An Overview

Fleming County, Kentucky

Fleming County is located in northeastern Kentucky. In area it is a large county with 224,493 land acres and 128 water acres for a total of 224,621 acres. (Ky Ag Statistics 1999-2000). It is bounded on the north by Mason County, on the east by Lewis and Rowan Counties, and on the west by Nicholas and Robertson Counties. The North Fork of the Licking River forms the northern county border; the Licking River forms the southern boundary.

The county has three main topographical areas. Western Fleming County is physiographically in the Hills of the Bluegrass region and is characterized by long narrow ridges with short steep slopes and narrow valleys. Central, northern, and southern parts of the county fall into the Outer Bluegrass region which is similar to the Bluegrass region of central Kentucky. The eastern part of the county is part of the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.

Agricultural production in the county tends to divide along the topographic areas. Approximately 73,000 acres primarily in the eastern part of the county are commercial forest land. Major row crop production occurs in the north, central, and southern parts of the county. Livestock, hay, and burley tobacco production occur countywide. According to the USDA Soil Survey of Fleming County, Fleming County has more than 50,000 acres of prime farmland. The major management problem on most of this land is erosion control because most pasture and cropland in the county is gently to steeply sloping and consists of highly erodible soils.

According to Kentucky Agricultural Statistics 1999-2000, in crop year 1999 Fleming County had 2,700 acres of corn harvested for grain, 2,000 acres of soybeans, and 500 acres of wheat harvested for grain. Also in 1999, there were 12,500 acres of alfalfa hay harvested yielding 31,250 tons and ranking Fleming County 2nd in the state in alfalfa production. All other hay produced totaled 34,600 acres yielding 51,900 tons and ranking the county 30th in the state.

With regard to livestock and milk production, Fleming County in 1999 had an average of 6,700 dairy cows which produced 87,400,000 lbs. of milk and ranked 3rd in Kentucky in milk production. As of January 1, 2000, Fleming County had 16,500 beef cows and ranked 21st in the state in that category. The combined number for all cattle and calves as of January 1, 2000, was 44,000 which ranked the county 9th in the state. Estimated cash receipts from farm marketing in 1999 for the county were $14,045,000 from crops and $23,972 from livestock - total of $48,017,000.

In 1999, the county had 4,100 acres of burley tobacco and produced an estimated 5,858,000 lbs. of tobacco ranking it 23rd in the state. The county has 1537 quota holders who are directly impacted by tobacco. Total receipts from the sale of burley tobacco in 1999 were estimated at $10,544,400.00 or 27% of the county's total ag income. For the crop year 2000, assuming sale of 100% of the effective quota for burley tobacco and using the same average sale price ($1.80), Fleming County farm income from tobacco will drop more than $4 million to $6,422,248.00. This amounts to an average loss of income in one year of $2,681.94 per quota holder. Fleming County is ranked 8th in the state for dependence on tobacco.

Efforts in non-traditional agriculture have been limited within the county both because of limited availability of speculative funds and because of the history of disaster of such enterprises. Past efforts from ostrich production to the production of peppers, strawberries and cucumbers have been distinguished economic failures. While Fleming County farmers have done an excellent job of producing...
different crops, their contracted markets have been capricious and at time blatantly deceptive. Current efforts in aquaculture, nursery production, vegetables, flowers, and fruits are a tiny part of total county production. Some of these alternative efforts - especially flowers - are filling local niche markets which are quickly becoming saturated. Others - especially vegetable production - because of their intensive labor and capital demands, are not appealing to an aging farm population.

Ag Information, Trends, and Projections
According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Fleming County reflects national trends in agriculture. The amount of farmland had decreased 2% in the five years since 1992. The average size of farms had increased 6%; the number of full time farms had increased 13% from 667 farms in 1992 to 577 farms in 1997. The market value of ag products sold decreased 10% to $37,044,000 in 1997. Of this amount, crop sales including tobacco accounted for 47% of total sales; livestock sales accounted for 53%. During this same time period the average market value of agricultural products sold per farm declined 2% from $33,409 in 1992 to $32,724 in 1997. The 40% reduction in tobacco quota between 1997 and 2000 and the severe drought in 1999 have only served to intensify these trends. The age of the average farmer in Fleming County is 54.1. This figure is increasing because the depressed agricultural economy coupled with high input costs are making it financially impossible for most young people to enter farming.

Demographic Data
According to the Fleming County Chamber of Commerce, the county has a projected 2000 population of 13,849 with Flemingsburg, population 3,111, its county seat and largest city. It is projected that the 2000 census will reflect a county population which is approximately 25% urban and 75% rural. Agriculture and agriculture related business are the largest employer group in the county. The average per capita income for Fleming County is $13,227. The county has 25.4% of its population living below the 2000 federal poverty level which is $17,050 for a family of four. An estimated 4.4% of the adult workforce is currently unemployed. Of the county population over age 25, 54% have a high school degree or higher; 31% have less than a 9th grade education.

Resources
Although there are no four lane highways or interstate highways in the county, most of the county is within thirty minutes or less of the AA Highway which provides rapid access to the northern Kentucky/greater Cincinnati area to the west and the Huntington/Ashland area to the east. Both Highway 32 South to Morehead and Highway 11 South to Mt. Sterling provide access in 30 minutes or less to I-64. The county has air service at the Fleming-Mason airport which has a 5000 foot runway capable of handling small jets. Rail service by TTI Systems runs through the county and is a possibly under-utilized resource. Approximately 79% of the county population is furnished water from either the Fleming County Water Association or the Western Fleming County Water Association. Recent improvements have linked Fleming County water service to the Ohio River augmenting existing service to the Licking River. Sewer service is provided within the city of Flemingsburg, but none is available in rural areas. Electric service is provided to the county by Fleming-Mason Energy and Kentucky Utilities. Local telephone service is provided by Verizon. Cellular phone service is provided by Bell South and Cellular One. The county has a number of local doctors and a small local hospital which provides both in-patient and emergency room services. A number of regularly scheduled visiting specialists also serve the county population.

Post high school secondary education is available to residents within the county through off-campus classes offered by Maysville Community College. Both Maysville Community College and Morehead State University are only a short distance from Fleming County. Additional technical training is available at the Rowan County Vocational Technical School.

Process Review
The County Comprehensive plan was developed on an entirely volunteer basis by the County Agriculture Development Board. A public forum was held in
Flemingsburg on Sept. 7, 2000, to determine community concerns. Area farmers listened to presentations from Representative Pete Worthington, John Mark Hack of Governor Patton's office, and State Ag Board members Willa Poynter and Danny Case. Farmers then had the opportunity to discuss the process with these individuals as well as members of the County Ag Development Board. Additionally, a survey form was distributed to area farmers to help the Board determine what areas of production within the county were felt by farmers to have the most potential for improving farm profitability. Members of the Fleming County Ag Development board attended an area-wide meeting at Blue Licks State Park in an effort to identify and work towards projects which would benefit farmers in multiple counties. The Fleming County Ag Development Board is also indebted to our local Farm Service Agency, Soil Conservation Service, the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Fleming County Farm Bureau, and the city government of Flemingsburg for their input. A very special thanks is given to the Fleming County Chamber of Commerce which provided immeasurable help and support.

Assessments: Strengths
The diversity of county agriculture in beef, dairy, alfalfa, tobacco, grain, and timber provides a number of areas with existing production where efforts to improve farm profitability can build on existing foundations. An experienced farm population possesses a strong work ethic, a love of the land, and a strong sense of community. Fleming County possesses a sound basic infrastructure and a location within a 24 hour drive of two-thirds of the population of the United States. The County possesses outstanding potential as a site for producing and distributing value-added agriculture based products.

Assessments: Weaknesses
Decreasing farm income is threatening the survival of our family farms. Because of the sloping terrain, Fleming County farmers cannot generally look to bigger equipment and larger tillable acreage such as is found in the cornbelt in western Kentucky as a solution to shrinking profits. An aging farm population and a shortage of local farm labor make the production of highly labor intensive crops unfeasible for most operations.

Assessments: Opportunities
Significant opportunities exist to improve the profitability of existing operations. Because tobacco has always paid the bills, other areas of production have played a secondary role on many farms. By adopting proven management practices in areas of livestock and forage production, it may be possible for producers to increase the efficiency of their operations and improve their profitability. It may be possible for farmers to reduce input costs through co-operative purchasing and to increase profits through co-operative marketing. Because most agricultural production within the county is currently marketed at a commodity level, significant potential exists to improve profit through value-added marketing and through the encouragement of the growth of industry which utilizes agricultural raw materials. Efforts should be made on both a county and state level to support Kentucky farmers first when purchasing foods and feeds for our institutions.

Alternative crop production will be an option for some farmers. There are a number of greenhouses within the county which were originally built for tobacco plant production. Because of the decline in demand for tobacco plants, these structures and their owner/operators will become available to produce other plants.

Assessments: Threats
Subdivision encroachment is taking over prime farmland and driving up prices. As urban refugees continue to migrate to rural areas, there will be increasing conflicts between home-owners and farmers. A political policy favoring cheap food coupled with increasing concentration within ag business will continue to pressure farm-gate receipts. Those at the ground level of the food chain will continue to be trod upon by bigger, wealthier, and more politically organized entities. This will perpetuate a decline in the number of young farmers because of the inability for young farmers to maintain a decent standard of living.
Mission/Vision Statement:
The mission of the Fleming County Agriculture Development Board is to promote a thriving farm economy which sustains not only agriculture but our small towns and rural way of life.

Short-term Priorities:
The 40% cut in tobacco quota is causing economic disaster to the agriculture economy. The immediate priority is to provide economic assistance to stabilize this situation as soon as possible to as many farmers as possible. The Fleming County Agriculture Development Board will actively seek an individual or entity to assist local farmers to apply and qualify for the funds available.

Long-term Priorities:
1. Establish systems to market the production of local farmers more effectively.
2. Provide cost-share assistance for the application of proven practices which would improve farm income.
3. Encourage community co-operation in group and/or value-added marketing.
4. Support efforts to networking to improve farm marketing and production.
5. Support efforts to more effectively utilize farm assets.
6. Encourage the growth of local industry which utilizes locally produced agricultural raw materials.
7. Pursue areas of common interest with other counties with the goal of improving profitability in agriculture at the grass-roots level.

Tactics for leveraging funds:
The Fleming County Agriculture Development Board has voted to limit any one person to 1% of the total county funds in any one year. The Board has also voted that any funds provided for any interest buy-down or cost-share will be matched by in-kind, matching funds, or other valuable support equal to 25% of the total of the proposed budget. The Board also expects to work closely with the Farm Service Agency, the Soil Conservation Service, Buffalo Trace ADD, Morehead State University, and all other pertinent agencies to maximize the impact of available dollars. The county board is also participating in regional meetings to identify projects worthy of multi-county co-operation.

Evaluation and Review:
Proposals to the County Board will be reviewed according to guidelines set forward in HB 611. Additionally all approved proposals will be required to submit periodic evaluations by which the Board may assess their progress. The Fleming County Agriculture Development Board submits this County Plan based on their evaluation of current circumstances in Fleming County. The Board reserves the right to modify and adapt this plan at any time circumstances would indicate that this was wise.