Jackson County
Agriculture Development Council
Comprehensive Plan

March 2001

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A public forum was held November 30, 2000 at the Jackson County Courthouse. Invitations were mailed to over 2,000 individuals that have direct interest in tobacco as either quota holders, growers or tenants. Public service announcements were made via the local newspaper and radio station. Over 80 individuals attended the forum where they were updated as to how the Phase I Program came about by Representative Marie Rader. This was followed by an open discussion of ideas by those in attendance which gave the local council a clear direction as to the agriculture interests of the group.

The county council developed the overview of the county, and a ‘thumbprint’ of the county’s characteristics. A subcommittee of four council members was selected to complete the county’s comprehensive plan. Resources were collected from several different agencies in the county. Ideas and plans were taken from farmers involved in the public forum and during individual conversations.
Overview of County:

Jackson County is located in the foothills of Southeastern Kentucky, it consists of long and narrow ridge tops, valleys, and steep hillsides. Most of the soils formed in colluvial or alluvial material weathered mainly from sandstone, siltstone, or shale. Jackson County drains into two major river basins, the Cumberland River and Kentucky River watersheds. Farming is limited to ridge tops, narrow valleys and creek bottoms.

The county has a population of about 13,000. There are approximately 4,400 households in the county. In 1997, there were 689 farms with an average acreage of 107 acres per farm and 253 full-time farmers, a decrease of 9% in the number of farms and 19% in full-time farmers since 1992. In 1997, the market value of agriculture products sold in Jackson County was $9,326,000. Crop sales accounted for 62% of the market value and livestock sales accounted for 38%. Since 1998, burley tobacco quotas have been reduced 61%. This has led to a reduction in total farm receipts of over 30%. Several local producers are diversifying into alternatives such as vegetables and bedding plants with limited success due to no established markets or organized efforts to produce such crops. Tobacco has been a mainstay in the county with 1449 quotas and the loss of tobacco income due to quota cuts is being realized in all aspects of the local economy. In a mid-1990’s report by Kentucky’s Long Term Policy Center, their report, “The Future of Burley Tobacco”, Jackson County was ranked in the top 10 across the state of being “at risk” should tobacco quotas experience a major decline.

Jackson County is an isolated, rural county with a poverty rate of 34.8% in 1995; almost double the state average. In 1995, Jackson County had a child poverty rate of 48.1% compared to the state average of 26%. The education level in Jackson County has gradually improved from the 1990 figures which show that of the county population 25 years of age and over, 25.2% have high school diplomas and 5% a college degree or beyond. Nearly 50% of the county’s work force that is 16 years old and over, work outside the county. The mean household income level in 1995 was $17,887 for Jackson County compared to the state average of $28,929. Since 1995, Jackson County has been designated an Empowerment Zone Area which is leading to some improvements in regard to job creation, quality of life and infrastructure improvements. As a part of the EZ Alternative Crop Venture incentive, over 40 local producers are currently implementing alternative income opportunities to the farm with good success; however, lack of established markets continue to be a hindrance.
Jackson County – Comprehensive Plan

Assessments

a. Strength

- Jackson County’s agricultural population has a determined work ethic to be successful in their ventures
- Jackson County Farmers have been able to adapt and diversify in the past due to limited tillable acreage and have been innovative in the use of their farmland.
- Farmers have proven that they can successfully provide a wide variety of products
- Because 64% is forested land, there is a potential for the development of wood grown industries and improved timber management.
- Many idle acres of usable land to expand new and/or existing livestock, tobacco, horticultural, forage and grassland production.
- Empowerment Zone designation has brought significant changes to Jackson County, positively impacting the quality of life.
- Recent road improvements to U.S. 421 at Big Hill in Madison County, which links the northern half of Jackson County with the rest of the state, and future improvements to KY 30, linking the county with London and points south will open up the county to help market farm products, allowing established businesses to expand and encourage introduction of new business to the area.
- Jackson County has low land cost per acre, farmland is not as threatened by urban development.
- Clean and scenic environment

a. Weakness

- Very weak base of infrastructure, i.e. information, markets, roadways – no major road construction project since World War II.
- Public water supply is limited
- Losing the young farmers to public jobs
- Daniel Boone National Forest encompasses 58,375 acres (33% of total acres) – nonfarmable and nontaxable
- Labor base for agriculture is limited
- Stereotypical image of Eastern Kentucky and it’s people
- The natural terrain of Jackson County causes climatological phenomenon effecting many aspects of life: i.e. flash flooding, hazardous winter roads, etc
- The mountainous terrain of Jackson County poses a safety threat while operating farm equipment
b. Opportunities

- Rental equipment will enable farmers to improve overall production with less initial cost
- The Appalachian Heritage Highway, a regional tourism initiative, includes Jackson County
- Livestock/forage improvement programs and market development
- Vacant buildings that can be renovated for agricultural purposes: i.e. slaughter, cooling
- Once completed Hwy KY 30 will be a more direct route in and out of Jackson County
- Encourage youth interest in agriculture by supporting projects
- Cooperate with other counties to support regional agricultural projects
- Cultivate horticultural development
- Encourage aquaculture development
- Support potential projects to utilize existing timber stands, forested land, and improve forest management
- Foster those interested in value added endeavors
- Promote profitability of existing agriculture
- Potential to improve the agriculture support systems locally

c. Threats

- Youth leaving the farm due to lack of profitability in agriculture
- Current water supply cannot support existing usage
- Health concerns from working in the environment, and working with chemicals
- Farming as a full-time job is not self-supporting, many have to take public jobs in order to make ends meet
- Reduction of tobacco quotas
- Limited tillable acreage
County Council Objectives

Mission Statement:

Our mission is to create opportunities for our farm community that sustain the existing agriculture base and develop new and innovative programs that introduce, to those involved, new concepts in agriculture. Educate and support applicants so they can be successful and remain committed to agriculture production. We can achieve this by providing opportunities that make an immediate impact and make agriculture related business a viable and realistic career opportunity for Jackson County residents.

Through mutual partnerships within the county, region and state, we can enhance the agricultural economy both locally and beyond. Every proposal will be considered with regard to how it impacts the local agricultural economy, how many producers it may reach, and its effect both short and long-term.

Short Term Goals:

This council and the agricultural community think that short-term priorities should be centered around existing enterprises, to help strengthen and enhance profitability. The council strongly supports regional projects and regional marketing initiatives. Our past experiences with marketing limitations causes us to realize the need to support regional projects such as; The Wilderness Trail Area Beef Marketing Alliance Regional Facility, Wilderness Trail Area Vegetable Co-op, that is being planned in the Corbin area, and the Regional Farmers Market in Berea, Madison County. The Jackson County Ag Development Council has unanimously agreed to commit to these regional projects.

Jackson County is in the process of developing a local Cattlemen’s Association. Beef cattle production is 2nd to tobacco in Jackson County. It will be given a high priority by the Ag Council. The county’s Ag Council will be looking for projects that encourage improvements in:

1). Beef Cattle Genetics
2). Herd Health
3). Forage Management, improvements and use

We feel these improvements would create more profitable marketing possibilities for a greater number of our cattle producers. We also feel any new or innovative ideas are a high priority. Examples of these groups in Jackson County are chestnuts, herbs, and native plants, etc. We are strongly encouraging our local farmers to look and reach out of the ‘traditional’ Ag box.
Council will encourage all producers to participate in personal agricultural development and provide adequate information needed to present their applications, so goals will be realized.

**Long Term Goals:**

This council will encourage all sectors of agriculture in Jackson County, evaluating proposals, feasibility studies and pilot projects to increase farm profitability.

Recognizing the efforts of some Jackson County farmers that have worked hard to create and develop niche markets or products unique to our area, the AG Council gives high priority to these efforts and will encourage continuance of these efforts. These types of endeavors parallel the philosophy of this Jackson County AG Development Council.

Develop a network locally that provides educational opportunities for farmers to acquire the necessary information to be used in a practical setting. We feel this will enhance the quality of life on the farm and allow farm families to achieve a higher level of success insuring their future.

Give opportunity to those that are deeply rooted in agriculture to make farming as feasible a career by developing the agriculture industry to the point so that such a career choice would be competitive with non-farm employment opportunities in the area.

The A.D.C. will promote and encourage projects that increase the potential to expand the short-term goal success into projects that increase profit to farmers and have a greater impact in the agriculture community.

**Tactics for Leveraging Funds:**

Jackson County is part of the Empowerment Zone Program through the year 2005, within this program are funds available to farmers as an incentive to create or develop new income opportunities. We will have the potential to leverage some of these funds as well as significant applicant contributions and state funds.
Evaluation and Review:

All plans will be considered by the local A.D.C., but, plans that address individual farming needs that may not lead to future profits or are of low impact to all county farmers will be given low priority.

Applications will be received at the Extension Office at any time, and evaluated by the council at the regular monthly meeting or on an as need basis. Periodically, funded projects will be evaluated to determine success or the potential to expand the project beyond a current level locally. The council will expect updates from recipients to determine if goals are being met. The frequency of the updates will be determined by the type of project involved, and will include: financial progress, number of people involved, and short and long-term progress.

We plan to carefully evaluate and review each program annually to measure increase in income and note changes in the attitudes of those involved to determine the direction we should take in future years. It is understood that history is being made here and that there is an opportunity of a lifetime to solidify agriculture and the economic impact it has always had in this county and help to make it even more of an impact in the future. It is an opportunity to keep the farm an integral part of our culture and society, a place where many of our youth can learn about the importance of family and responsibility and to appreciate the land and what it can provide if properly managed. It is our most sincere desire to make the best of this opportunity.