

Whitley County
Agricultural Development Council

Update of
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Submitted by:

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Whitley 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

Based on 2024 Kentucky By The Numbers information, the population in 2022 was 36,873. Median household income is \$43,604.00. The poverty rate was 26.3%. Child poverty rate was 34.6 %. The unemployment rate in 2023 was 4.8 %. There are 476 farms in Whitley County. The average farm size is 131 acres. The farms are divided evenly with 1/3 pastureland, 1/3 crop land, and 1/3 forestry. The majority of the farms are operated part time. There is no burley tobacco present at this time.

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

- Traditional agricultural production

Most farms in Whitley County are used for beef production. There are small amounts of corn and soybeans mostly used for feeding livestock. Forestry accounts for nearly 1/3 of land use. Tobacco production has ceased in Whitley County.

- Non-traditional agricultural production

Vegetable crops have increased in Whitley County due to a strong farmers market. It is operated 2 days a week alternating between downtown Corbin and the Whitley County Extension office.

- New & emerging agricultural production

There has been a push for organic vegetable production as well as conventional vegetable production. Some growers are using high tunnels and greenhouses to extend the growing season. Also, natural meats locally raised is a topic of interest. Two custom meat processors in the county are at maximum capacity.

- Tobacco dependency

Tobacco production has ceased in Whitley County.

b. Demographic Data

- Social data

Whitley County has a population of 36,873 people.

- Economic data

Median household income is \$43,604.00 with 26.3% below poverty level.

2. Assessments of the County

a. Strengths

Whitley county has access to I75 from the northern to the southern border. The county seat, Williamsburg, is centrally located in the county with direct access to the interstate. The University of the Cumberlands is also located in the county seat. The farmland is primarily rolling grassland very suitable for forage production for beef cattle and other livestock with some river bottom land for row crops. Whitley County also has a portion of the Daniel Boone national forest on the Eastern side where Cumberland Falls is located as well as the Sheltoewe Trace trail passing through. Strong Vo-Ag programs at both local high schools teach not only ag production, but leadership skills. Opportunity is good for more agritourism with our location, water ways, and natural resources as well as family pumpkin patches.

b. Weaknesses

Even with a population of 36,873, Whitley County is still mostly rural area. This makes for difficult marketing of locally grown produce and meats. There is very little land suitable for row crops other than river bottoms which can be flooded. There is very little industry in the county and there have been recent layoffs in rail transportation and the coal industry. There is a lack of good jobs to replace these. Farmers are an ageing population with an average age of almost 60. There is a lack of interest among younger people in agriculture. Also, high speed Internet access is not readily available to everyone.

c. Opportunities

Whitley County has an opportunity by being included in the promise zone area as well as in the SOAR initiative. With part of the county in the Daniel Boone national forest we have a lot of tourism and recreation possibilities.

d. Challenges

With farming, the aging population of farmers is a growing concern. Also, absentee landownership is an issue in the fact that farmland is tied up and not available for farm use. Many farms have been split up and sold at auctions in smaller tracts for housing. There is also a disconnect between the two major towns of Corbin and Williamsburg.

3. County Council Objectives

a. Mission/Vision Statement

The county council would like to promote agriculture on an immediate and long-term basis in Whitley County. The council is interested in making farming more profitable by helping farms become up-to-date and also diversify their production. Whether it be in agritourism, timber, improvements in livestock production or alternative crops.

b. Short term goals

The council would like to help get younger farmers more involved with all aspects of agriculture and encourage them. They would also like to educate farmers about low interest loans and grant opportunities available in this area for existing as well as new farmers. The council wants to continue helping farms with forage improvements, genetic improvements as well as on-farm diversification to new crops and practices and educate timber land owners and loggers on proper forest management techniques. Another goal is to expand shared use equipment availability.

c. Long term goals

The council would like to encourage conservation practices to help maintain our soils and farmland. Support and expansion of farmers markets to help farmers have a place to market their products locally is also important. Also encouraging tourism by way of recreational development in areas of horse, atv, and hiking trail development. These and other outdoor adventure opportunities would bring more money and jobs to the county. Expansion of county fair and further development of our fairgrounds is also an area of interest for the council.

d. Tactics for leveraging funds

- Regional partnerships

The council has many opportunities to partner with other entities locally and regionally, including the following: Center for Rural Development, Fiscal Court, Kentucky Highlands, CEDIK, Whitley County Extension Service, local and state universities, and anyone interested in the betterment of agriculture and community.

- State Agricultural Development Board resources

The council acknowledges the role of the state board in taking the lead in programs and strategies for the county council. The council plans on working with them in any way for the betterment of agriculture.

- Other local/state/federal resources

The NRCS board, Kentucky Highlands, Whitley County Farm Bureau, and Whitley County Cattlemen's Association work with the council. There is shared use equipment offered through farm bureau such as seed drills, lime spreaders, fencing equipment and pasture sprayers. There is also shared use equipment available for local producers through the Whitley County Farm Bureau and the Whitley County Extension office.

3. Evaluation & Review

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

The county council will review all proposals and use criteria of application to evaluate all applicants.

- b. How is success and failure measured?

The county council will require applicants to report completions of projects and impact of the project. Council will review reports. Increased profits would be considered a measure of success.

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

It will be revised on an as needed basis to meet the needs of Whitley County agriculture and community.

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