Trends, & Projections (i.e. Census Data) Traditional Agriculture:

- Crops: In 2022, crops accounted for 64% of the county's agricultural sales, totaling \$6.67 million. Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas contributed \$1.8 million, while tobacco sales were \$478,000. (blueprintkentucky.ca.uky.edu)
- Livestock: Livestock, poultry, and related products made up 36% of sales, amounting to \$3.69 million. Cattle and calves were the predominant livestock commodity, generating \$3.18 million in sales.
- Farm Economics: The county had 878 farms in 2022, a 4% decrease from 2017. The total market value of agricultural products sold was \$10.36 million, a 10% increase from 2017. However, net cash farm income was negative \$2.04 million, a 58% decline. (blueprintkentucky.ca.uky.edu)
- Land Use: Cropland - 30,695 acres; Pastureland - 26,259 acres; Woodland - 27,317 acres; Other Uses - 7,033 acres
- Conservation Practices: No-till - 8% of farms; Reduced Tillage - 3%; Intensive Tillage - 7%; Cover Crops - 6% (blueprintkentucky.ca.uky.edu)

### Non-traditional Agriculture

- The CAIP program and the emergence of new producers and increased interest to our area has contributed to an increase in diversified operations beyond conventional farming including non-profits, homesteads, and farmsteads.
- Operations include: greenhouses, nurseries, equine enterprises, aquaculture, fruit & vegetable production, goat & sheep farming, sod, beekeeping, and forestry.

## **New and Emerging Trends:**

- As stated above, there is a growing interest in diversified and non-traditional agricultural operations, including greenhouses, nurseries, equine enterprises, aquaculture, fruit and vegetable production, goat and sheep farming, sod production, beekeeping, and forestry.
  - Because of these new trends, The Pendleton County Farmers' Market has experienced significant growth, with the increased membership and sales, providing outlets for value-added products and fostering direct-to-consumer relationships.
  - The CAIP program and the emergence of new producers and increased interest to our area has contributed to an increase in diversified operations beyond conventional farming including non-profits, homesteads, and farmsteads.
  - Many of these operations are not captured by USDA surveys, though they are actively engaged in agricultural production and agricultural organizations. These unique operations call for unique marketing techniques, as very few local markets exist.

## **Tobacco Dependency**

- The mass exodus in 2014 of tobacco market/tobacco companies leaving the market has left many producers who relied on tobacco production seeking alternative agricultural enterprises. Though Tobacco production had decreased from 4,738 (2007); 3,763 (2012); to 2,409 (2017) it represented 45% of all county crop sales in 2012 (Ag Census) and a mere 25% of sales in 2017 (ag census).

## **b. Demographic Data**

- Population: As of 2023, Pendleton County's population was estimated at 14,683, a slight increase from previous years.
- Age & Income: The median age is 41.7 years. The median household income in 2023 was \$66,601, a 13.4% increase from the previous year.
- Employment: Approximately 6,719 residents were employed in 2023, with a significant portion commuting to jobs outside the county.
  - From 2002 to 2012 there was a 14% decrease in the number of jobs available in the county. Pendleton County is what most refer to as a bedroom community, meaning most individuals work and play in surrounding areas, and utilize the county primarily as residence. This is evident by the fact that 1,151 people live and work in the county (2010), while 44% of those employed in the county are in-commuters from surrounding areas.
- Poverty: The poverty rate in 2023 was 14.3% - a decrease from the previous year.

## 2. Assessments of the County

### a. Strengths

- Forage-based production enterprises of beef cattle and cash forages
  - On-going management through nutrition and designated calving seasons
  - The cattle industry serves Pendleton County farmers well, especially with the record high prices brought on in the current market season.
  - These enterprises have commonly been coupled with tobacco production and in many cases still are. However, for those who have since left the tobacco market, this was in most cases the easiest transition.
- Shared-use equipment operation
  - Enables all farmers and citizens the opportunity to utilize high-value, specialty, and efficient farm implements at seasonal times of the years without making the high capital investment to purchase such equipment that would spend the largest portion of time in the barn
- Diverse agricultural base with both traditional and emerging enterprises
  - There is a growing interest in diversified and non-traditional agricultural operations, including greenhouses, nurseries, equine enterprises, aquaculture, fruit and vegetable production, goat and sheep farming, sod production, beekeeping, and forestry.
- Proximity to urban markets in the Greater Cincinnati area
  - Offers opportunities for direct marketing and agri-tourism
- Equine Industry
  - The equine industry has taken a significant leap within Pendleton County, moving from 58<sup>th</sup> in the state in 2007 to 38<sup>th</sup> in the state in 2012 (2012 Census of Agriculture). This can be attributed to a growing number of equine facilities and breeders within the county, extraordinary leadership efforts to market and present horse shows in Pendleton County, which has contributed greatly to the agr-tourism opportunities.
- The Pendleton County Farmers' Market
  - Provides opportunities for farmers and cultural artisans to sell their homegrown, homemade, and value-added products
  - The Farmers' Market which currently operates at one location at the PC Fairgrounds, has seen dramatic growth in membership, sales, and attendance and is contributing greatly to the culture of Pendleton County.

### b. Weaknesses

- The proximity to agricultural suppliers, markets, dealers, veterinarians, etc.
  - This is a costly limitation and production management component that hinders many farmers within the county. It increases costs and decreases profits.
- Willingness of farmers to effectively manage forage crops in a rotational system or to test forage base for nutritional quality. (2020- seeing improvements with forage focus).
- Lack of access to city water
  - This limits farmer's opportunities to effectively limit access to streams and ponds for livestock.
- Declining number of farms and farmland acreage
- Negative net farm income, indicating economic challenges in the agricultural sector
- Limited access to processing facilities and agricultural infrastructure
- Aging farmer population with concerns about succession planning

### c. Opportunities

- Expansion of value-added and niche agricultural products
- Utilizing CAIP, NRCS Cost Share Programs, other government programs, and grants to support agricultural development
- Development of agri-tourism and local food initiatives
- Implementation of conservation practices to improve sustainability
- Growing consumer base in the Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati area with increased ethnic populations and the buy local/healthy lifestyle movement

### c. **Opportunities (cont.)**

- Producers willing to work at expanding agricultural diversification and explore new markets by taking risks.
- Rental contracts for hunting season, can lead to capital return on land

### d. **Challenges**

- Profitability of traditional agriculture/ Economic viability of small and medium-sized farms
- Competition for land use and rising property values
  - Rising cost of property values and tax evaluations
  - Outside residents moving to area & continued development of airbnbs are driving property valuations to higher levels adding more tax burden
- Loss of road frontage, consolidation of farms
- Limited tillable land
- Access to processing facilities (abattoirs, commercial kitchens, etc.)
- Increased governmental regulations
- Lack of community awareness for importance of agriculture (2020 improving)
- Water quality and water access to “city” water
- Access to startup capital for agricultural production
- Need for investment in agricultural education and workforce development
- Farm transitions to the next/new generations
- Ensuring access to helathcare and other services for rural residents

## 3. **County Council Objectives**

### a. **Mission/Vision Statement**

The goal of the Pendleton County Agricultural Development Council is to enhance the economic well-being of Pendleton County's agricultural community by supporting sustainable practices, fostering innovation, and promoting the development of diverse agricultural enterprises.

### b. **Short term goals**

- Explore new enterprises that will stand alone or add value to an existing operation
- Support on-going cooperative efforts in the expansion of their market development
- Support non-production efforts if they demonstrate an economic impact to the community and agriculture
- Encourage cooperation among individuals to develop proposals that are broad-based in scope and benefit multiple parties
- Encourage farmers to better manage and utilize forage based enterprises
- Provide support to local farmers' market to further promote expansion, reach, and direct-to-consumer sales channels
- Educate consumers on true agricultural practices and science
- Increase number of young farmers returning to the county to farm and pursue employment in the agriculture field
- Promote conservation practices and sustainable agriculture
- Facilitate access to shared-use equipment and infrastructure
- Encourage participation in agricultural education and training programs

### c. **Long term goals**

- Ensure preservation of farmland (including family farms), while increasing the number of profitable and sustainable farms and sustaining natural resources for future generations
- Foster relationships between consumers and farmers, to increase agricultural awareness
- Promote ethical farm management practices which ease concerns from government and consumers
- Create long lasting and reliable new markets for agricultural products
  - Develop agri-tourism and value-added agricultural sectors
- Food supply and manufacturing, creating infrastructure for value-added-product development
- Strengthen the agricultural economy through diversification and innovation

#### d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Collaborate with regional partners and organizations to maximize resources
  - Farm Bureau
  - Cooperative Extension Service
  - Pendleton County Cattleman's Association
  - Soil Conservation District
  - Fiscal Court
  - County/City Government
  - FFA
  - Farmers' Market
  - Fairboard
- Encourage producers to pursue grants and funding opportunities from public/private partnerships to support agricultural initiatives. Local, State, and Federal agricultural development board resources: KAFC, Farmers' Market Promotion Program, USDA, KCARD, CEDIK

### 3. Evaluation & Review

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

- CAIP applications are evaluated according to state guidelines.
- Projects are inspected to ensure compliance within state guidelines.

B .How is success and failure measured?

- By percentage of unfinished projects.

C .How will the county comprehensive plan be revised?

- By committee of the Pendleton County Agricultural Development Board