

Rockcastle
Agricultural Development Council

Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Submitted by:

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Rockcastle

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 the County

Rockcastle County is located on the Southern edge of Kentucky's Bluegrass region. Farmland is generally considered 70% hilly and 30% gently rolling. Traditionally, agricultural production, before 2010, has mainly been based on tobacco, beef cattle, and dairy cattle, along with forage and grains to supply the livestock industry. A *The move* toward row crops has increased harvested row crops to almost 3,000 acres. Commercial vegetable production has been added, along with Agricultural tourism activities.

The 2022 Kentucky Agriculture Statistics reported 585 farms. More farmers have turned to farming on a part-time basis or left farming to work at industries to support their families. Thirty-seven percent of farms in Rockcastle County report sales of \$2,500 or less.

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

- Traditional agricultural production

Rockcastle's 202,589 acres have 90,816 in farm land made up of 27,760 acres of crop land with 1,542 acres corn, 1,502 acres of soybeans, and 18,403 acres in hay production, plus 28,959 acres of pasture. In 2022, farmers produced \$10.4 million in farm income.

- Non-traditional agricultural production

Agriculture Tourism has developed through Horse Camps and On-Farm Field Days, which reach out to the non-farm community.

- New & emerging agricultural production
There seems to be a shift of smaller-acreage farmers growing vegetables for farmers' markets and roadside stands. Buying locally sourced foods is an important culture shift to ag producers that allows them outlets to market produce as well as finished meat products directly to consumers. Four percent of farms sold directly to consumers in 2017.
- Tobacco dependency
Following the Tobacco Buyout, acreage has dropped from 1800 to none produced in 2021. From 502 farms to 0.

b. Demographic Data

- **Social data**
The 2022 Kentucky Agriculture Statistics reported 585 farms, which is a 13% decrease from 201. This reflects small farms being added for most likely vegetable production on a small scale as a part-time business.
More Farmers have turned to farming on a part-time basis or left farming to work in industries to support their families.
- **Economic data**
The 5,7 million dollars from livestock production is now our leading farm income source. In 2022, Agriculture Statistics reported 15,551 head of cattle and calves plus 330 horses.

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

Rockcastle County has a diverse agricultural community, which includes crops, livestock, and horticulture. Farmers have shown that they will adjust to changing times. Beef production utilizes over 28,959 acres of pastureland and fits well with part-time farming. Rockcastle has livestock marketing facilities in four of the six adjoining counties. Most facilities offer special sales for pre-conditioned calves. Rockcastle County hillsides are well-suited for livestock production, making them the most suitable alternative for land use.

b. Weaknesses

Small part-time farmers with an average of 25 cows have limited resources to invest in upgrading their farms. Farmers are faced with escalating fuel and fertilizer prices. The value of hay has increased dramatically and making the need for protection from weather damage more important. Farmers continue to need help in building hay storage facilities, improving fencing¹ handling facilities, feeding areas, weaning areas, and improving genetics.

Marketing through special sales or pre-conditioned sales requires vaccinations and herd health for producers. Farmers continue to show a need for improved handling and feeding areas. Forage crops have a three to five-year life, and farmers are faced with higher replacement costs during a critical financial period.

c. Opportunities

Improve handling and weaning facilities

Increase income per feeder calf produced

Improve purchasing opportunities of Feed Concentrate

Increase the acres of alfalfa hay

Sell more hay

Develop Agri-Tourism opportunities

Expand Farmers' Market

Utilize more special programs/ Group Sales

d. Challenges

Subdivision/Industrial site development within prime

farm land, aging farmers with few young farmers

coming on, escalating fuel and fertilizer prices

Lower income is causing farmers to leave the industry

Qualified Labor Force

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission Statement

To help sustain existing agriculture in Rockcastle County while aiding farmers in developing new sources and improving agriculture income for years to come.

b. Short term goals

The Council believes that our immediate or short-term goals are to add profitability to the already existing agriculture enterprises in the county while helping farmers develop and investigate new sources for added income in areas in which we do not presently take advantage.

c. Long-term goals

Rockcastle County's long-term goal is to place emphasis on the efficient utilization of the forage base through improved livestock management. To replace lost tobacco income through improving and expanding well-proven existing farm enterprises, as well as investigating new projects for increasing farm profitability. There is also plans to invest in county-wide projects, such as continual support of new farmers market facilities, veterinarian services, shared use equipment, and to help the overall agriculture community in Rockcastle County.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional partnerships

The Council will be looking for evidence that there will be matching of funds by the applicant at the state level. Council members will support regional projects that benefit local producers, but consist of a scope beyond the Council's ability.

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

Staff to assist in Applications and Financial Management.

