

Future of Agriculture Study

Pickaway County

October 14, 2026



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FROM THE CHAIR

Agriculture has long been Pickaway County's economic driver. Like all industries, agriculture must evolve and adapt to be successful. Agriculture in Pickaway County faces a unique set of challenges. With thoughtful planning and adaptation, agriculture can continue to flourish here well into the future. We hope this study helps make that possible.

I would like to thank the members of the Agriculture Committee who volunteered their time to complete this study. Their time and dedication to this project reflects their passion for agriculture.

Keith Summers

*Pickaway County Agriculture Committee Chair,
Leist Mercantile*





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



OVERVIEW

The Future of Agriculture Study is a step toward creating a future with agriculture as the heart of a growing community. The plan offers a clear-eyed vision for Pickaway County where farming becomes a more diversified, resilient, and localized practice that retains its capacity to engage with the global market. This entails managing growth, stewarding the land, and encouraging a prosperous future for farmers. A growing community deserves a community of growers!

Vision

Pickaway County is a place where agriculture is diverse, resilient, local, and viable for future generations.

Analysis

The plan aligns a variety of demographic, spatial, and economic data with input from farmers, agribusinesses, landowners, residents, students, and public officials to envision a positive future for agriculture in Pickaway County.

Public and stakeholder engagement were critical parts of this process to ensure the lived experiences of those living and working in the County could ground the analytical work. Over 450 people were engaged, including almost 100 high school students.

Local and national trends are influencing the conditions within the County. Locally, population growth and regional economic development are impacting farmland in the County. Nationally, instability in markets has left farmers in a state of uncertainty. Trends are not destiny, but coordinated action is necessary to enact change.

Themes for Protecting Agriculture

1. Managing Growth

- » Pickaway County must manage growth to harness the benefits of economic development while protecting the agricultural heritage of the community. Thoughtful planning and regulatory tools can prioritize areas best suited for development and agriculture, and ensure a town and country feel for new neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

2. Stewarding the Land

- » Pickaway County must steward the land to foster thriving farms and a healthy environment. Farmers can take advantage of agricultural easements and benefits to protect and maintain agricultural land, and adopt practices that encourage strong yields in the long-term. This includes building more diversified, resilient, and local operations to reduce uncertainty.

3. Encouraging Prosperity

- » Pickaway County must encourage prosperity by investing in the long-term to ensure that farming remains a viable and vibrant way of life. Marketing Pickaway County's farming roots through educational programs and highlighting the area as a hub for agricultural investment on the edge of a growing metro can ensure the community is at the forefront of agricultural innovation.

These strategies are intertwined. Managing growth protects agriculture, protecting agriculture creates a tradition of stewardship, and this stewardship nurtures new generations of growers. This plan operates as a cycle to build a better agricultural system in Pickaway County without stifling the development that enhances residents' access to jobs, education, and a higher quality of life.

Implementation

To realize the desired vision, action, implementation, and management will be necessary. Pickaway County must leverage financial, technical, and market tools to encourage smart land use decisions, long-term agricultural production, and economic prosperity for the next generation.

Capacity and resources to move the vision forward will be necessary. To ensure the plan does not simply sit on a shelf, leadership will be necessary. It is the recommendation of this study that the Agriculture Committee, formed by P3, stay intact to see through the implementation of this work. This group of volunteers, with rich agricultural backgrounds, could continue to meet at regular intervals throughout the year to check in on the progress and discuss urgent matters related to the future of agriculture.

Administrative capacity will help to organize this group and ensure that someone is waking up every day thinking about furthering the vision of Pickaway County as an agricultural powerhouse that is adapting to the uncertain agricultural future. Funding and an organizational framework will be necessary to set up a position.

Pickaway County is poised to harness the regional change and growth, while bolstering agriculture as a foundational industry and cultural asset for generations to come. This agriculture study organizes the sentiments of the community and puts them into an actionable agenda to position Pickaway County as a place where agriculture is diversified, resilient, localized, and accessible for future generations of farmers.

Priorities

The Agriculture Committee responsible for drafting this study identified 31 unique actions that should be completed. Additionally, they identified 8 priorities that the group in partnership with the county, P3, and local jurisdictions should focus on first.

These priority actions are:

1. **(M1) Draft and adopt a county-wide land use plan.**
2. **(M7) Establish a county-wide community reinvestment area focused on agriculture.**
3. **(S1) Maintain a bank of existing resources for farmland preservation and best practices.**
4. **(S8) Promote programs that help farmers adopt practices like diversifying production and promoting healthy soil and water.**
5. **(E5) Establish or support local newsletters focused on community news, including agriculture.**
6. **(E7) Establish a new agribusiness incentive program.**
7. **(Ec1) Review conveyance fee revenue and explore options to encourage farm to farm land sales.**
8. **(Ec3) Use community benefit agreements to secure public value at the entitlement stage.**





1 | SETTING THE SCENE



MOTIVATION

Why plan now?

Pickaway County is an agricultural powerhouse on the edge of a growing metropolitan area. Growth can be an economic driver, bringing new families, jobs, and amenities that enrich communities. But growth brings questions of what to prioritize, where to develop, and how to best serve the community. For farmers, it is also a question of their livelihoods.

Farms cover 88 percent of land in Pickaway County for a total of 280,000 acres. Pickaway County is losing farmland at an estimated rate of 2,700 acres annually. With farmers increasingly approaching retirement age, equipment and chemicals becoming more expensive, and global trade becoming increasingly volatile, the future of agriculture in Pickaway County is uncertain. So, what do we do? We plan.

Who is guiding the process?

Pickaway Progress Partnership (P3) is the economic development agent for Pickaway County and its municipalities. P3 oversees both a broader economic development strategy and agricultural and agribusiness development. Given the importance of farms and agribusiness to the economy, culture, and land use in Pickaway County, P3 convened an Agriculture Committee of local farmers, landowners, and business leaders to plan for the future of agriculture.

Initiating the Work

The Agriculture Committee identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) for the community to set the foundation for additional research and eventually to identify the actions required. This SWOT analysis was based upon the perception of the industry and the county. Throughout the process of conducting the study, items in the SWOT analysis were considered and in some cases called into question. For example, recent studies have shown potential instability in water supply, which was previously understood to be an abundant resource (and shown as a strength in the SWOT analysis).

The committee quickly identified threats that are common in counties throughout the state and the nation. Because these challenges are not new and they are not isolated to Pickaway County, the SWOT analysis revealed the need to reflect on the actions of other agricultural communities, including counties from other states. The SWOT analysis also identified key individuals to engage with, including educators, business owners, and state agency representatives who helped identify opportunities aligned with opportunities that have been well-known in the community.

Strengths

- Strong infrastructure and abundant water to support agriculture
- Experienced producers
- FFA/4-H support
- Market access
- Government support for farmland production

Weaknesses

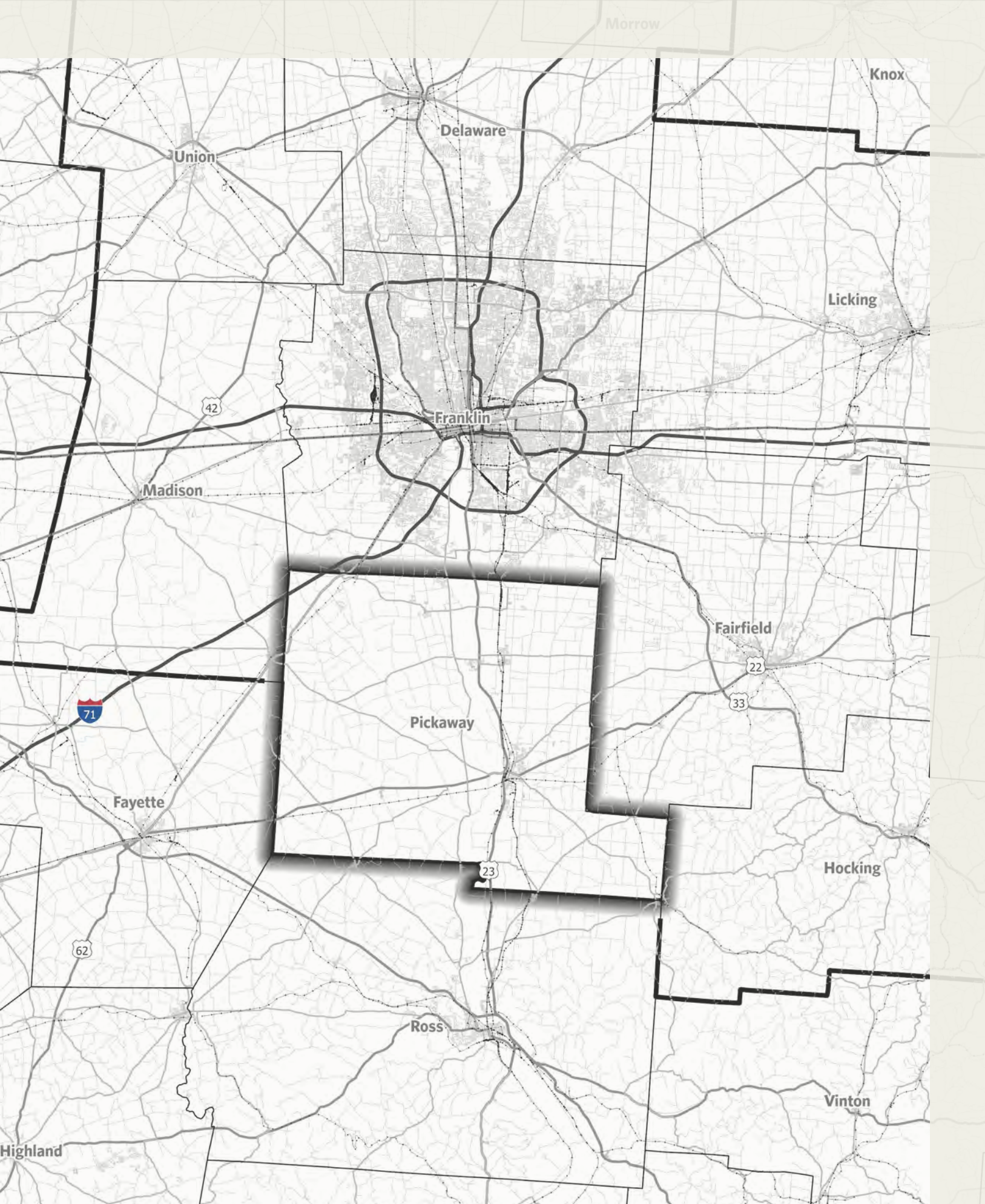
- Rural divide
- NIMBY attitude
- No unified comprehensive plan
- Aging landowners, labor shortages, and brain drain
- Poor township roads
- Minimal community conversation
- Market monopolies

Opportunities

- Growth in specialty crop, biofuels, direct to consumer markets
- Partnerships with WORKS and tech schools, prison, meat processing facility
- Startup funding sources
- Greenhouse production
- Enhanced transportation for import/export

Threats

- Urbanization, land loss, development pressures
- Climate change, regulations, and market instability
- Declining workforce, housing issues, energy security



How is the region changing?

The Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is home to over 2.1 million people. Between 2010 and 2020 alone, the region grew by 235,000—that's the size of four Pickaway Counties—and growth does not stop at county, municipal, or township lines.

Pickaway County is expected to grow by 20,000 people by 2050. That's equivalent to adding a new Circleville, Ashville, and South Bloomfield in just 25 years. These new people require homes, jobs, infrastructure, and amenities, which in turn require land. As land is converted into neighborhoods, commercial centers, industries, roads, and parks, the future of development becomes intertwined with the future of agriculture.

This plan considers not only how agriculture may change in the future, but how development can be managed to protect and expand agricultural production in Pickaway County. While the plan focuses on farming and agribusiness, it considers a variety of planning and development tools as central to agricultural preservation and production.

Why focus on agriculture?

Agriculture and agribusiness are global, multi-billion-dollar enterprises that span a variety of sectors from food and beverage, to textiles and apparel, to energy and fuel, to agritourism and conservation.

In Ohio, food and agriculture create \$124 billion in economic activity every year. The state is a major agricultural producer, ranked #15 in the United States in gross receipts at \$13.4 billion. Ohio boasts strong farming and food infrastructure, but its focus on corn and soybeans comes at the expense of fruit and vegetable production. The state's livestock sector is strong, with a focus on poultry, dairy, and pork. However, organic farming is uncommon and the state lags behind the country in adopting environmental preservation and sustainability measures that ensure farms remain productive in the long-term. Further, the state's lack of statutory planning requirements leaves agricultural preservation and planning at the discretion of local governments.

Pickaway County exemplifies opportunities and challenges of Ohio agriculture. The 760 farms in the county produce \$250 million in annual market value, mostly from row crops like corn and soybeans, the majority of which are used for biofuel, feed, and food production. In recent years, increasingly thin margins have led to instability in corn and soybean markets, putting strain on Pickaway County farmers. At the same time, Pickaway County is well-positioned for agricultural innovation, diversification, and preservation as one of the few Ohio counties with a rich agricultural history within a growing metro.

World-class universities and multinational employers are at Pickaway County's doorstep, and a booming region with strong anchor institutions means Pickaway County has the resources and visibility to harness its rural roots and envision the future of agriculture.

Defining agriculture

For the purpose of this study, agriculture is defined in four separate parts. Agriculture is...

1. The cornerstone of the global food system

- » The growth, cultivation, and distribution of food products to support the nutritional needs of the world.

2. Culturally significant

- » A relationship between people and the land that revolves around the cycles and systems that support the cultivation of crops and livestock.

3. A relationship with the land

- » The art and science of intervening in an ecosystem to grow food and produce goods in a cycle of nutrient regeneration.

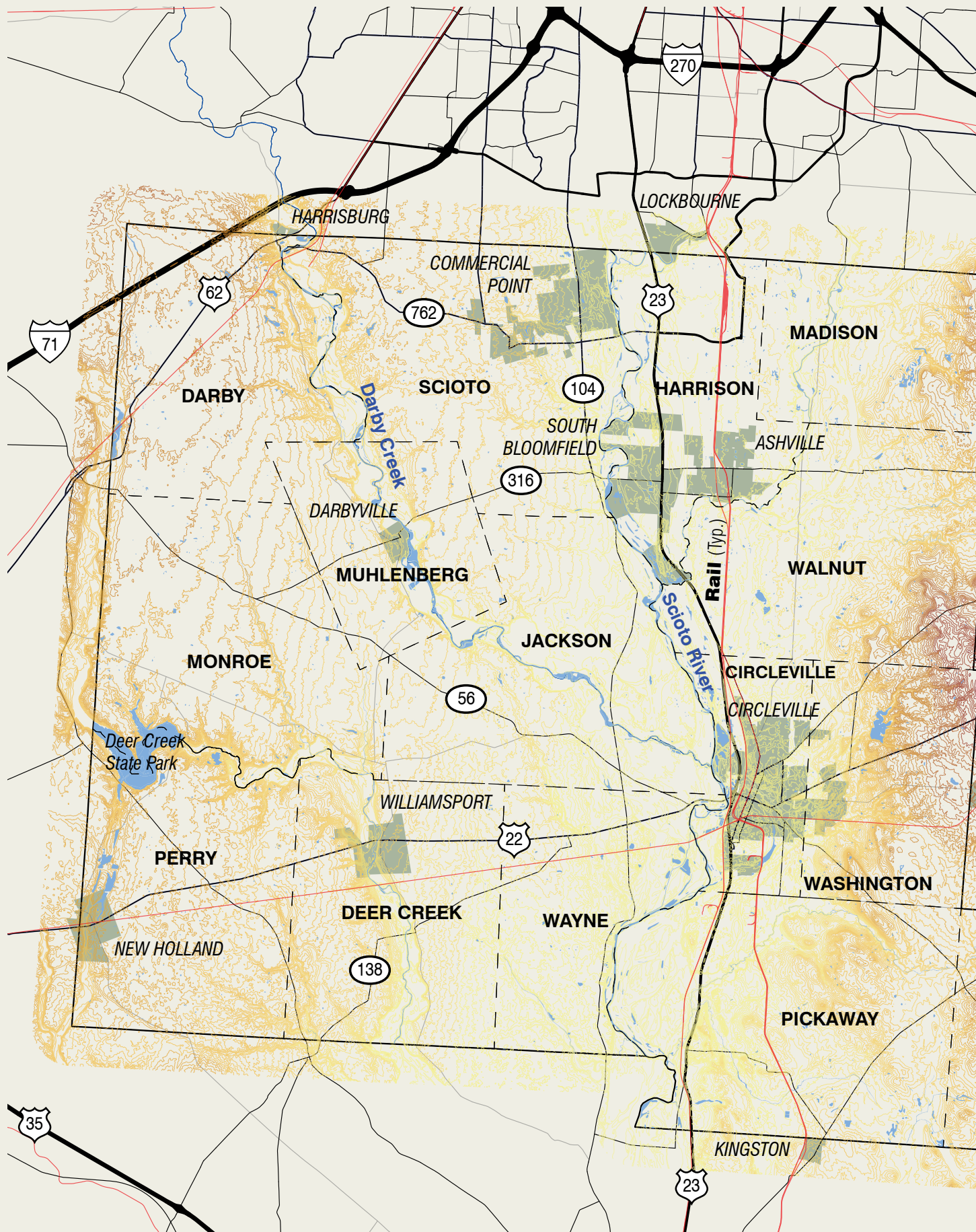
4. A driver of the economy

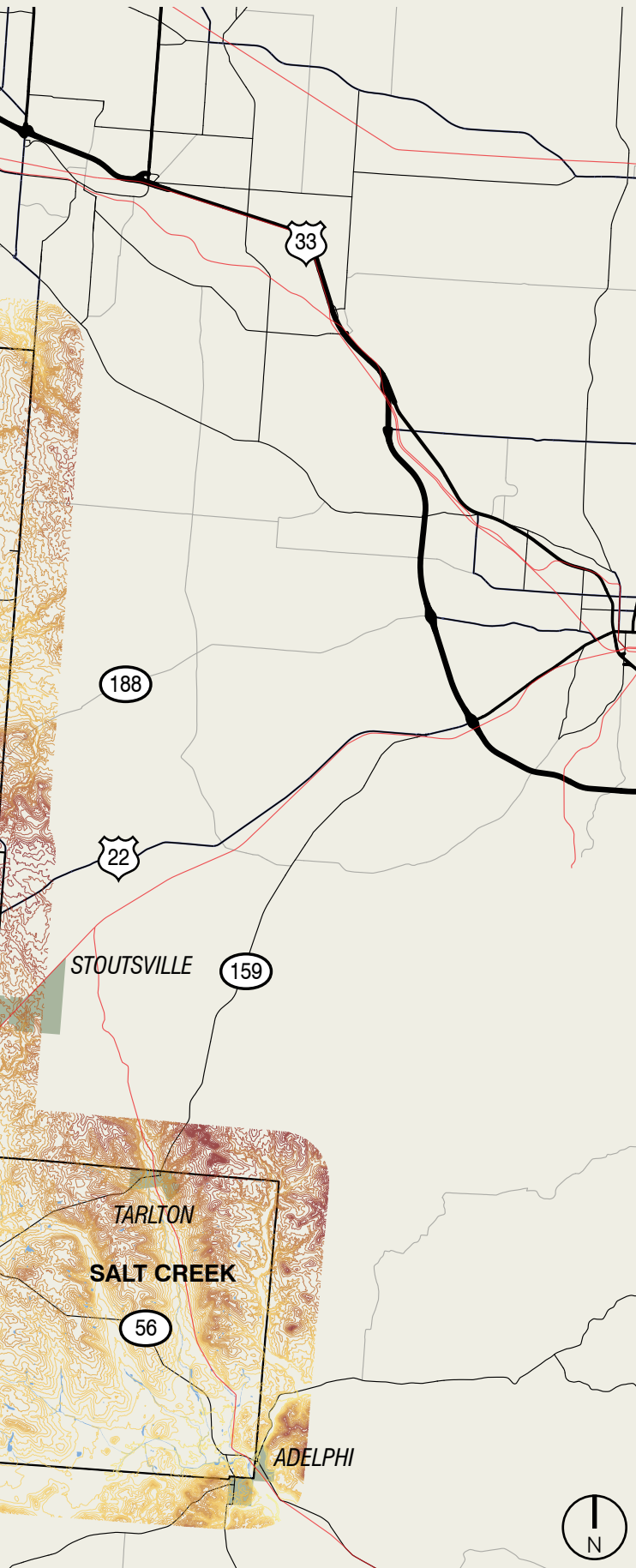
- » A system that produces, processes, and distributes agricultural products to generate profit, jobs, and development.

TRENDS AT A GLANCE

- 1. Pickaway County is part of a growing region.** Central Ohio is expected to grow from 2.25 million (2024) to over 3 million in 2050 according to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.
- 2. Regional economic development is impacting Pickaway County.** Over \$40 billion is being invested across the central Ohio region. Significant development projects are happening in northern Pickaway County as well as the US-23 corridor.
- 3. Sprawling development patterns are a threat to farmland.** Leap-frog development and greenfield low-density residential subdivisions are consuming farmland and require significant infrastructure investments.
- 4. Farmland is being lost to development.** Over 13,000 acres of farmland was lost between 2017 and 2022.
- 5. Future water availability is becoming less certain.** According to the 2025 Pickaway County Water Study, an increase in water demand of 20 million gallons/day for agricultural uses is expected by 2040 due to the need to irrigate cropland.
- 6. Row crops dominate farmland.** 93% of all farmland is dedicated to corn or soybeans.







GEOGRAPHY

County Overview

Pickaway County sits 30 miles south of Columbus, Ohio, just north of the foothills of Appalachia. The county is largely flat, split in two by the Scioto River and U.S. 23 which run parallel to each other. The landscape is dominated by farmland, with green space clustered around waterways.

The county seat of Circleville is a small city (population 14,144) that is home to a historic main street and manufacturing corridor that remain an important part of Pickaway County's economy. While Circleville is growing, most development pressure emanates from the northern County and along U.S. 23. The communities of Ashville, Commercial Point, South Bloomfield, and the area around Rickenbacker International Airport have seen significant development. At the same time, the villages of Darbyville, Lockbourne, and Tarlton have been either stable or shrinking.

Land use and infrastructure are interconnected. From highways and utility lines to land prices and parcel sizes, decisions around uses, density, character, and location can have effects that impact the rural character and resonate throughout the county—and the region.

By the Numbers

62,978	County Population (2025)
1,363	Total Producers (2022)
760	Farms (2022)
502	Square Miles
88	Farmland as a % of total land area
59	Farmer Average Age (2022)
40	Overall Average Age (2022)
15	Townships
8	Villages
1	City

ENGAGEMENT

Nov	First P3 Agriculture Committee Meeting Intro meeting with County Commissioners
Dec	Intro meeting with Pickaway Mayors' Group Stakeholder Meetings
Jan	Stakeholder Meetings Ag. Committee Meeting
Feb	Ag. Committee Meeting
Mar	Panel discussion and public engagement event at Pickaway County Fairgrounds Public engagement event in South Bloomfield Public engagement event at Westfall High School Presentation at Township Trustees Meeting
Apr	Ag. Committee Meeting Meeting with Pickaway Mayors' Group Youth Engagement at Teays Valley High School
May	Youth Engagement at Circleville High School Ag. Committee Meeting Rotary meeting Stakeholder workshop Meeting with County Commissioners
Jun	Ag. Committee Meeting Meeting with County Commissioners County Fair Public Engagement
Jul	Ag. Committee Meeting

Learning from lived experiences

Over the course of the planning process individual perspectives were gathered through a variety of settings and engagement opportunities. Overall, over 450 people were engaged, ranging from high school students to seasoned farmers. Other participants included agricultural lenders, crop insurance representatives, machinery dealers, large animal veterinarians, township and municipal leaders, alongside interested members of the public.

Public engagement kicked off with a panel discussion at Heritage Hall at the Pickaway County Fairgrounds. The panel was made up of the Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Brian Baldrige, the Director of Planning for Wayne County Jennifer Kiper, and Pickaway County farmer Lee Radcliff, and discussed their perspectives on the future of agriculture.

Community members at the event completed open-ended questionnaires that expanded upon their own hopes and concerns for agriculture in Pickaway County. This questionnaire was distributed at the panel kick-off, two pop-up meetings, available online, and a modified version was distributed to students of Circleville and Teays Valley High Schools.

Emerging themes

Input from engagement opportunities was analyzed and summarized to develop themes that guided the study. These themes were as follows:

1. Balance agriculture and development

- » Respondents acknowledged growth is going to come to Pickaway County and desire a plan to direct the growth while advocating for the protection of desirable farmland.

2. Foster the next generation of farmers

- » A recognition of the need to ensure farmers of the future have access to farmland and the ability to farm the land was of importance to many community members.
- » This importance of fostering the next generation was tied to the desire to see farmland conserved as a cultural and place-based anchor as well as a career pathway.

3. Involve and communicate planning and development initiatives with the community

- » Community members feel like the world is happening to them, not for them. They desire to be brought along as development decisions are being made that impact their lives.



What Can We Control?

National trends and externalities are outside of the direct control of the farms, institutions, and local governments of Pickaway County. What is under the control of the people and policymakers in Pickaway County are decisions on how the land is used and how the community chooses to support agriculture. This situation is described by Dr. Amanda Weinstein of the *Center on Rural Innovation*, who notes, "Uncertainty is global, resiliency is local."





"Wayne County has a lot of the same problems that Pickaway County has, that other counties are also dealing with. We have a real opportunity to work together and share ideas with each other."

JENNIFER KIPER

Director of Planning for Wayne County, Ohio

"Economic development and agriculture can absolutely coexist, and deliberate land-use planning helps to navigate that balance."

BRIAN BALDRIDGE

Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture



"We need to have incentives that are focused on keeping agriculture as the number one industry in the County, because once it's gone, it won't come back."

LEE RADCLIFF

Pickaway County Farmer and Agribusiness Owner

High school highlights

1. Students **hoped** that Pickaway County would remain a close-knit, welcoming, rural community with a strong agricultural economy.
2. Students were **concerned** that growth and suburbanization would lead to the loss of farmland and the community's rural character.
3. Students **loved** the people, lifestyle, and landscape of Pickaway County.

Engagement by the numbers

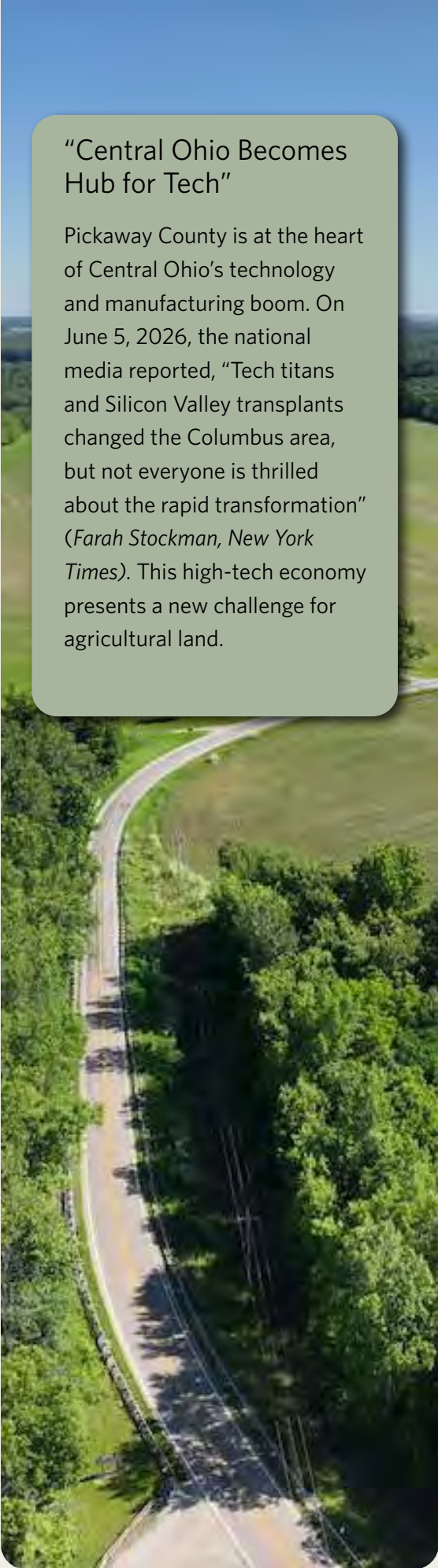
450	total participants
93	students engaged
23	stakeholders interviewed
4	public meetings
2	mayors' group meetings
1	township association trustee meeting

Fair highlights

A set of actions were presented at the County Fair for public feedback. Community members were able to vote on their top priorities and comment on the suitability of the actions for Pickaway County. This input was used to revise the actions to better suit community needs.

1. Residents were **excited** to see progress on addressing community concerns about rapid development and the loss of agricultural land.
2. Residents **supported** the use of additional land use and agricultural preservation tools.
3. Residents **emphasized** a variety of methods for strengthening farming as a way of life.





“Central Ohio Becomes Hub for Tech”

Pickaway County is at the heart of Central Ohio’s technology and manufacturing boom. On June 5, 2026, the national media reported, “Tech titans and Silicon Valley transplants changed the Columbus area, but not everyone is thrilled about the rapid transformation” (*Farah Stockman, New York Times*). This high-tech economy presents a new challenge for agricultural land.

RESEARCH

Agriculture in Pickaway County

Pickaway County is home to 760 farms covering 283,000 acres and produces over \$250 million in agricultural market value. The vast majority of farmers cultivate row crops like soybeans, corn, and wheat, but a number of farmers manage livestock and poultry.

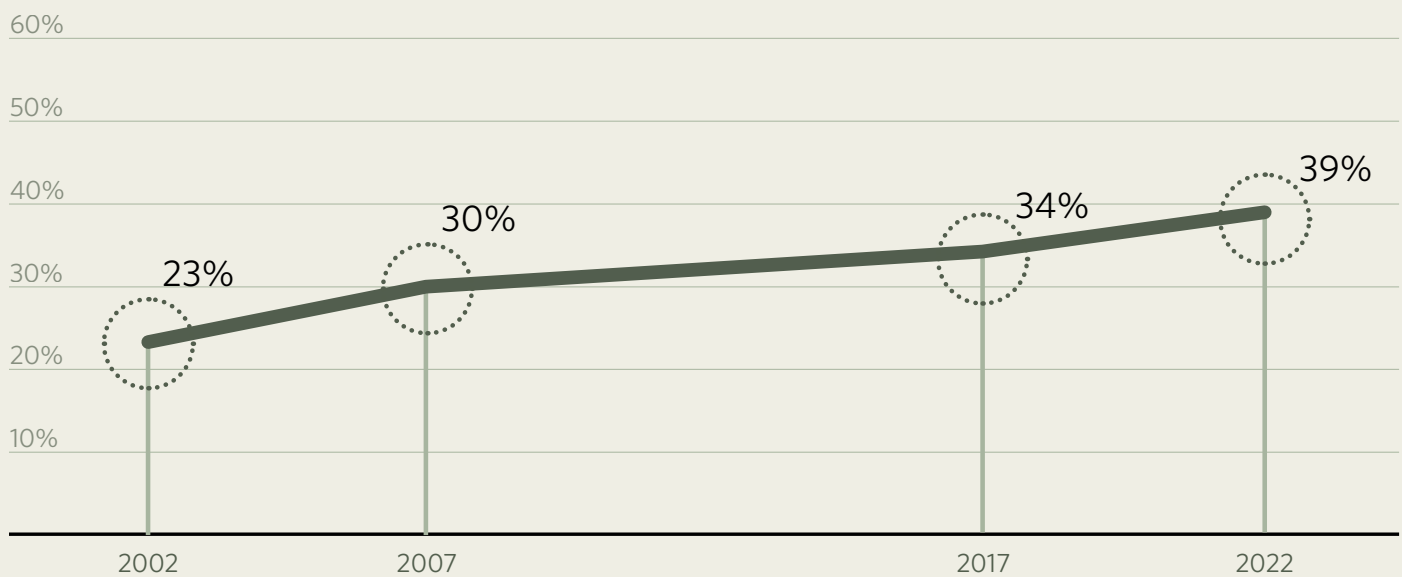
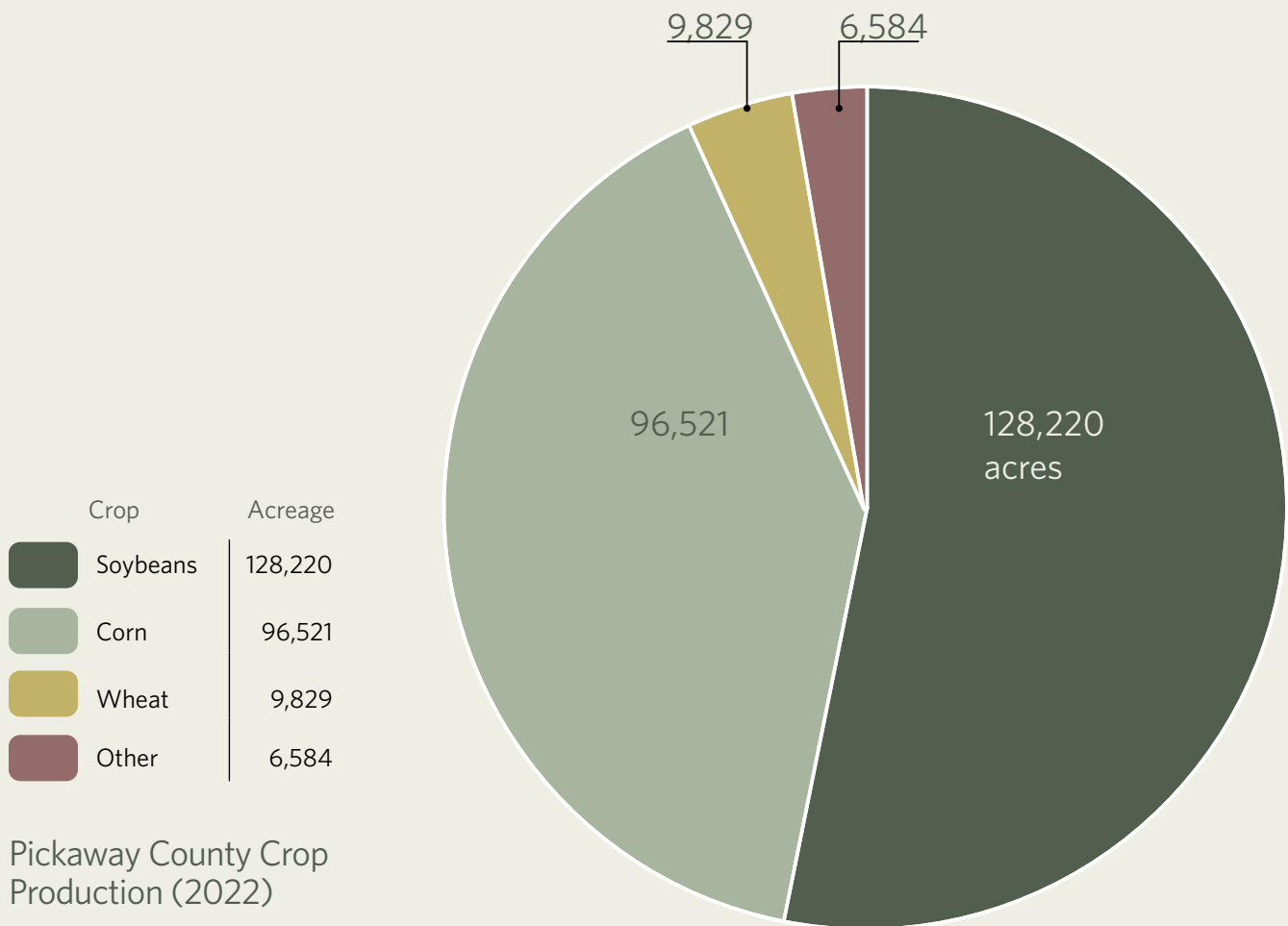
Pickaway County farmers have adopted a mix of agricultural practices, but there is potential for additional innovation and diversification. Six in ten farms in Pickaway County use either no-till or reduced-till practices and one in ten farms use cover crops. Additionally, 29% of farm acres use drainage tile and 1% of farm acres use irrigation.

Only 3% of farm acres are used for a crop other than soybeans, corn, or wheat.

Pickaway County has lost farmland for the first time in 25 years at a rate of -4.7% between 2017 and 2022. Average farm size has remained stable at around 370 acres and median farm sizes have decreased, but the data suggest a more complex picture. Between 2017 and 2022, an estimated 45 farms were lost and a number of farms either sold or purchased land from other farms, or sold land to developers.

As farmers get older, the future of their farms becomes less certain. Economic changes may push retiring farmers to sell to residential, commercial, or industrial developers. While development can create opportunities, the rising pressure to sell puts farmland at risk.

Recent land sales in northern Pickaway County and along U.S. 23 have driven sales prices up even though land values have only modestly increased. In 2002, agricultural land was valued at \$11,200/acre and purchased for \$7,300/acre. In 2022, agricultural land was valued at \$13,700 an acre and purchased at \$27,000 an acre.



Farmers Over 65, as % of Total Farmers in Pickaway County
 (USDA 2012 Agricultural Census not used in this Study for inconsistencies with other survey years)

Influential trends

National, regional, and local data on agriculture and development point to a series of connected trends that influence the future of agriculture. These nine headlines provide a snapshot of this moment in time for Pickaway County farmers.

1. Central Ohio is growing

- » Central Ohio's 15-county region is expected to grow from around 2 million people in 2020 to over 3 million people in 2050 according to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC).
- » Regional growth brings economic opportunity—and development. The Rickenbacker International Airport and the new Anduril Arsenal One manufacturing facility are economic drivers for Central Ohio. This affords residents access to new jobs, but exerts significant development pressure on northern Pickaway County.

2. Pickaway County is growing

- » Pickaway County's population is expected to grow from around 60,000 in 2024 to 80,000 in 2050, an increase of 20,000 people.
- » 20,000 people will need homes, jobs, infrastructure, and amenities. Further, development is not evenly distributed. The communities in northern Pickaway County and along U.S. 23 may experience additional growth pressure and will need to consider how this affects agricultural land.

3. Pickaway County farmland is declining

- » The most recent U.S. Census of Agriculture estimated that Pickaway County lost 13,800 acres of farmland between 2017 and 2022. This translates to about 2,700 acres per year. Land cover data indicates most of this farmland is lost to development.
- » Once farmland is developed, it is incredibly unlikely that the land will return to agriculture. And once a development is complete, it is unlikely that it

will be redeveloped for many decades. The type, location, and density of development impacts not only the users of a site or the people living nearby, but also future development.

4. Farmland is selling well above the average appraised value

- » In 2022, the average sale price of one acre of agricultural land was 270% higher than the average sale price in 2002, not adjusted for inflation. This is primarily due to large-scale land acquisition by developers in northern Pickaway County. But even elsewhere in Pickaway County, agricultural land often sold well above its appraised value when being converted into a new industrial, commercial, or residential use.
- » As farmers face national economic headwinds due to rising costs and unstable export markets, they may be tempted to sell in order to better care for themselves and their families. For farmers that do not own their land, landowners may also feel the pressure to sell at key locations within the county.

5. The average age of farmers is increasing

- » The average Pickaway County resident was 39.5 years old, but the average Pickaway County farmer was 59.1 years old in 2022. While the share of older residents in Pickaway County is slowly increasing, the average farmer is approaching retirement age.
- » Ohio is facing a demographic challenge. If current trends continue, there will be fewer young people to work, pay taxes, and care for older Ohioans. For farmers, this problem is existential. Many farmers are approaching retirement at the same time. This raises a host of questions, like who will tend to the land—or who can afford to buy it—and what will become of it in the future. Even if land remains agricultural, it could be purchased by nearby farms or by corporations, leading to fewer farmers and a more consolidated market.

6. Export and biofuel markets are increasingly volatile

- » Pickaway County farmers operate on thin margins. Volatile export and biofuel markets make planning for future seasons incredibly difficult.
- » From uncertainty around tariffs to the complicated impacts of global conflicts on shipping, fertilizer, and fuel costs, farmers are left in the dark. Farming requires significant upfront investments, and even seasoned farmers find that rapidly changing market conditions lead to starkly different margins between planting and harvest cycles.

7. Input costs are rising

- » The price of land, equipment, chemicals, and seeds continues to rise, even as revenues stay flat, and farmers increasingly rely on holding a job off the farm to make ends meet.
- » As Pickaway County farmers struggle with high prices, it may be difficult to invest in innovation, diversification, or even the current operation. This may influence farmers' decisions around maintaining the farm or selling land.

8. Corn and soybean market conditions are in poor shape

- » Corn and soybean market prices remain relatively flat, with record supply and unclear demand.
- » Pickaway County farmers are highly vulnerable to global market shifts around corn and soybeans. This means that, even as Pickaway County residents support agriculture, financial outlooks depend on a market that is far beyond local control.

9. Corporate consolidation is putting pressure on farmers

- » From the beginning of the supply chain to the end, farmers are increasingly reliant on a few large corporations. From tractor sales to seed supplies to meat processing, large companies control significant market shares that put farmers in a difficult position.
- » Corporate consolidation can create the scale needed to produce new efficiencies—but it can also corner the market and limit choices. Pickaway County farmers are unlikely to be able to exert the influence needed to make change at these corporations, and so farmers must work with them, or around them, when issues arise.

Corporate Consolidation

Agriculture in the United States faces significant risks due to market consolidation. Two companies, Deere & Co. and CNH, oversee 97% of combine and 95% of large tractor sales. Corteva and Bayer control 72% of the corn seed and 66% of the soybean seed markets, Pickaway County's staple crops. Walmart, Kroger, and Costco handle over 60% of grocery sales (Source: Farm Action; USDA ERS). The list goes on.

Sometimes, companies may need scale to produce new efficiencies. But market consolidation is always a consolidation of power, which, without transparency and accountability, can lead to abuse. Pickaway County farmers are facing increasing consolidation amongst suppliers and buyers, which makes them vulnerable to market shocks that big companies can weather, or exploit, without much consideration for family farms.

COUNTY COMPARISON

Analysis of peer counties

Five peer counties were selected based on their relevancy to the existing conditions of Pickaway County.

Wayne County, Ohio and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania were chosen for their strong agricultural planning and production capabilities. Lancaster County in particular is a large, metropolitan county with a highly developed agricultural economy. These counties provide insight into how planning can encourage diverse, resilient agriculture even as populations grow larger.

Three counties were comparable due to their proximity to growing metropolitan areas, while retaining agriculture use, these counties include: Madison County, Ohio, Boone County, Illinois, and Story County, Iowa. These three counties provide insight and context to help Pickaway County decide what the community wants to do, or not do, related to the growth.

Compared to the five other counties, Pickaway has the largest average farm size at 373 acres, this aligns with Pickaway’s position as having the second lowest number of farms. These statistics reinforce that Pickaway’s farm landscape is dominated by row crops. Ninety percent of farms produce crops, most of this farmland is corn and soybeans as indicated on page 23.

As Pickaway looks to diversify farming operations and enable the next generation of farmers, other counties serve as reference counties to investigate the distribution of crop types and farm sizes.

Building peer networks

Pickaway County is not alone, other places are grappling with similar conditions and trying to navigate how to retain agriculture amidst regional and global challenges. Building relationships with other agricultural places will help Pickaway share and build knowledge.

Variable	Pickaway County, OH	Wayne County, OH	Madison County, OH
Population (2022)	58,809	116,559	43,961
Farms	760	2,084	763
Average Farm Size (acres)	373	124	310
Total Farmland (acres)	283,165	259,339	236,886
Farmland (% of county total)	88%	73%	79%
Market Value (\$)	\$250 million	\$554 million	\$234 million
Net Farm Income (\$)	\$82 million	\$157 million	\$82 million
Crop % Livestock %	90% 10%	26% 74%	79% 21%

The US Agricultural Census was used to develop these comparisons. The most recent data for the Agricultural Census at the time that this study was published was 2022. Population estimates from US Census Bureau from 2022 were used to provide accurate ratios for all included communities.



Boone County, IL	Lancaster County, PA	Story County, IA
53,459	556,629	99,673
416	4,680	1,067
299	81	280
124,244	378,574	299,244
69%	63%	82%
\$146 million	\$1,854 million	\$386 million
\$49 million	\$673 million	\$131 million
86% 14%	18% 82%	74% 26%

Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture and US Census Bureau



2 | REALIZING THE VISION



INTRODUCTION

The Themes

This chapter outlines three sets of actions to realize the stated vision of Pickaway County. These themes came from an analysis of the influential trends mentioned in the previous section, along with community input. The themes are “managing growth”, “stewarding the land”, and “encouraging prosperity”. Importantly, many of these actions require capital to either directly fund agribusiness innovation, educational programs, or to hire staff to oversee programming. The “economic development tools” identify ways that the county may capture investment from certain types of development.

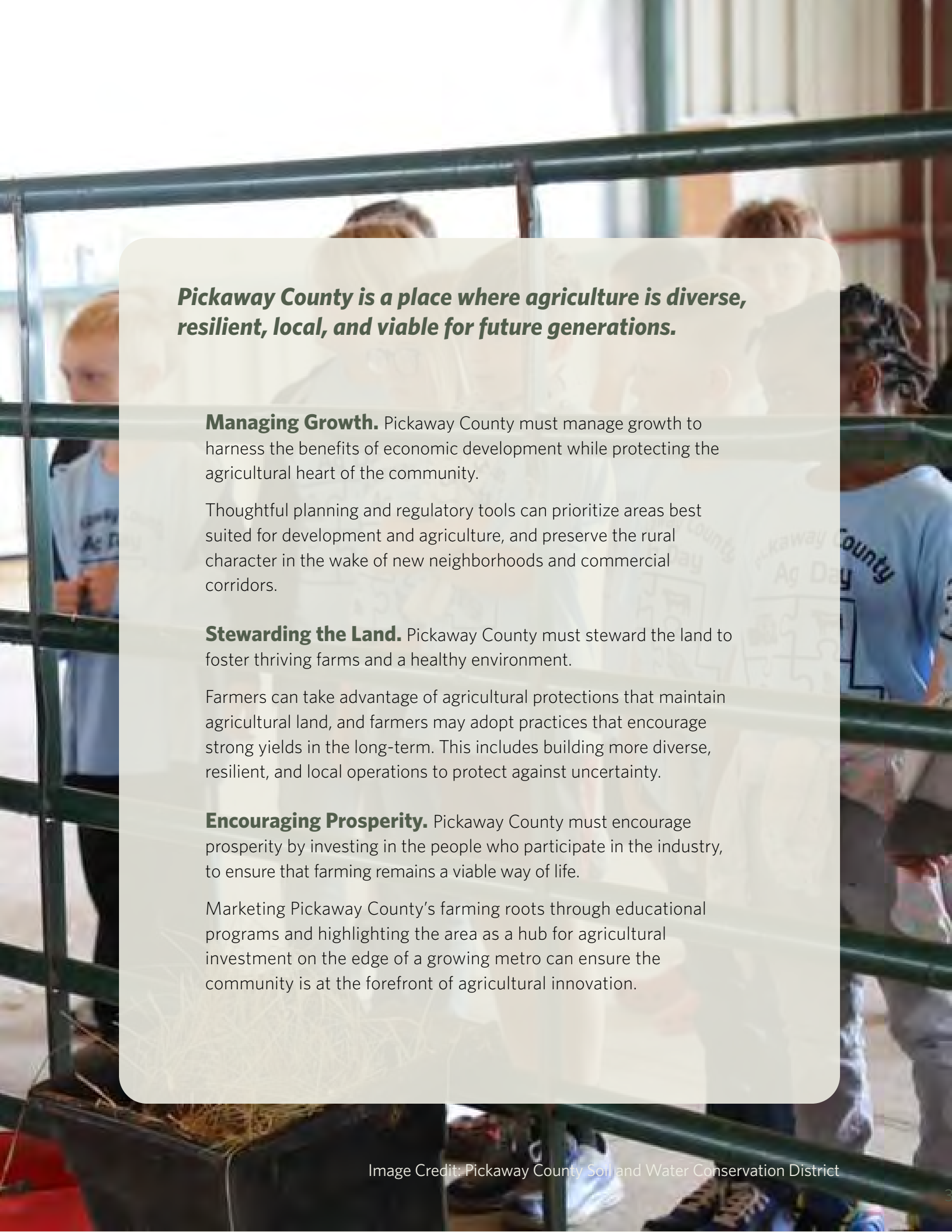
Managing growth actions are related to balanced growth and conservation. Residents acknowledge that development is coming to the county and actors should attempt to encourage order and predictability, leveraging opportunities for the preservation of agricultural land and practice while balancing other types of economic growth and development.

Stewarding the land actions are focused on the need to consider the quality of farmland. Land’s ability to sustain crops for generations to come is a key pillar to the future of agriculture in the county. Stewardship relies on the alignment of public and private initiatives to help farmers as they balance productivity, diversity, and innovation to protect the natural resources that make farming possible.

Encouraging prosperity focuses on providing opportunities and access to future farmers as farmland changes hands. Prosperity extends to the provision and availability of opportunities for all members of the County, whether they are directly engaged in agriculture or not. The belief with encouraging prosperity is that an improvement for agriculture and farmers raises the quality of life for all in Pickaway County.



The Vision for the Future of Agriculture

A background photograph showing children at an agricultural fair. In the foreground, a child in a white shirt is looking down. Behind them, other children are visible, some wearing blue t-shirts with "Pickaway County Ag Day" printed on them. They are standing behind a green metal railing. The scene is outdoors with a bright, slightly blurred background.

Pickaway County is a place where agriculture is diverse, resilient, local, and viable for future generations.

Managing Growth. Pickaway County must manage growth to harness the benefits of economic development while protecting the agricultural heart of the community.

Thoughtful planning and regulatory tools can prioritize areas best suited for development and agriculture, and preserve the rural character in the wake of new neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

Stewarding the Land. Pickaway County must steward the land to foster thriving farms and a healthy environment.

Farmers can take advantage of agricultural protections that maintain agricultural land, and farmers may adopt practices that encourage strong yields in the long-term. This includes building more diverse, resilient, and local operations to protect against uncertainty.

Encouraging Prosperity. Pickaway County must encourage prosperity by investing in the people who participate in the industry, to ensure that farming remains a viable way of life.

Marketing Pickaway County's farming roots through educational programs and highlighting the area as a hub for agricultural investment on the edge of a growing metro can ensure the community is at the forefront of agricultural innovation.

TAKING ACTION

The Future of Agriculture Study is intended to be a working document that is referenced often, providing options and tangible actions for potential partners. It will take time, energy, and a high level of collaboration to achieve the projects, policies, and programs outlined in this study.

The conditions being addressed through this plan are dynamic and regular monitoring will be necessary to track progress. The Agriculture Committee, a group of community members established by the Pickaway Progress Partnership, will continue to convene to review the completion of actions identified in the plan. The Study offers 31 unique actions, and identifies several potential actors. These groups and individuals may have resources or authority to enact certain steps, however, it is the role of the Agriculture Committee to initiate collaboration with the identified “Potential Actors”.

This is unlike other plans in that it includes a broad range of actors, bridging public and private groups.

Potential Actors

These actors were identified for their potential resources, authority, or alignment of goals and values with the actions identified. These potential actors are subject to change, and are not considered responsible for the potential actions contained in this study.

The Agriculture Committee is the group responsible for establishing this study and overseeing actions. The Committee will identify the method for engaging the potential actors and working with the County and county partners to fund, program, or adopt the assorted actions as required.

The Agriculture Committee will monitor the actions over time, considering if there are changes to be made to the priority actions, and identifying the process for updating the goals and actions included in the plan. The Committee represents the entire geography of the county, many agencies, local governments, and private interests. The Committee will identify the appropriate actors and partners to address each potential action in this study.



MANAGING GROWTH

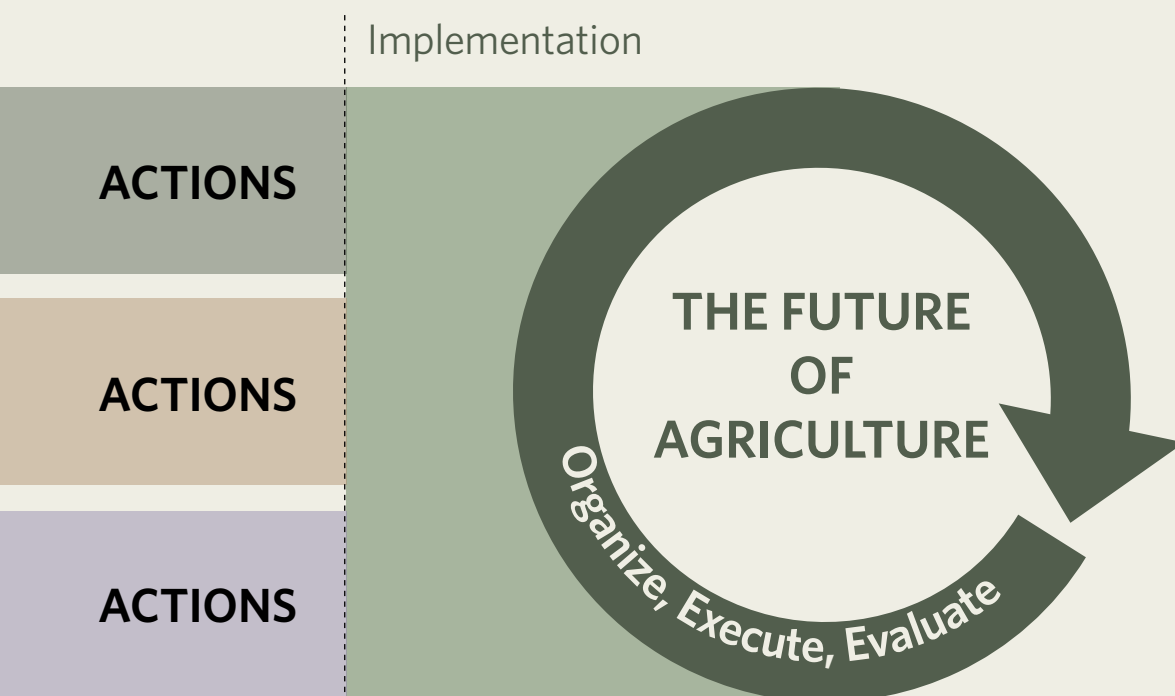
The actions in this group are focused on activities that help to organize and leverage investment to bolster agricultural practices and opportunities.

STEWARDING THE LAND

Actions within the stewarding the land group promote the conservation of agricultural lands so they may be farmed for generations to come. Agricultural character may be strengthened through these actions.

ENCOURAGING PROSPERITY

Actions related to encouraging prosperity look to bolster the economic and market conditions associated with agriculture. These actions focus on providing growers with the resources they need to manage their operations.



Managing Growth



“The Road Ahead for Pickaway County”

Pickaway County is making headlines. On November 7, 2025, Columbus Business First stated on its front page, “Community leaders have to decide how to handle rapid growth as Anduril and a booming logistics industry bring thousands of new jobs to the area.” Growth represents an opportunity, but harnessing it is a collective effort.



The county, like many others in Central Ohio, has experienced considerable growth in recent years. While this growth has come with significant challenges, the alternative—stagnation or population decline—brings even more acute challenges. Many residents in the county see the benefits of this growth, acknowledging that their children will have good education and job opportunities nearby, that increases in property values can help provide security for landowners in the future, and that amenities and services are often nearby. Residents have also seen increased traffic, changes in the landscape, and an

increasingly dire outlook for agriculture, as farming costs are tied to land.

Management of growth is vital to ensuring that the growth is leveraged for its benefits and that appropriate guardrails keep it from pushing out the community assets that are here today. County residents who participated in the planning process called for a balanced approach to development, advocating countywide planning efforts and voicing concerns about how quickly development has changed the character of communities, and feeling that by

the time developments are in place, there is nothing to be done. This was especially true in the northern portion of the county. Managing growth may include incentivizing growth in certain areas, applying land use plans and regulations to protect natural features, and collaborating among townships, municipalities, and the county to coordinate transportation and utility improvements as places continue to grow.

In support of agricultural stability, local jurisdictions may encourage new development

that respects rural vistas, supports rural lifestyles, and conserves historic resources, including historic farms. The county and various actors have a significant role to play in a multi-faceted approach to managing growth in order to conserve what makes Pickaway County what it has always been, an agricultural community.

M1. Draft and adopt a county-wide land use plan

The land use plan is a tool that is often drafted alongside a comprehensive plan. The land use plan generally applies guidance about land uses, densities, intensities, and characteristics of different spaces throughout a city, county, or township. Land use plans may also contain recommendations for how communities can achieve land use outcomes and reduce conflicts with certain types of growth. Land use plans identify goals for growth and conservation.

(Potential) ACTORS

County

M2. Draft and adopt a county-wide comprehensive plan

A comprehensive plan is a tool to align local planning efforts. It consolidates trends, conditions, and existing regulatory guidance to present a picture of what is happening throughout the county and what that means for the communities within it. It also establishes key goals and policies that can be used to procure funding for programs and to justify land use decisions, including approvals of major developments.

(Potential) ACTORS

County

M3. Update comprehensive plans in townships and municipalities

Land use and form regulations and guidelines can support rural character and new development that respects small town and rural feel. Communities that do not have agricultural land use categories or other policies related to agricultural protection should consider them as they update their plans and regulations.

(Potential) ACTORS

Townships
Municipalities

M4. Update zoning ordinances in townships and municipalities

A zoning ordinance establishes the permitted uses and the general density, lot coverage, building specifications, and other standards for development throughout the county. Agricultural zoning can conserve agriculture by setting minimum lot sizes, making it challenging to subdivide large, productive agricultural land into large-lot residential and reducing sprawl. A zoning map based on a community-established land use plan clearly identifies the agricultural zones where converting uses is discouraged by law. Other regulations or forms of flexibility can also reduce sprawl, including clustered development, which can be applied as a zone or allowed systematically through the subdivision ordinance, and PUD districts, which allow flexibility in lot sizes and set-asides of protected land.

(Potential) ACTORS

Townships
Municipalities

M5. Establish and update annexation agreements between townships and municipalities

An annexation agreement is an agreement between a municipality and the township or county that establishes growth areas and sets the criteria and process for annexation. Updating these agreements can help avoid sprawl, concentrate development in key areas, and preserve agriculture. Communities should closely analyze their capacity for infrastructure and services and determine and visualize feasible growth boundaries.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Townships
Municipalities

M6. Participate in regional collaboration

Participating in regional studies and plans helps the county and local governments understand regional trends and development and evaluate their effects on Pickaway County, allowing the county and all of its municipalities and townships to be more nimble. Regional partnership may support funding for planning efforts and implementing regional transportation initiatives. Regional planning organizations and even neighboring counties can also provide vital coordination as the county looks forward to major employment opportunities that will bring new threats and opportunities. The county can also learn from other counties in the state that have executed programs or policies successfully. Wayne County, for example, is a leader in Agricultural Security Area implementation and has noted interest in regularly meeting with other ag-focused counties to identify and implement best practices.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Neighboring Counties
Townships
Municipalities

M7. Establish a county-wide community reinvestment area focused on agriculture

Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs) are tax incentive areas adopted by a local government. Local governments designate areas and types of development for which property owners may receive tax incentives for investing in real property improvements. By selecting the location and the type of development (commercial, residential, industrial), communities can directly incentivize certain types of growth in certain places.

(Potential) ACTORS

County

M8. Establish or update CEDAs in the county to incentivize economic development

A CEDA is a jointly governed area that may share land use planning, land use regulations, or financing methods between different jurisdictions. These identify regional land-use guidance for economic growth areas and provide cross-jurisdictional coordination, and fees related to developments

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Neighboring Counties
Townships
Municipalities

in these areas may be shared among jurisdictions for the provision of services. The Northern Gateway CEDA may benefit from an update. It may include a strategic approach to industrial and commercial land use to avoid nuisance issues, and it will also need to account for the immense employment growth and investment associated with the recent Anduril site.

M9. Establish or update Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs)

A JEDD is a jointly governed area that can collect and administer money for the development of infrastructure and other services to support development. It is adopted by local government partners. JEDDs manage intense growth across municipal boundaries, and this mechanism can offset costs for infrastructure development. The JEDDs often do this by levying an income tax in the area for a specific amount of time. This is also a tool to accumulate capital (see page 57).

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Neighboring Counties
Townships
Municipalities

M10. Encourage new development that respects rural vistas, supports rural lifestyles, and conserves historic resources

Historic resources are scattered throughout the county, many community members, especially among the farming community, have been in the county for decades. While growth happens, local jurisdictions may use their zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans to identify community assets that are most important to community members. At the county level, there are organizations that are already conserving property, artifacts, and stories. These assets should be well marketed and new development should respect access to these assets, and mimic certain characteristics of historic rural character.

(Potential) ACTORS

Historical Society
Nonprofits
Community Members
Visitors Bureau

M11. Draft model text for agricultural zoning that townships or municipalities may choose to use or adapt

Agricultural zoning is useful because it can protect farmers from nuisance claims (nearby residential and commercial uses cannot easily sue farmers over smell, noise, traffic, and other impacts that are often not protected in association with other land uses). Agricultural zones may also set minimum lot sizes to protect large swaths of agricultural land from being subdivided.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Consultant



Stewarding the Land



Pickaway County's open farmland, natural waterways, and working landscapes are assets that, once lost, are nearly impossible to recover. As development pressure mounts and farmlands change hands, the window for protecting these resources is narrowing. Proactive stewardship — through tools like agricultural easements and countywide land protection efforts that prioritize the county's most productive soils and sensitive natural areas — offers a path forward that honors a promise to future generations.

County residents who engaged in the planning process expressed a deep attachment to the rural character of Pickaway County and a strong desire to see it preserved — not just for today, but for decades to come. That deep attachment speaks to a recognition that the county's farmland, waterways, and open spaces are finite resources that require deliberate protection. The significant growth and development that Pickaway County and its neighbors are navigating presents a real opportunity in this regard — when well-planned, development can generate resources

and partnerships that fund conservation efforts along stream corridors, buffer prime agricultural land, and establish protected open space that benefits the entire community. While existing programs already give farmers meaningful tools to protect the land they steward, gaps remain. The county and numerous partners have the opportunity to act today before growth and development change the county's landscape forever and challenge Pickaway's agricultural future.

S1. Maintain a bank of existing resources for farmland preservation and best practices

These resources may include financial, legal, academic, marketing, and labor contacts, with an emphasis on local connections. Maintain the resource bank on the P3 or OSU Extension website, or in another easy-to-access location, and update it often.

(Potential) ACTORS

P3
OSU Extension
Farm Bureau

S2. Establish a county program for the consolidated management of Agricultural Districts, Agricultural Security Areas, and agricultural easements

ASAs, agricultural districts, and ODA easements offer significant protection for agricultural lands. The County, although it has a very high percentage of land in active farming, has relatively few of these compared to many of its neighbors. Consolidating the management of these programs allows the county to monitor, support, and expand the use of existing and enhanced agricultural protections. Wayne County offers a model for the management of these programs through its Farmland Preservation Specialist and its Ag Success Team.

(Potential) ACTORS

Soil & Water
Land Trust
Nonprofits

S3. Apply for Local Sponsor Certification (LAEPP program)

For farmers to apply for the LAEPP program, they must have a local sponsor—which may be a land trust, the County’s Soil and Water agency, or another nonprofit approved by the ODA. Local sponsors must apply annually and report back to the ODA each year. Several counties in the state have more than one certified local sponsor, giving their community members access to relatively more LAEPP funding. The County had no approved local sponsors in 2025.

(Potential) ACTORS

Soil & Water
Land Trust
Nonprofits

S4. Supplement the Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) and encourage farmers to apply to enhance the program

The County, P3, or a nonprofit or other entity may provide additional funding to successful LAEPP applicants. While these funds are helpful, the funding provided in exchange for development rights is often well below the market value of the land. Farmers are frequently caught in a challenging situation, choosing between maintaining the land as productive agriculture for the next generation and managing personal finances and retirement. A program that supplements LAEPP may encourage more Pickaway farmers to take advantage of it and apply.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Agriculture Committee
Farm Bureau
OSU Extension

S5. Establish a land trust

Many of Central Ohio's agricultural counties use land trusts to conserve land, provide public access, host events and educational programming, and sponsor the state's LAEPP program. While the American Farmland Trust has been active in the County—in the past sponsoring the LAEPP for Pickaway and several other counties—AFT operates across the country. The AFT's presence in the county has dwindled over time and a local land trust could address challenges and opportunities specific to Pickaway County.

(Potential) ACTORS

Land Trusts
Nonprofits
Appalachia Ohio Alliance

S6. Partner with existing conservation groups to identify opportunities for land conservation, to share data, and to promote programming

There are many groups that are doing a wide variety of conservation programming. Land conservation groups can extend beyond County Soil and Water Districts. The Appalachia Ohio Alliance is a regional land trust that hosts events, manages conservation easements, and provides public access in and around the county.

Other counties in the region have smaller land trusts; for example, the Philander Chase Conservancy in Knox County has conserved thousands of acres of farmland over decades surrounding Kenyon College. Because it is difficult to know where and to what extent agricultural land is protected today, the county's GIS team and Soil and Water should closely consider where these land trusts operate and help illustrate the progress they are making.

(Potential) ACTORS

Land Trusts
County

Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program

The latest round of LAEPP funding from the Ohio Department of Agriculture delivered \$6.5 million to land trusts and local governments across the state. State-supported easement programs have protected over 111,000 acres since their inception. While the state government continues to support agricultural preservation, local governments and landowners must be proactive to take advantage of these programs.



S7. Evaluate and market existing incentives for farmers to adopt new technology or practices that protect soil and water quality

These may include federal programs, local or regional programs, pilot projects/research and development associated with Ohio State University and other programs.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
OSU Extension
Farm Bureau

S8. Promote programs that help farmers adopt practices like diversifying production and promoting healthy soil and water

Many resources are available, and groups can help connect farmers to them while building networks that test and promote regenerative practices. These practices may include diversification, the implementation of cover crops, buffering waterways, developing healthy hedgerows, and other best practices.

(Potential) ACTORS

P3
OSU Extension
Soil & Water
Farm Bureau

S9. Establish demonstration farm or garden projects to test and teach regenerative agriculture

Public demonstration gardens have helped communities by showing growing methods and best practices. Demonstration farms can teach innovative methods such as low-till, cover crops, organic pest management, and organic fertilizing and soil preparation, among others.

(Potential) ACTORS

OSU Extension
Soil & Water
Nonprofits

S10. Restrict development in prime agricultural lands and near natural features with special zone districts

Townships and municipalities with zoning authority can restrict the minimum lot size and the uses allowed in zoned parts of the county. Many places around the state have instituted agricultural zoning, which allows only agriculture-related uses and secondary residential uses. Because rezoning requires several levels of review from the zoning authority and is subject to public comment, it can provide added oversight over major changes in agricultural areas. Environmental quality is vital for the health of the community and the longevity of agriculture. Development near surface waters can negatively affect water quality, which has downstream effects. Protecting natural features in the county benefits community members and farmers alike. Local jurisdictions may provide specific guidance through their zoning ordinances to establish buffers between these natural features and development.

(Potential) ACTORS

Townships
Municipalities

Conserving Land and Water

Farmers are on the frontlines of environmental preservation. Farmers, especially those on generational farms, know and care for their land and water. As farms look to continue producing essential products for the community, farmers are using no-till practices to reduce runoff and protect regional watersheds. A majority of Pickaway County farms use no-till or reduced-till practices and the state continues to invest in programs to support farmers' conservation efforts.



Encouraging Prosperity



The farming community faces a pressing challenge: farmers in the county are aging, and too few young operators are positioned to take their place. As longtime farm families consider retirement, the path to transitioning land and operations is uncertain. Volatile global markets have made conventional farming less financially predictable, while soaring land prices have raised the cost of entry to levels that put ownership and operation out of reach for many aspiring farmers — even those with the knowledge and drive to succeed. Without deliberate action, productive farmland is at risk of being converted to other uses, agricultural knowledge built over generations may be lost, and the rural character that defines much of Pickaway County could quietly erode. County residents who participated in the planning process voiced genuine concern about the future of farming and the livelihoods of those who depend on it.

Time and again, conversations turned to the need to support not just farming as a land use, but farmers as people — ensuring that those who work the land have access to the resources, networks, and opportunities they need to build resiliency and to attract emerging agricultural professionals to take their place. Community members understand that there needs to be a concerted effort to protect the practice. Programs in this section include capacity building; tools to support innovation and diversification in practice; education and resources for the next generation; genuine marketing of goods and services; and efforts that help agribusiness professionals diversify income and build more resilient operations. Addressing these needs is not simply an agricultural policy matter — it is central to preserving the prosperity, the rural culture, and long-term vitality of Pickaway County.

E1. Establish or support farmer and agribusiness mentorship programs

Provide farm-specific management, financing, maintenance, innovation, and other types of peer-to-peer advice and resources. This type of program may be facilitated by an educational institution like the OSU Extension Office or locally by the county or municipalities. These programs may have more emphasis on peer-to-peer, tactile learning, networking, and resource sharing. These may also be a catalyst for the transition of land between legacy and emerging farmers. Succession planning is a key topic for these local community groups, gathering resources, including draft agreements, process information, and peer-to-peer conversations.

(Potential) ACTORS

Farmers
Community Members

E2. Establish technical assistance programming for grant and loan applications

The USDA administers grant and revolving loan programs available to local governments, state governments, and private corporations. One applicable example is the Agriculture Innovation Center Program, which provides up to \$1 million for value-added processing facilities and actions. Other loans support rural housing development and homeownership as well as business and economic development. Hiring a staff member to monitor grant options and apply for competitive programs can significantly increase the county's capital to carry out a broad array of actions. Farmers may choose to take advantage of a number of programs offered through the state or the nation. For some, including emerging or smaller-scale farmers, these grant applications can be a significant hurdle, with specific reporting requirements, timelines, submission materials, or technical documentation. The county and regional partners, including the OSU Extension or the Farm Bureau, can assist these potential applicants, closing a significant gap and taking full advantage of programs that are already available.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
P3

Sustainable Agribusiness

Pickaway County farmers and agribusiness owners are leading the way to a more sustainable future for agriculture. W.D. Farms LLC, a manure and biosolids collection and distribution company, is redefining how people view “waste.” Co-owner Megan Dresbach is committed to using conservation practices to boost agricultural production.

- Kathy Lynn Gray, Our Ohio



E3. Develop an Agricultural Innovation Program

Incubator projects, demonstration farms, agritourism destinations can all bring in consumers, encouraging a local market and allow for more exposure to farming practices. These provide an opportunity to showcase and encourage diverse agricultural production and methods. Develop the space and programming for value-added processing using funds from major developments and other public funds from development. These could include but are not limited to soy processing, meat processing, produce washing or portioning, canning and preserving, packaging, shipping and fulfillment, and more.

(Potential) ACTORS

Farmers
Nonprofits
Local Businesses
Educational Institutions
Community Members
County
P3

Growing Tomorrow Grant

The Ohio Farm Bureau is investing in the future of agriculture with programs like the Growing Tomorrow Grant. The grant helps young agricultural professionals and entrepreneurs get started, and the 2025 grant recipients are using the funds to support their small, regenerative family farm in Clermont County. (Source: Kelli Milligan Stammen, Our Ohio)



E4. Establish a network of growers and local institutions, including a directory of farms that sell products locally, that facilitates local produce being sourced by institutions in the County

Healthcare and educational institutions often hold considerable and reliable buying power, and may enter percentage-based agreements with local partners. A system that connects healthcare and educational institutions to farmers, ensures compliance with state and federal guidelines, and sources specific produce at different times of the year can stabilize local markets and provide local choices for these institutions. The regulatory adherence, logistics, and other functions of this process may be overseen by the County, a nonprofit, or a for-profit local business.

(Potential) ACTORS

Farmers
Non-Profits
Local Businesses
P3

E5. Establish or support local newsletters focused on community news, including agriculture

Local newsletters may include biographies of farmers and longstanding community members, information about advocacy opportunities, and advertising for educational programs and other resources. Some local news organizations have highlighted local youth education around agriculture, bringing a future-oriented perspective to community members. The Scioto Post is already a popular local news outlet, and the county and residents can encourage reporting on agriculture and local events to ensure the paper continues to cover news that relates to and tells the story of the County.

(Potential) ACTORS

Community Members
Non-profits
For-Profit Businesses

Buying Local Directory

Buying local has always been a powerful way to keep your hard-earned dollars working for your community. With a growing appetite for locally sourced food and farm products, networks across Ohio are working to connect people with the farms next door. The Knox County Farm Bureau's Buying Local Directory focuses specifically on connecting residents to local agriculture and agribusinesses.



E6. Support industrial and commercial development to support value-added processing using land use planning and regulations to allow for their development

Review and enact zoning and other regulations that support developers and business owners who seek to establish processing facilities in Pickaway County.

(Potential) ACTORS

County
Townships

E7. Establish a new agribusiness incentive program

Microloan programs provide revolving funds to community members, covering unique project opportunities defined by the applicant. The administering entity may adopt acceptance criteria for the loans and focus on building agricultural resilience. The county via P3 and the Agriculture Committee may provide seed funding for new farms/agribusiness in the county, this could be part of a competitive process or it may be a program specific to business starts or emerging farmers.

(Potential) ACTORS

P3
County
Agriculture Committee
Community Members
Farmers
Prospective Business Owners

E8. Support existing educational programs that teach about rural business administration or farming in the County's school districts

The county may provide additional funding to existing educational programs like FFA or local schools to expand gardening, farming, plant sciences, or other agriculture-related programming.

(Potential) ACTORS

Schools
Nonprofits
County

The Next Generation of Farmers

The Ohio FFA Association maintains over 30,000 members and over 150,000 youth participate in Ohio 4-H clubs, events, and programs. Students across Ohio are working to build a vision of agriculture that supports a variety of interests, skills, and career pathways. Encouraging youth to enter the agricultural sector is crucial to the future of agriculture.



E9. Collaborate with OSU Extension Office to teach and facilitate agricultural practices that diversify production, sell to local markets, and help farmers build resilience

Participate in existing programs at the OSU Extension Office, take advantage of available loans and courses, and share these resources with other community members.

(Potential) ACTORS

OSU Extension
Farmers
Community Members

E10. Utilize local and state Farm Bureau channels to advocate for additional land use protections and funding for agricultural production, diversification

Certain land use protections available in other states are not available in Ohio. Additionally, state funding can encourage certain programs and practices. For example, the Ohio Department of Agriculture offers Land Use and Farmland Preservation grants to fund the purchase of agricultural easements. State representatives need to hear from constituents about the issues and programs that are important to them.

(Potential) ACTORS

Farmers
Community Members
Farm Bureau



3 | IMPLEMENTATION



IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

Action-oriented

Implementation is at the core of this study, without it there will be no change. Through coordinated, dispersed action the community will begin to realize desired changes as opportunities are capitalized on and leveraged to create further opportunities. Implementation relies on a variety of actors, all working toward the shared vision of making Pickaway County a place where agriculture is diverse, resilient, local, and viable for future generations.

To help track and organize the work to be done, this section lays out tables for each thematic action, with the highest priority actions shown in **bold type**. The actions were prioritized based on feedback from the public during the Pickaway County Fair, in addition to ongoing work with the Agriculture Committee.

Potential actors have been identified as those who may be capable of carrying out each action. The Agriculture Committee is tasked with coordinating potential actors around the stated actions and tracking progress over time.

How will progress be measured?

The organization of tracking and reporting of actions is a critical part of making and recording progress.

This plan recommends that the Agriculture Committee remain intact to serve as the organizing body to collect and track actions and actors to gauge the progress of the execution of the future of agriculture study for Pickaway County. The continuation of the Agriculture Committee serves to continue the good work that has been organized and established in an effort to maintain the momentum that has been gained over the course of the writing of this study. The Agriculture Committee is uniquely

situated to carry forward the implementation of this plan given its agricultural and community orientation, as well as the close relationship with development and land planning at the county level through P3.

Resource cultivation

The funding for an administrator position and the continuation of some version of the Agriculture Committee would be a step toward solidifying the vision and actions outlined in this study to realize the desired future for Pickaway County.

Funding for the ongoing organization and participation of agriculture community members — who are volunteers — could be provided for by the establishment of an agriculture fund, with dollars earmarked for initiatives that advance the practice of agriculture in Pickaway County.

The permanent establishment of the Agriculture

Committee will ensure the voices of those engaged in agriculture are at the table alongside economic development. The creation of an administrator role would add capacity and focus to manage and help communicate the recommendations outlined in this agricultural study. Wayne County, Ohio stands as an example of what can be done when agricultural priorities are at the top of mind of county decision makers.

Pickaway County has a longstanding history of agriculture, now it is time to realize the agricultural future the people of Pickaway have envisioned.





The actions listed for each of the themes require social capital, funding, time, staff capacity, and consensus. Establishing those requires significant resources, and because the county is growing, there are opportunities to capture capital. The following tools are examples of economic development tools that may be used to establish a fund for agricultural programs, like the Innovation Program (Page 48), where the county can incentivize certain actions among private property owners and business owners in alignment with the goals and actions identified in this study. Some of these tools are already in use by the county, some

are not. While some may be expanded, like the Joint Economic Development Districts, others would need to be initiated or adjusted to address the actions identified in the plan.

Communities around the state have been successful at leveraging growth for the protection of community assets, Pickaway County is at the forefront of innovative agricultural protections, and can utilize their economic development strategies to continue to build momentum.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Ec1. Review conveyance fee revenue and explore options to encourage farm to farm land sales

Ohio counties may impose a conveyance fee in addition to the statewide fee. Pickaway County’s current fee structure can be evaluated to identify whether adjustments—such as reduced fees for farmer-to-farmer sales or added notifications when CAUV properties are conveyed—can help retain agricultural land and generate revenue for protective programs.

ACTORS

County

Ec2. Establish a payment in lieu of tax (PILOT) process for large developments

When large developments receive significant state or local tax abatements, communities can negotiate payments in lieu of taxes to recover revenue during the abatement period. These funds offer flexibility and can be directed to taxing entities, special funds, or community programs, ensuring that major growth still contributes to local priorities.

ACTORS

County
Townships
Municipalities

Ec3. Use community benefit agreements to secure public value at the entitlement stage

When a developer seeks approval for a project that does not comply with existing regulations, communities can negotiate community benefit agreements as part of the entitlement process. These flexible tools are particularly effective for large developments and can be used to secure infrastructure improvements, protected agricultural land, or dedicated capital for community programs.

ACTORS

County
Townships
Municipalities
Schools

Ec4. Establish public-private partnerships to support agricultural and economic programs

Public and private interests frequently align around shared goals such as workforce development, environmental quality, and infrastructure investment. By partnering with private businesses and educational institutions, the county can leverage outside capital and expertise while offering credibility and long-term stability.

ACTORS

County
Townships
Municipalities

Example: Hilliard, Ohio — [City Lab](#) is a public-private partnership that helps local businesses access federal SBIR and STTR funding.

Ec5. Use Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) to share revenue across jurisdictions

These manage intense growth across municipal boundaries. This mechanism can offset cost-to-revenue deficit, helping maintain stability. Jointly governed areas that can collect and administer money for the development of infrastructure and other services to support development. There are several unique ways that the JEDD can leverage funding for infrastructure improvements and other services that are required to support growth. And the fact that these areas are geographically constrained can help incentivize growth in certain areas while protecting agriculture and less intense uses in others outside of the JEDD.

ACTORS

County
Townships
Municipalities

Ec6. Explore impact fees to offset the public costs of large-scale development

Impact fees are one-time payments collected from developers to fund public infrastructure made necessary by new development. While Ohio law requires a clear nexus between the fee and the specific cost incurred, impact fees may be structured to address grid, water, and road costs associated with large developments such as data centers. Communities should work with legal counsel to establish a defensible fee structure tied to documented costs. Coordination among municipalities and jurisdictions that cannot impose impact fees will also be critical to ensure that the areas that are well suited for growth are competitive in capturing potential development.

ACTORS

Municipalities

OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Summarizing the actions

The action overviews outlined below and on the following pages provide a summary of all of the actions and associated actors who may be responsible for carrying out the actions. These tables are meant to provide a quick reference point for anyone involved

in implementing the plan. All actions and actors included in this list are based on community feedback and best practices, it is not the intention of the document to dictate responsibility, but instead the Potential Actors highlight groups and individuals that may have the resources and/or the authority to implement these potential actions. These Actors are not compelled to complete these actions without consultation, collaboration, and agreement. Priority actions are shown **in bold**.

ACTION OVERVIEW | MANAGING GROWTH

Potential Action	Potential Actor(s)
1. Draft and adopt a county-wide land use plan	County
2. Draft and adopt a county-wide comprehensive plan	County
3. Update comprehensive plans in townships and municipalities	Townships, Municipalities
4. Update zoning ordinances in townships and municipalities	Townships, Municipalities
5. Establish and update annexation agreements between townships and municipalities	County, Townships, Municipalities
6. Participate in regional collaboration	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
7. Establish a county-wide community reinvestment area focused on agriculture	County
8. Establish or update CEDAs in the county to incentivize economic development	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
9. Establish or update Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs)	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
10. Encourage new development that respects rural vistas, supports rural lifestyles, and conserves historic resources	Historical Society, Nonprofits, Community Members, Visitors Bureau
11. Draft model text for agricultural zoning that townships or municipalities may choose to use or adapt	County, Consultant

ACTION OVERVIEW | STEWARDING THE LAND

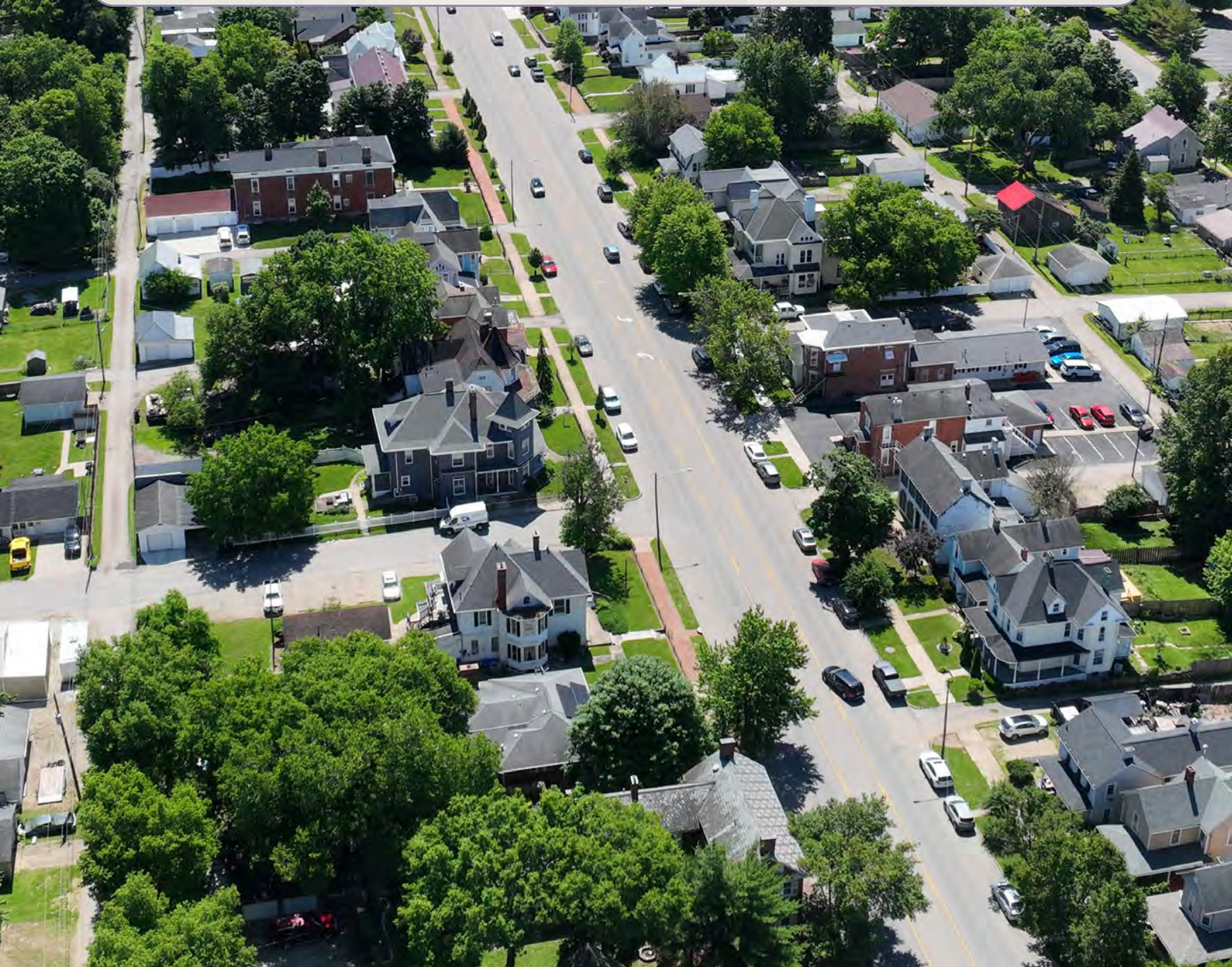
Potential Action	Potential Actor(s)
1. Maintain a bank of existing resources for farmland preservation and best practices	P3, OSU Extension, Farm Bureau
2. Establish a county program for the consolidated management of Agricultural Districts, Agricultural Security Areas, and agricultural easements	Soil & Water, Land Trust, Nonprofits
3. Apply for Local Sponsor Certification (LAEPP program)	Soil & Water, Land Trust, Nonprofits
4. Supplement the Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) and encourage farmers to apply to enhance the program	County, Agriculture Committee, Farm Bureau, OSU Extension
5. Establish a land trust	Land Trust, Nonprofits
6. Partner with existing conservation groups to identify opportunities for land conservation, to share data, and to promote programming	Land Trust, Nonprofits
7. Evaluate and market existing incentives for farmers to adopt new technology or practices that protect soil and water quality	County, OSU Extension, Farm Bureau
8. Promote programs that help farmers adopt practices like diversifying production and promoting healthy soil and water	P3, OSU Extension, Soil & Water, Farm Bureau
9. Establish demonstration farm or garden projects to test and teach regenerative agriculture	OSU Extension, Soil & Water, Nonprofits
10. Restrict development in prime agricultural lands and near natural features through special zone districts	Townships, Municipalities

ACTION OVERVIEW | ENCOURAGING PROSPERITY

Potential Action	Potential Actor(s)
1. Establish or support farmer and agribusiness mentorship programs	Farmers, Community Members
2. Establish technical assistance programming for grant and loan applications	County, P3
3. Develop an Agricultural Innovation program, this program may include new agribusiness incentives to encourage entrepreneurship, or a competitive micro loan program that supports existing businesses	Farmers, Nonprofits, Local Businesses, Educational Institutions, Community Members, County, P3
4. Establish a network of growers and local institutions, including a directory of farms that sell products locally, that facilitates local produce being sourced by institutions in the County	P3, Nonprofits, Local Businesses, Farmers
5. Establish or support local newsletters focused on community news, including agriculture	Community Members, Nonprofits, For-Profit Businesses
6. Support industrial and commercial development to support value-added processing using land use planning and regulations to allow for their development	County, Townships
7. Establish a new agribusiness incentive program	County, P3, Agriculture Committee, Community Members, Farmers
8. Support existing educational programs that teach about rural business administration or farming in the County's school districts	Schools, Nonprofits, County
9. Collaborate with OSU Extension Office to teach and facilitate agricultural practices that diversify production, sell to local markets, and help farmers build resilience	OSU Extension, Farmers, Community Members
10. Utilize local and state Farm Bureau channels to advocate for additional land use protections and funding for agricultural production, diversification	Farmers, Community Members, Farm Bureau

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Tool	Potential Actor(s)
1. Review conveyance fee revenue and explore options to encourage farm to farm land sales	County
2. Establish a payment in lieu of tax (PILOT) process for large developments	County, Townships, Municipalities
3. Use community benefit agreements to secure public value at the entitlement stage	County, Townships, Municipalities, Schools
4. Use Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) to share revenue across jurisdictions	County, Townships, Municipalities
5. Establish public-private partnerships to support agricultural and economic programs	County, Townships, Municipalities
6. Explore impact fees to offset the public costs of large scale development	Municipalities



ACTION OVERVIEW | COMBINED

	Potential Action	Potential Actor(s)
MANAGING GROWTH	1. Draft and adopt a county-wide land use plan	County
	2. Draft and adopt a county-wide comprehensive plan	County
	3. Update comprehensive plans in townships and municipalities	Townships, Municipalities
	4. Update zoning ordinances in townships and municipalities	Townships, Municipalities
	5. Establish and update annexation agreements between townships and municipalities	County, Townships, Municipalities
	6. Participate in regional collaboration	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
	7. Establish a county-wide community reinvestment area focused on agriculture	County
	8. Establish or update CEDAs in the county to incentivize economic development	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
	9. Establish or update Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs)	County, Neighboring Counties, Townships, Municipalities
	10. Encourage new development that respects rural vistas, supports rural lifestyles, and conserves historic resources	Historical Society, Nonprofits, Community Members, Visitors Bureau
	11. Draft model text for agricultural zoning that townships or municipalities may choose to use or adapt	County, Consultant
STEWARDED THE LAND	1. Maintain a bank of existing resources for farmland preservation and best practices	P3, OSU Extension, Farm Bureau
	2. Establish a county program for the consolidated management of Agricultural Districts, Agricultural Security Areas, and agricultural easements	Soil & Water, Land Trust, Nonprofits
	3. Apply for Local Sponsor Certification (LAEPP program)	Soil & Water, Land Trust, Nonprofits
	4. Supplement the Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) and encourage farmers to apply to enhance the program	County, Agriculture Committee, Farm Bureau, OSU Extension
	5. Establish a land trust	Land Trust, Nonprofits
	6. Partner with existing conservation groups to identify opportunities for land conservation, to share data, and to promote programming	Land Trust, Nonprofits
	7. Evaluate and market existing incentives for farmers to adopt new technology or practices that protect soil and water quality	County, OSU Extension, Farm Bureau
	8. Promote programs that help farmers adopt practices like diversifying production and promoting healthy soil and water	P3, OSU Extension, Soil & Water, Farm Bureau

	Potential Action	Potential Actor(s)
ENCOURAGING PROSPERITY	9. Establish demonstration farm or garden projects to test and teach regenerative agriculture	OSU Extension, Soil & Water, Nonprofits
	10. Restrict development in prime agricultural lands and near natural features through special zone districts	Townships, Municipalities
	1. Establish or support farmer and agribusiness mentorship programs	Farmers, Community Members
	2. Establish technical assistance programming for grant and loan applications	County, P3
	3. Develop an Agricultural Innovation program, this program may include new agribusiness incentives to encourage entrepreneurship, or a competitive micro loan program that supports existing businesses	Farmers, Nonprofits, Local Businesses, Educational Institutions, Community Members, County, P3
	4. Establish a network of growers and local institutions, including a directory of farms that sell products locally, that facilitates local produce being sourced by institutions in the County	P3, Nonprofits, Local Businesses, Farmers
	5. Establish or support local newsletters focused on community news, including agriculture	Community Members, Nonprofits, For-Profits
	6. Support industrial and commercial development to support value-added processing using land use planning and regulations to allow for their development	County, Townships
	7. Establish a new agribusiness incentive program	County, P3, Agriculture Committee, Community Members, Farmers
	8. Support existing educational programs that teach about rural business administration or farming in the County's school districts	Schools, Nonprofits, County
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	9. Collaborate with OSU Extension Office to teach and facilitate agricultural practices that diversify production, sell to local markets, and help farmers build resilience	OSU Extension, Farmers, Community Members
	10. Utilize local and state Farm Bureau channels to advocate for additional land use protections and funding for agricultural production, diversification	Farmers, Community Members, Farm Bureau
	1. Review conveyance fee revenue and explore options to encourage farm to farm land sales	County
	2. Establish a payment in lieu of tax (PILOT) process for large developments	County, Townships, Municipalities
	3. Use community benefit agreements to secure public value at the entitlement stage	County, Townships, Municipalities, Schools
	4. Use Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) to share revenue across jurisdictions	County, Townships, Municipalities
	5. Establish public-private partnerships to support agricultural and economic programs	County, Townships, Municipalities
	6. Explore impact fees to offset the public costs of large scale development	Municipalities



GLOSSARY



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agricultural District — A 5-year enrollment program administered by the county auditor that protects enrolled farmland from nuisance suits, defers special tax assessments for infrastructure, and triggers additional review if the land is subject to eminent domain. Eligibility requires at least 10 acres or \$2,500 in average gross income.

Agricultural Easement — A permanent legal restriction placed on a parcel of land that prohibits non-agricultural development in perpetuity, while allowing the landowner to retain ownership. Easements may be purchased through local, state (Ohio Department of Agriculture), or federal (USDA ACEP) programs.

Agricultural Security Area (ASA) — A 10-year designation for contiguous blocks of at least 500 acres of farmland in unincorporated areas, requiring participating landowners to maintain agricultural use and follow best management practices. The designation restricts county and township land use decisions within the area to agricultural purposes.

Agricultural Zoning — A local zoning classification that limits land use to farming and related activities, protecting production agriculture from incompatible development. Under Ohio law (ORC 519.21 and 303.21), zoning authorities cannot prohibit agricultural use on parcels greater than five acres or in unplatted areas.

CAUV (Current Agricultural Use Value) — An Ohio tax provision that allows agricultural land to be assessed at its value for farming purposes rather than market value, resulting in significantly lower property taxes for working farmers. Eligibility generally requires at least 10 acres or \$2,500 in annual gross farm income, and landowners must reapply each year through the county auditor.

CAUV Recoupment — A financial penalty triggered when land previously enrolled in CAUV is converted to non-agricultural use, requiring the new owner to repay a portion of the tax savings from the prior three years. This charge becomes a lien on the property and appears on the tax bill administered by the county auditor.

Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) — A negotiated agreement between a developer and a local government or community organization that secures specific public benefits in exchange for development approval. Benefits may include infrastructure improvements, environmental mitigation, set-asides of protected land, or contributions to community funds.

Conveyance Fee — A fee charged at the time of a real property sale, imposed by the county in addition to a statewide base rate of \$1.00 per \$1,000 of sale price. Pickaway County's current total conveyance fee is \$3.00 per \$1,000, typically paid by the seller.

Development Agreement — A legally binding agreement between a local government and a developer that establishes the terms and conditions under which a specific development may proceed. These agreements can be used to secure infrastructure, community benefits, or land protections that would not otherwise be required under existing regulations.

Impact Fee — A one-time payment collected from a developer by a local government to offset the cost of public infrastructure necessitated by new development. Ohio law requires a clear and specific nexus between the fee charged and the infrastructure cost it is intended to recover.

Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) — A contract between one or more municipalities and one or more townships, authorized under Ohio Revised Code 715.70–715.83. It lets the parties jointly develop township land for commercial or industrial use without annexing it. The municipality typically extends services such as water and sewer. The district levies an income tax on businesses and employees within it, and the township and municipality share that revenue under their negotiated agreement. A board of directors governs the district.

Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) — An Ohio Department of Agriculture program through which local sponsors—including local governments, nonprofits, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts—can apply for state funds to purchase agricultural easements from willing landowners. Eligible parcels must generally be at least 40 acres and enrolled in both CAUV and an Agricultural District.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) — A negotiated payment made by a developer to a community or designated fund in place of property taxes during a period of tax abatement. PILOTs provide communities with revenue from large developments that would otherwise generate little or no tax income during the abatement period.

Planned Unit Development (PUD) — A flexible zoning tool that allows a developer to propose a mixed-use or otherwise non-standard development in exchange for meeting specific community goals, such as clustering buildings to preserve open space or setting aside agricultural land at a defined ratio.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) — A voluntary program that allows landowners in designated agricultural “sending” areas to sell their development rights to buyers in “receiving” areas where denser growth is encouraged. The transaction permanently protects the sending parcel from non-agricultural development while compensating the landowner and directing growth to more appropriate locations.

USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) — A federal program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides funding to purchase agricultural conservation easements on productive farmland, grazing land, and other eligible parcels. Easements are permanent and restrict non-agricultural development in perpetuity.

