Casey County Comprehensive Plan for Agriculture

Overview & Demographics
Casey County is a rural community located in the Second Congressional District in south central Kentucky. The county, one of the 49 Appalachian Regional Commission counties, is located in the heart of Kentucky—sixty miles south of Lexington, Kentucky, and eighty miles north of the Tennessee state line. The county has a population of 16,436 and a land area of 432 square miles. Liberty, the county seat, is a 5th Class city with a population of 1,897. There are 1,353 farms in Casey County, with the average size of 141 acres. There is a wide diversity of cropland, ranging from fertile river bottoms to ridges and knobs. Fifty-eight percent of the farmers are full-time; 42% are part-time. Casey County has a total of 280,000 acres. There are 115,920 acres of cropland and 60,972 acres of woodland.

Economy
Based on three socioeconomic indicators (poverty, market income, and unemployment), Casey County has been identified as a "distressed community" by the Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky. The county has also been described as a "persistently poor" county, i.e., its median per capita income has ranked in the bottom fifth of all counties in the United States since 1950. Currently, the county's poverty rate is 33.1%. The median income is $19,330 ($9000 below the state median), with 3630 children under the age of 18. Twenty-five percent of the total population live at or below the poverty rate and the present unemployment rate is 5.7%. Over 95% of this rural county are Caucasian.

In 1997 37.89% of local jobs were in agriculture. Other major employers are gate factories, lumber companies, and the school system. Currently, several of the local retail businesses are owned and operated by individuals who live in adjoining counties, lessening the likelihood of local school community involvement. Many of the local jobs were negatively impacted when Fruit of the Loom closed one factory in an adjoining county and downsized a factory in another.

About 45.7% of Casey County workers commute to jobs in other counties, increasing the daily number of hours of unsupervised out-of-school time for many children and youth. In addition, 9.5% of households do not have telephone service; 11.5% do not have automobiles; and the vast majority of
households do not have access to advanced technology (such as home personal computers.) No local public transportation system exists; thus access to services is often very limited. With 60% of the population at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Index, Casey County is a community of "working poor"—people who have limited marketplace skills, scarce assets, and are employed in low-skill/low-wage jobs with few, if any, benefits. Thus, family funding for enrichment activities for extended learning opportunities, and for technology related purchases is severely limited.

**Education** According to the 2006 Kentucky Kids Count, only 57.4% of county residents over age 25 are high school graduates (with only 7.4% having a bachelor's degree or higher.) With a total school population of 2,435, 69% of Casey County's students participate in the free and reduced price lunchroom program. Data and surveys indicated that a large number of students who did not graduate exhibited academic weaknesses in the areas of reading, mathematics, writing, science, arts and humanities, and practical living skills. Teacher input identified a lack of strong study skills, poor attendance, and numerous discipline referrals for these students at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. The school system has three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one alternative center, one secondary vocational school, two Family Resource Centers, and one Youth Services Center. No post-secondary institutions are located in the county.

**Community and Economic Development** Casey County has recently hired an economic development coordinator. Casey County has limited recreation and tourism opportunities. To promote the recreation and tourism opportunities that are available, the Casey County/Liberty Chamber of Commerce has just recently opened a Tourism Information Center at Gateway Park. It's early yet to project what impact this will have on the local economy.

**Agriculture** According to Kentucky Agricultural Statistics (2006) Casey County ranks 42th in corn production, 61th in soybean production, 55th in wheat production, 39th in burley production (2006 data) with a production of 1,627,200 accounting for $2.5 million in income to the local economy. We also rank 19th in alfalfa production, 9th in all other hay crops, 18th in all cattle and calves, 14th in beef cattle production, and 22nd in milk production. Casey County is also one of the top 5 vegetable producing counties for commercial vegetable production.

**Review of the Process** The Casey County Agriculture Development Council held 4 community forums throughout the county and met with other counties in the area to gather input from farmers, agribusinesses, and industry/government leaders. The council developed a survey instrument to gather input from citizens on the best way to spend the appropriated funds for our county. Multiple radio programs and several feature stories have been run by The Casey County News detailing the work of the county council and emphasizing the need for public comment. The Council made the following assessments:
**Strengths**

- We consider our people our greatest asset. These people desire to stay on the farm and are struggling to do so.
- An abundance of wildlife and natural resources (water, fertile soil, etc.)
- From the results of our surveys a majority of our farmers wanted to expand and improve their beef herd.
- We have a readily available supply of high quality agricultural lime.
- We have a large number of beef cattle to utilize our large forage base.
- We are suited for many crop and livestock enterprises.
- Casey County has a progressive agricultural community including an active beef and pork association, 4-H and FFA organizations, with the help of USDA agencies that care about their community.
- Our farm families have a willingness to adapt to changing technologies.
- There are good roads leading in/out of the county; i.e., Hwy. 127 and 70.
- Casey County is the farm gate capitol of the world.
- Casey County vegetable growers are considered to be the pioneer of trickle irrigation for commercial vegetable production in the state of Kentucky.
- South Fork Produce purchases local vegetables

**Weaknesses**

- The topography limits the crops that we can grow due to our soil being subject to erosion and flooding.
- Casey County has limited industry.
- Casey County does not have a market infrastructure for crops, livestock, or vegetables.
- Resistance to cooperatives and marketing alliances due to a lack of willingness to assume risks.
- Lack of an educated workforce.
- Our economies of scale limits our ability to market truckload lots of our commodities/livestock.

**Opportunities**
• Improve forages to expand livestock production.

• There is a significant amount of timber in Casey County. There is an opportunity for timber stand improvement as well as value added products.

• There is an opportunity for genetic and herd health improvement in beef/dairy herds.

• There is a willingness to diversify into alternative livestock and crop enterprises; i.e., meat and dairy goats, shrimp, rabbits, grapes.

• Opportunities exist to capture tourism dollars from travel going to Lake Cumberland.

**Threats**

• Restrictive environmental standards threaten the ability of crop and livestock producers in using normal farming practices. These restrictions will reduce their ability to choose least cost-effective production practices such as the use of manures, tillage practices, and chemical control of insects and diseases.

• Young people are not pursuing careers in production agriculture.

• Rising cost associated with farming; i.e., rising land values, fuel, fertilizer, chemicals, and low commodity prices make it difficult to enter farming.

• Hiring qualified farm labor is becoming increasingly difficult.

• Tobacco buy-out has forced farmers to seek alternative sources of farm income.

• Rising land prices due to immigration of retirees.

• Many families desire to live in the country but are intolerant of normal farming practices.

**Mission Statement:** Successful agriculture for today and tomorrow.

**Short Term Priorities:** The Council believes that short-term priorities should include developing and adding profitability to our existing strengths such as beef, dairy, forages, timber, vegetables and other enterprises. Additionally, short term priorities include investigating new, innovative or value added enterprises.

**Long Term Goals:** Our County Agriculture Development Council wishes to invest monies into innovative proposals that increase net farm income by finding new ways to add value to Casey County agricultural products and exploring new opportunities for Casey County farms and farm products. Our desire is for all proposals to become self-sustaining to the fullest extent possible.
The Casey County Agriculture Development Council is willing to evaluate local proposals and assist these entities "on an as needed" basis. Success and failures will be measured by having these entities report back to the local Council. The county comprehensive plan will be revised as new ideas and proposals are reported.

Casey County would consider cooperating with other counties on regional or state efforts. We also wish to cooperate with the State Ag Development Board in achieving its long-term goals.

**Tactics for Leveraging Funds**

The council will expect proposals to show significant evidence of in-kind or matching funds from the applicant. The level of applicant's contribution will play a major role in the council's decision to prioritize a project. Proposals should clearly outline who the funds will be directed to and who will be responsible for the expenditures. Proposals should follow the criteria as set forth by the state application.

**Evaluation and Review** Applications must be presented in person to the Casey County Extension Office by the third Thursday of each month. The Casey County Agriculture Development Council will attempt to review applications the fourth Thursday of each month. However, we reserve the right to take additional time to review lengthy proposals. Approved applications will then be submitted to the state board for approval during the following month.

The Council reserves the right to request additional information from applicants and does not guarantee acceptance or denial during the initial review process. The Council reserves the right to reject or accept proposals based on how well the proposal coincides with our County Comprehensive Plan. The Council will expect quarterly updates from funded recipients. Updates should include financial progress, number of people involved, short term and long term progress.

Model Program administrators will present their request for funding to the Ag Development Board. The Board will give the request its priority level and forward the request to the state committee for their approval. Upon state approval, the Administrator will take applications from producers and oversee the dispersement of cost-share funds.

**Areas of Interest**

We, the Casey County Phase 1 Committee, have created a broad comprehensive plan for the purpose of allowing different types of proposals to be considered in the future. The following areas of interest are identified for the purpose of educating the state board of possible proposals.

- From survey results, farmers have shown interest in the following areas: a livestock facility for marketing and herd health with scales, a produce facility for marketing and cold storage, specialized equipment for vegetables, forages, livestock and other crops (i.e., water wheel setters,
bed shapers, mulch lifters, silage wrappers, semen tanks, high pressure sprayers, etc.)

- Farmers are interested in grants and low interest loans. There is an opportunity for the state board to address farm safety (i.e., seat belts, roll bars, PTO shaft guards.)

- There is interest in efficient farming practices (i.e., hay storage, bale wrappers, etc.)

- The timber industry offers potential for many value added products.

Signature___________________________________  Date______________________