

Perry County  
Agricultural Development Council

Update of  
**COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

May 1, 2025

**Submitted by:**

List County Council Members

Mr. Jason Spencer Chairman

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# Perry 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

Perry County consists of 219,110 acres or 341 square miles of Mountainous terrain with a population of 26,266 and dropping. Perry County has an unemployment rate of 8%, which is 4% higher than the State average.

20% of the population, or 5,253 people are living in poverty. The medium household income is \$39,594, which is almost \$16,000 behind the State average of \$55,454.

23% of Perry County's population has less than a 9th grade education compared to a state average of 19%. Only 79.5% of the population has a high school education or higher degree compared to the State average of 81.7%.

The major employer was once the mining industry but with a significant loss in mining jobs, nearly 64%, employment has shifted to public administration, healthcare, retail and services.

There are 53 farms in Perry County, which is a decrease of 10 from 2017. The average farm size has also decreased by 3% over the last 5 years.

Farming in Perry County makes up less than 1% of all employment in the County. 23.3% of all farmers are full time.

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

##### ▪ Traditional agricultural production

Total Farm receipts, from traditional agriculture, are 730,000 with almost all sales coming from livestock and crops.

Farm numbers have declined in the last five years, 63 in 2017 to 53 in 2022.

Total farm income is up 45% since 2017. Farm size has decreased since 2017 by 3%.

##### ▪ Non-traditional agricultural production

Perry County is mainly a traditional agriculture County but there are some non-traditional agriculture taking place. Such as agri-tourism, fee hunting on agricultural lands and increase interest in High Tunnel vegetable production. There is also a lot of interest in commercial beekeeping.

- New & emerging agricultural production

Sheep and goat production has been on the increase in Perry County over the last five years. New marketing opportunities have been developed for these small ruminants.

There is also a big push in the County for local grown foods. The local Farmer's Market has expanded and sales at the market have grown steadily.

- Tobacco dependency

Perry County is a non-tobacco dependent County. No tobacco is currently being grown in Perry County.

## b. Demographic Data

- Social data

Perry County has a population of 26,266 which has been declining for the past several years.

96 % of the population is white, 1.0 % Hispanic, 1.7% African American, .8% Asian and 1.2% listed as other.

18.5% of the population is older than age 64

79.5% of the population 25 and older have a High School Diploma or GED

14.2% of the population 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher

- Economic data

Perry County has a median household income of \$39,594. 26% of the population is living in poverty. 32.3% of the population under 18 years of age is living in poverty.

Perry County has an employment rate of 8%.

Total number of jobs in Perry County is 11,638, down 15% over the last 10 years.

## 2. Assessments of the County

### a. Strengths

Perry County has a strong work ethic. Perry County is a Work Ready Community.

Perry County has an abundant resource of land out of the flood plain, suitable for development as well as wildlife, forestry and agriculture.

Water is abundant in Perry County. A new water plant is being built on Buckhorn Lake. This will make a more dependable supply of water to the industrial park and south-west area of the County.

Access to energy sources, natural gas, coal and oil.

About 90% of the Perry County has access to broadband.

Perry County is the natural hub for the region.

A 4-lane highway runs through Perry County.

## Weaknesses

Lack of affordable housing.  
Medium education level is below State average.  
There are very few farming operations in the County and expansion has been slow but is happening.  
Need to be able to work together regionally and be able to think regionally.  
Lack of an entrepreneurial spirit.  
High drug and alcohol abuse rates in the County.  
There is a feeling of hopelessness in the County.  
The loss of 2000+ coal jobs that won't be coming back.  
Inadequate infrastructure.

### b. Opportunities

Abundant reclaimed mine land from Mountain Top Removal operations that could be brought into production to expand agriculture and could be used housing out of the floodplain.  
Abundant supply of timber resources.  
Perry County has an Industrial Park.  
Perry County has one of the region's largest airports.  
Perry County has a large railroad system that could be used to move agricultural products in and out of the County.  
Increase of purchasing local foods by large food users, such as, regional jail, schools, hospitals, day care centers and nursing homes.  
Fee hunting and Agritourism

### c. Challenges

Lack of capital - financial resources has limited our choices and actions  
Lack regional planning and cooperation  
Education  
Substance abuse  
We don't necessarily see and value our own assets  
Attracting new business or industry to the County  
No highway system  
Lack of housing  
Government regulations  
Lack of job diversification  
Need to invest in growing our own businesses by developing entrepreneurs

## 3. County Council Objectives

### a. Mission/Vision Statement

It is the intent of this Council to take the limited resources available and maximize the impact to the local economy by investing in the future of Perry County through educational opportunities and farm diversity by participating in new marketing programs and nontraditional agricultural programs. It is also the intent of this Council to take funds allocated and leverage them by forming regional partnerships with other County or regional Councils to positively, permanently and collaterally impact this region's economic situation.

b. Short-term goals

Provide incentives for the development of abandoned mine land as orchards, vineyards or other commercial production as well as grazing lands and for tourism development.

Continue to aid farmers who are willing to diversify their farming operations in horticulture, aquaculture and forage improvement. Industrial quality broad band for the County.

County Flood maps need to be revised to reflect Carr Creek Lake and Buckhorn Lake that provide flood control to the region.

Assure that the \$115 million funding for HWY 15 stays in the road budget.

c. Long term goals

Establish a commercial processing facility combined with a community meeting room.

Establish a youth entrepreneurship program as a partnership of schools, Chamber and Hazard Community and Technical College that provided both training and co-op market for youth businesses.

Improve the overall education level in the County.

Support regional efforts to establish a Food Hub in Perry County.

Figure out some way to take advantage of the Coal Fields Industrial Park.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

▪ Regional partnerships

Perry County is one of the Promise Zones County and is a SOAR County. Being part of these two will provide opportunities for Grants.

This Council also works closely with other State Agencies to purchase items through shared-use equipment.

Perry has and will continue to participate in multi-County projects.

▪ State Agricultural Development Board Resources

This council has and will continue to ask for advice and input about projects from the Ag Development Board. This Council will invite representatives from the KOAP to attend Council meetings and offer advice.

With limited funds to work with in Perry County, this Council will continue to look at State funds to fund projects in the County. We have and will continue to take advantage of the share-used equipment program.

- Other local/state/federal resources

We have used and will continue to use local resources such as the Conservation District and the Appalachian Foundation to conduct joint programs and projects.

### 3. Evaluation & Review

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

This Council will expect progress reports on the funded program. The Council will also evaluate the project either by written documentation or visiting in person the location of the project to determine its impact.

The council will review the project to make sure all requirements have been met and to determine its success or failure.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

This Council will review each project and look at the impact to determine if the project was successful or was a failure. This will be accomplished through written documentation and in person interviews.

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

The County Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed annually by the Council and revisions made if warranted.