



CAMPBELL COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Campbell County study shows agriculture is stable

The Campbell County Farm Work Group was convened in June 2003 as an initiative of the Campbell County Conservation District. Farmland in Campbell County has steadily decreased over the past 60 years. Of the total 96,640 acres in Campbell County, there were 78,749 acres in farmland in 1940 held in 1,292 farms. By 1997, there were 45,108 acres in farmland, with 503 farms. Local concerns have been mounting about how to preserve the rural character of the county while maintaining an economically viable land base for those who wish to continue to farm.

The following concerns were expressed regarding farming and farmland in Campbell County:

- are we convinced that Agriculture is a viable industry in Campbell County;
- how would farmland preservation efforts be funded on a continuing basis;
- what ecosystem benefits, including those to mitigate the effects of land fragmentation, are potentially attributed to maintaining the county's farmland base;
- how does farmland, and the potential loss of farmland, affect the Ohio River and Licking River corridors for their flood prevention and wildlife habitat benefits?

Later in 2003, the Work Group was awarded a \$20,000 matching grant through the Kentucky Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Corporation, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, to explore farmland preservation options for Campbell County. Matching funds were provided by cash and in-kind support through the Conservation District and their partners: the Campbell Conservancy; Campbell County Fiscal Court; Campbell County Planning Commission; Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission; Campbell County Cooperative Extension Service; Campbell County Cattle Association; and Campbell County Farm Bureau.

The Work Group was required to accomplish three tasks:

- a.) prepare an agricultural lands and services inventory to give a better picture of the status of agriculture in Campbell County, and identify classes of farmlands in the most need of protection;
- b.) develop an educational program for both farmers and the urban/suburban community regarding farmland preservation; and,
- c.) investigate techniques to finance a local farm protection program.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) was contracted to perform a Cost of Community Services Study and Agricultural Industry Profile to determine the contribution that agriculture makes to the overall economy of the county. AFT also investigated techniques to finance a local program to protect farmland.

The AFT study found that agriculture in Campbell County, despite changes in tobacco production and increased development of land, shows stability and signs of growth. The report notes, "Farmers appear to be adapting to change and, with proper support and investment, prospects look good for continued diversification and growth, especially in industries such as cattle and calves, and nursery and greenhouse production." There were 581 farms reported in the 2002 U. S. Census of Agriculture with 50,383 acres in farmland, or 53 percent of the total land area.

The Cost of Community Services study analyzes revenues and expenditures for the county for fiscal year 2003 – 2004. The study looked at how much money was generated by three categories of land use – residential, commercial/industrial, and farmland properties - and how much that category required in public services (e.g. public safety, government administration, schools, courts, etc.).

The study found that for each \$1 of revenue received from residential properties in Campbell County that year, \$1.21 was spent providing services to those properties. For each \$1 from commercial/industrial land, 30 cents was spent; and for each \$1 received from farmland, 38 cents was spent providing services. It is important to note that 79 percent of the revenue was generated by residential properties, 20 percent by commercial/industrial, and 1 percent by farmland. Of the total expenditures, 94 percent went to provide services for residential land use compared with 6 percent for commercial/industrial uses and less than 1 percent for farmland.

The Farm Work Group conducted a survey of agricultural landowners and county teens. A total of 1,307 surveys were mailed to owners of land who are listed with the Conservation District as being engaged in agricultural production. Of the 1,307 surveys distributed, 472 were returned (36%), a high rate of return for a mail survey. The survey included landowners in control of 18,950 acres of land, or 38% of the total acres in agricultural production.

The survey asked questions to gain an understanding of attitudes toward agriculture in the county. In general, 65% of those responding to the survey want their land to stay in agricultural production for the foreseeable future, about 20 – 30 years. About 32% would like to keep their land in agriculture even after they no longer own it, and 21% are willing to explore options for protecting their land for the future. Approximately 65% of landowners indicate that farmland protection should be considered with the provision that it is voluntary. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the landowners would consider options for protecting their land if tax benefits were available and local tax relief would be considered an incentive.

Three groups of teens were surveyed to look at attitudes of youth toward agriculture as a career, and the value of farmland. A total of 346 surveys were completed by the following groups: Campbell County Extension Service – 4-H Horse Club and Livestock Club; Campbell County High School Future Farmers of America Club; and, Bishop Brossart High School students in grades 9 – 12.

Sixty percent (60%) of the students reported that their grandparents and 47 % of their parents had lived on a farm. Only 28 % of the students reported that they lived on a farm. Forty-five percent (45 %) of the students plan to have a career in agriculture. Of those, only 4.6% plan to farm full-time; 8.2% part-time; and 24.1% plan to farm part-time and hold a full-time job off the farm. The remaining 8.2% plan to work in the agricultural industry, but not on a farm.

In general, students listed loss of land to subdivisions, population growth, and taxes as the hindrances to farming in Campbell County. They listed family and friends, nice people and communities, and the land, as things that would keep them here. Almost all of the students, 346 out of 362 surveyed, answered the question, “Is it important to protect and/or preserve farmland in Campbell County?” Of these, 77% said it was important to protect and/or preserve farmland in Campbell County. Only 5% said it was not important and 18% had no opinion.

The study was released in September and a strategic planning session was held in November to outline how to best utilize the information gathered in the study. For more information on the study contact the Campbell County Conservation District at 859-635-9587.