

2020 MUSKINGUM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Compiled by: Muskingum County Planning Commission

Communication & Technology Report

Agriculture Task Force Report

Introduction

Agriculture is a major component in the Muskingum County economy. According to the latest Census of Agriculture 44.4% of the total land area within the county is dedicated to agriculture. The market value of the farm products sold is more than \$70 million (Figure 1). Agriculture provides 8% of the employment in the county. Agriculture within the county includes conventional and specialized crops, livestock, and related activities. It is critical that agriculture be successful within the county to achieve the desired results of other sectors of the plan.

The 2008 version of the Comprehensive Plan contained sections on the historical background of agriculture in the county and trends since the 70's. For this plan update the task force did not restate that information and focused on trends since the last plan and recommendations for moving forward.

Trends Since 2008

The evolution of agriculture and farming since 2008 has continued, and like the evolution in all other industries, the rate of change has accelerated. Crop yields have continued to increase with improved genetics, targeted use of pesticides and herbicides, and better matching of tillage to soil conditions. Equipment manufacturers continue to develop larger and more efficient implements.

The crop mix in the county has shown little change. The biggest change in farm production has been the decrease in dairy operations. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, 20% of dairy farms across the United States have stopped milking cows since 2012. The percentage is larger in Muskingum County. There has been an increase in large chicken, turkey, and hog operations. Currently, state legislators are considering laws that allow the growing of hemp. It is unknown what impact this will have on county farm operations.

As technology makes advances in all sectors of our lives, the same is true for agriculture. Precision agriculture enables individual control of planter row units and sprayer nozzles, varying fertilizer application rates by soil types, and auto-steer tillage, planting, and harvesting

equipment to minimize soil compaction and reduce operator fatigue. Data needed for planning, planting, harvesting, marketing, and maintenance are available on both desktop and mobile devices. The problem is that access to the Internet via either broadband or cell phones is limited or nonexistent in many rural parts of the county (Figure 2). This places rural farms and businesses at a competitive disadvantage, increases response times for emergency services, and denies access to educational opportunities. Additionally, some major phone carriers have stated they will no longer maintain landlines that are providing the Dialup and DSL services. When landlines are no longer available more rural areas will be without both Internet and phone service. Providing high-speed broadband and cell phone service to all parts of the county may be the most important and immediate need.

The trend in change of land ownership and use has continued. The economic recovery since 2008 has accelerated the change. Another 3,900 acres of prime farmland (1.5% of total) has been converted from agriculture to residential in this period. Amish land ownership in the county has also increased by more than 3,400 acres. A trend is growing for hunters from out of the area to purchase farmland and they are competing against local farmers to purchase this land.

Muskingum County continues to be a regional center for agriculture. For example, the Muskingum Livestock Auction is one of the largest individual auction facilities in Ohio. The county's remaining commercial grain facilities, equipment dealers, and agribusinesses that support the farming community serve multiple counties. The local ethanol plant now sets the market for corn prices in this area. Coshocton Grain is building a soybean processing plant that should help support soybean prices locally. Local meat-processing plants also continue to provide our county with a number of avenues to have locally grown animals processed. The county is also a regional retail center. Muskingum County is home to several national home improvement and agricultural retail stores which allow farmers to purchase a wide variety of building materials, replacement parts and farm supplies locally.

Several community grocery stores have closed since 2008. This increases financial stress and nutritional limits on low-income county residents and those with limited access to transportation. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines these areas as *food deserts* when a census tract meets the following criteria: 1) low-income community in which the poverty rate is 20% or higher, or a median family income is at or below 80% of the statewide median family income; and 2) low-access community in which urban census tracts have more

than 33% of the population living more than 1 mile from a supermarket, or a rural census tract that is more than 10 miles from a supermarket. For example, Frazeyburg, Dresden, and Roseville do not have grocery stores.

Today's agriculture is not your father's agriculture. Animal welfare groups are negotiating with farmers on the standards of care for animals on the farm and in processing plants. Farmers now have to be licensed to apply pesticides, insecticides, manure, and fertilizers. The City of Toledo voters passed a Lake Erie bill of rights law. The renewable energy industry is acquiring farmland for locating solar panels and wind turbines. Consumers are demanding that restaurants procure their products from responsible sources. Farmers now have many new partners in their planning and operations. Because of the significant capital requirements to begin farming and the lack of available labor, it is difficult for persons to enter the industry. As a result, the average age of farmers is increasing (Figures 3 and 4).

The economic recovery since the 2008 Great Recession has not been as favorable in the agriculture sector as the general economy. Low prices for agriculture production items over the past several years and the continued rising cost of agriculture inputs and medical care increases the need for off-farm employment (Figure 5). Muskingum County is privileged to have off-farm employment opportunities for part-time farms. Unfortunately, since 2008 the county has lost employers such as Bloomer Candy, Longaberger Baskets, Mattingly Foods, and the New Holland equipment dealer.

Land use has a significant impact on public funds; according to a 2006 Extension study the amount of public services for each dollar of tax collected for each use is:

- Residential \$1.15–\$1.50
- Commercial \$0.35–\$0.65
- Farm/Open \$0.30–\$0.50

Figure 1

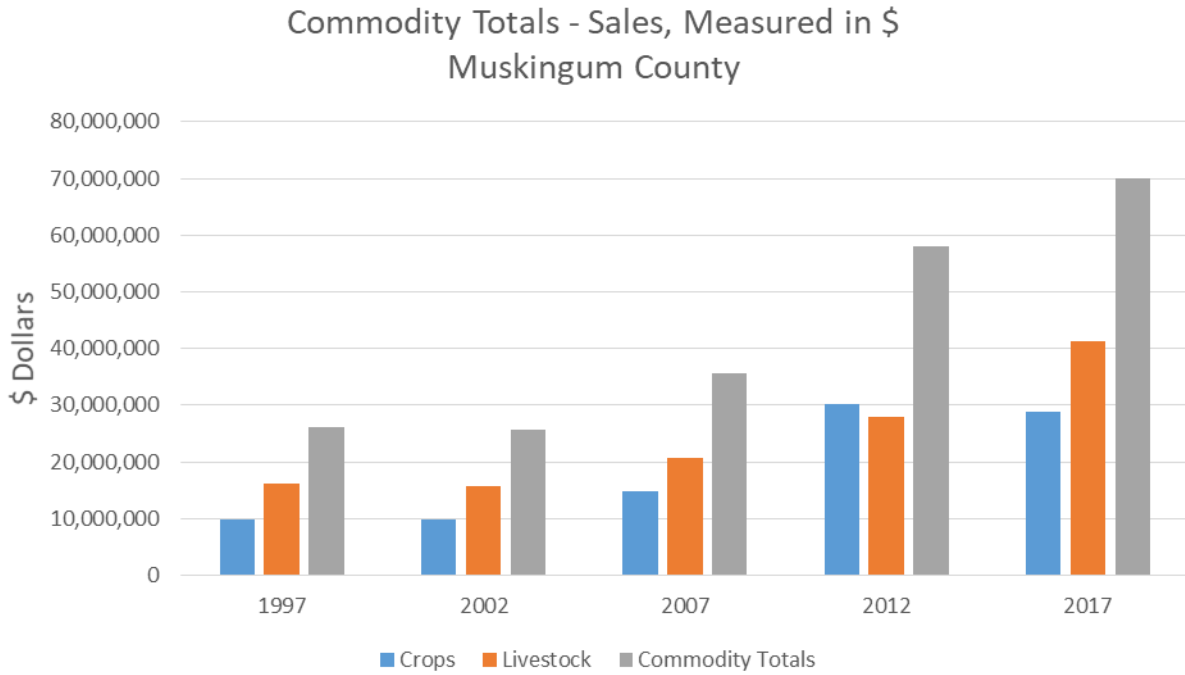


Figure 2

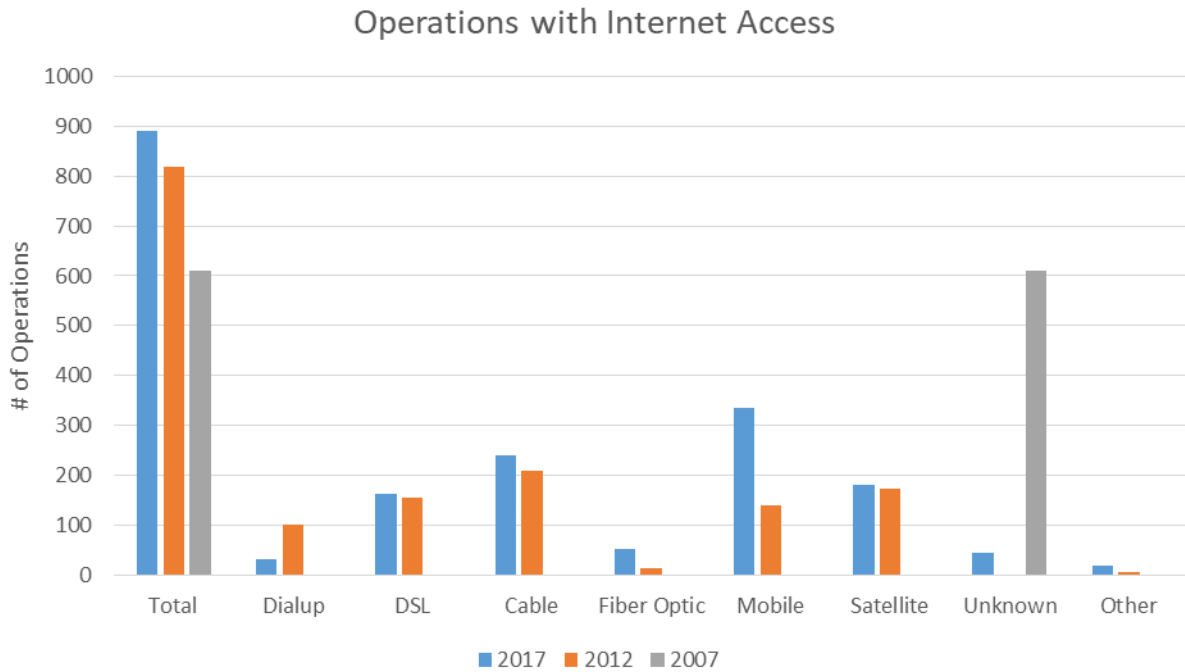


Figure 3

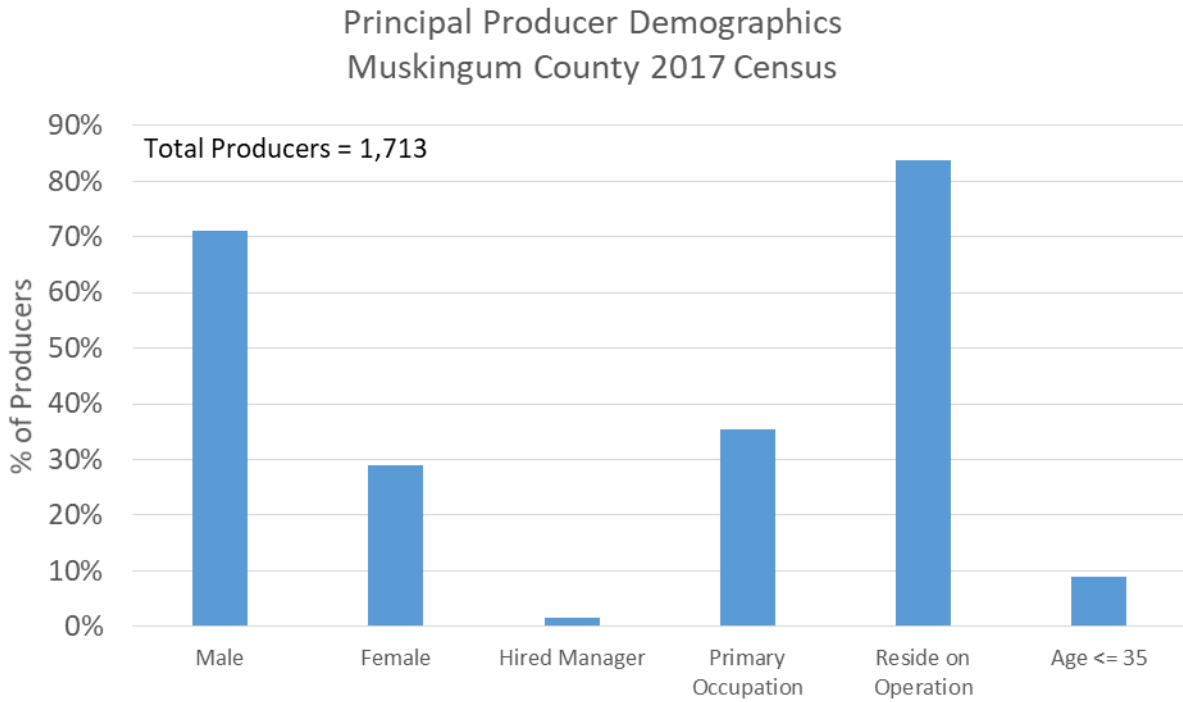


Figure 4

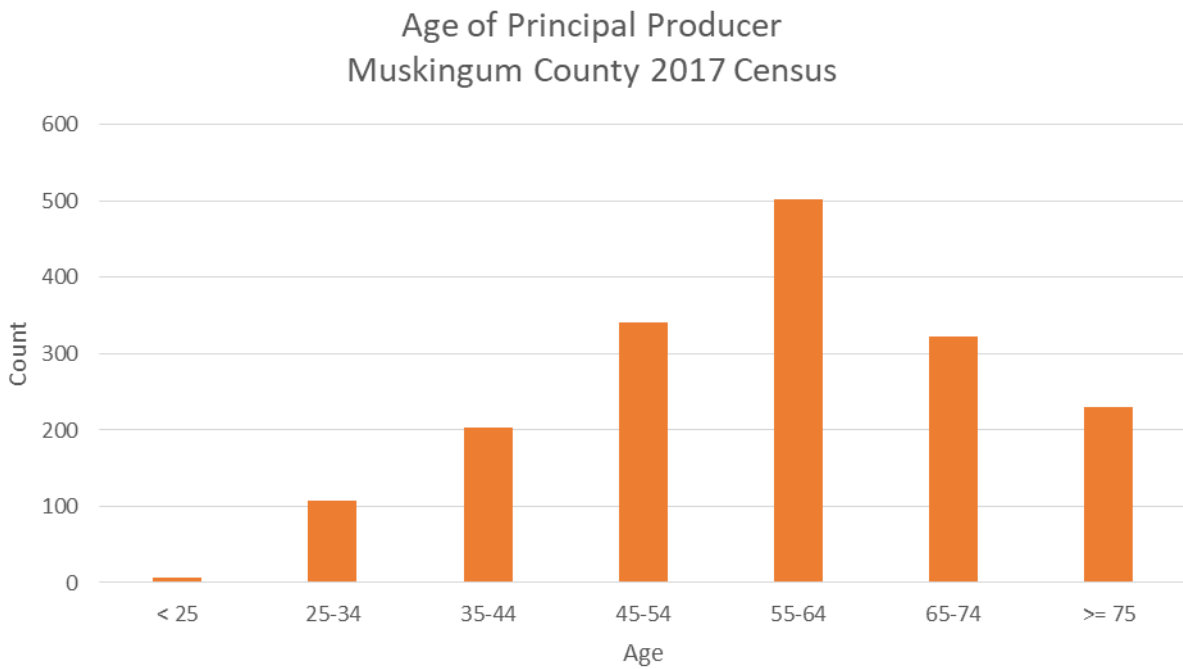
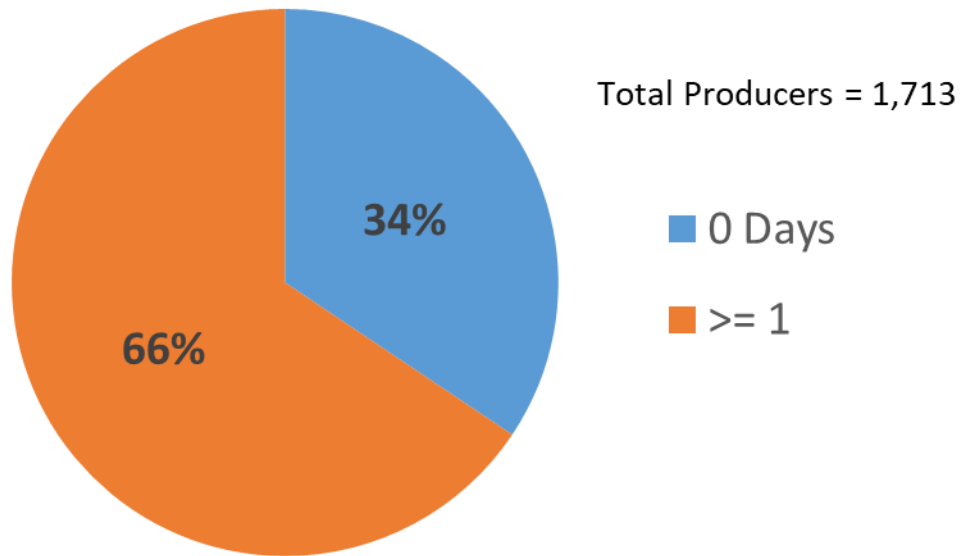


Figure 5

Days Worked Off Operation by Principal Producer
Muskingum County 2017 Census



Source: Census Data Query Tool, USDA NASS
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Census_Data_Query_Tool/index.php, accessed May 2, 2019.

Agriculture Task Force Vision

- All areas of the county have access to high-speed broadband and cell phone service.
- Prime farmland is considered a limited resource to be preserved.
- Competing land users and decision makers are aware of agricultural importance within the overall economy of the county.
- Government and business activities should not adversely impact the viability of agriculture in the county.
- Food markets should be accessible in all parts of the county.

Goal – Coordinate development to preserve prime farmland

Although the consumer and agriculture producers are separated by many layers of processors, packagers, and retailers, everyone is highly dependent on production agriculture for food and fiber. Therefore, it is vital that the prime farmland needed for sustainable agricultural production be preserved to protect the agricultural base within the county. Since 2008, another 3,900 acres of prime farmland (1.5% of the total) has been converted to non-farm purposes. Farmland is more than production agriculture. It is “open space.” The growing plants and trees in this space capture carbon dioxide from the air, this space provides recreational and hunting opportunities, and the space contributes to the beauty and character of this area. It is not just vacant ground.

One example of the benefits of maintaining farmland that benefits everyone is flood mitigation. One inch of rainfall on one acre is 27,125 gallons of water, so during an average year (38 inches) more than a million gallons of water falls on an acre. A house, driveway, and sidewalks that cover 5,000 square feet collect 118,313 gallons of water per year. This water generally enters the storm drain system, road ditch, or stream. Open land or farmland allows this water to enter ground aquifers with only the excess water entering streams or waterways. Most commercial development takes this water into consideration and implements practices or structures to slow this water from induction into storm drains or waterways. Rainfall on rural residential

development is immediately introduced to streams and waterways via road ditches or is directly introduced into waterways. The accumulated water in rural residential development leads to increased flood potential. Countywide stream and waterway management has become an important issue for much of our prime farmland because much of it is located in areas where flooding is more probable.

We fully recognize that the market is the driving force in determining land use. However, we also believe that an informed business, government, and consumer community will make better decisions. The various parties must coordinate their efforts to promote development in areas that are beneficial and sustainable for the county as a whole. The following actions are needed.

- A. Land Use Plan – Update the current Land Use Plan that addresses and incorporates all local issues, based on the land as a natural resource. Land use planning is a social, physical, and biological science. Agricultural lands to be preserved must be clearly identified. There is value in the process of updating the plan, and it should be updated at least every 10 years.

- B. Farmland Preservation – Increase awareness of two little-known programs currently available to land owners for the preservation of farmland. The Agricultural Easement Donation Program is a tool for landowners to protect their farm’s soils, natural resource features, and scenic open space. It provides landowners the opportunity to donate the easement rights on viable farmland to the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA). The department assures the land remains in agricultural use forever. The standard cost for services needed to secure the easement (i.e., title examination, title policy, escrow, closing and recordation) are covered by ODA. All easement transactions are permanent. The Agricultural Security Area (ASA) Program is a tool that promotes agricultural retention by creating special areas in which agriculture is encouraged and protected. ASAs provide certain benefits to farmers, including protection from non-agricultural development, a critical mass of land to help keep farming viable, and possible tax benefits for investing in new real-agricultural property. The ASA program authorizes one or more landowners, with at least 500 acres of contiguous farmland, to request enrollment into an ASA for a 10-year period from the boards of county commissioners and township trustees. Information is available at the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Farmland Preservation Office, or the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District. There is currently no program in the county to purchase development rights.

- C. Encourage Redevelopment – Encourage the development or redevelopment of land already unsuitable for agriculture. Rather than converting agricultural land that lacks infrastructure support such as roads, water, sewer, electric, gas, etc., provide incentives to redevelop areas within the county where the infrastructure is already in place.

- D. Clustered Development – Coordinate development to reduce the need for land use conversion by encouraging greater housing density. Clustered development is an efficient use of land and minimizes the cost of providing infrastructure. County subdivision regulations should include options for clustered development.

- E. Policies on Minimum Lot Size – Monitor policies that impact minimum lot sizes. Health departments now take into consideration soil type when determining the type of onsite wastewater systems to be installed and focus less on minimum lot size. However, the ORC states that lots more than 20 acres in size are not subject to Planning Commission review. Speculators are buying farms, then subdividing the land into at least 20-acre parcels to avoid planning review and then reselling the parcels. This is an example of how a policy to minimize public burden has unintended consequences. This activity creates problems by converting agricultural land at an accelerated rate and increases costs to local agencies for providing future services such as roads, water, sewer, bus service, etc. Once the land is subdivided in an inefficient manner, it is almost impossible to correct the problem.

Goal – Enable new directions in agriculture

Agriculture is still a major component of the county’s economy. More than 44% of the land is used for agriculture, and livestock and crop receipts exceed \$70 million per year. The agriculture industry continues to change. Land use planning and agency policies and regulations should promote agricultural sustainability. Making farming more economically feasible and sustainable enables agriculture to better compete with other land uses. The following actions are needed.

- A. Agriculture Incubator – Encourage incubators in all sectors of agriculture. Foodworks Alliance, LLC, is a food-based business incubator that began operation in 2015 and provides an avenue for regional produce growers and entrepreneurs to access an approved production facility that enables them to produce products that can be sold wholesale. For growers, this provides an avenue to expand their markets, provides an opportunity to reduce waste, and provides year-round access to markets for their agricultural production. One goal of this facility is to increase local food purchases.

- B. Local Branding Program – Promote a local branding program to help local farmers market to local consumers. The encouragement of vertical integration enables local farmers and ranchers to obtain higher prices for products while allowing consumers opportunities to

purchase goods at lower prices. The county should encourage the development of tools to assist with local branding.

- C. Direct Marketing – Encourage residents to purchase foods from Muskingum County farmers. The latest USDA figures (2017) show that the average American spends \$4,363 at home and another \$3,365 away from home on food expenditures. These two numbers total \$7,728 which is the amount that the average American spends on food every year. The population of Muskingum County in 2017 was 86,149. Multiplying the number of people in the county by the average amount of dollars spent by each American on food is \$665,759,472. This means that Muskingum County residents spent more than \$665 million dollars on food in 2017. County agricultural experts estimate that about three percent of the food purchased in the county is locally produced and marketed, which amounts to about \$20 million. If ten percent of the food produced and consumed in the county were local, \$46 million additional dollars could be added to the local agricultural economy.

There are several ways that locally produced agricultural products marketed directly to consumers could be increased in the county. A year-round farmers market could provide a steady stream of income for producers. Restaurants or mobile vehicles that feature locally grown food could be another source of prepared food for county consumers. Retail food markets could feature agricultural wares produced in the county. Value could be added to fruit, vegetables, and meat through preservation, enhancement, or innovation.

- D. Wildlife/Pest Management & Agriculture – Direct wildlife agencies to develop management plans that protect agricultural operations. Farmers provide wildlife habitat, but there is a point when the losses from wildlife damage jeopardizes the operation. Currently, federal and state wildlife agencies accept a damage level that is unacceptable for most growers. It is apparent that hunting alone cannot satisfactorily control the wildlife numbers. Pest management activities should be planned to minimize impacts on agriculture. For example, mosquito spraying must be scheduled at times other than when pollinators are active.
- E. Agritourism/Agritainment – Continue to encourage these activities. Agritourism, also known as agritainment, is defined as any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Agritourism providers link agriculture production and/or processing with tourism by inviting members of the general public to observe, participate in, or otherwise enjoy a farming activity. This serves the secondary purposes of entertaining and/or educating the public while at the same time generating income for the farm or business. Examples of agritourism include overnight facilities such as bed & breakfasts, dude ranches, petting zoos, “U-pick” strawberries or pumpkins or apples, etc.; agritainment includes corn mazes, horseback and trail riding, hayrides, etc. These activities also help local

restaurants, hotels, and local businesses. The following actions would benefit the county in several ways.

1. Educate the public about agriculture, promote the link between the tourism industry and agriculture, and help emphasize the importance of preservation of farmland. These activities can be a new source of revenue for the operation. The agricultural revolution of the earlier 1900s has created entire generations of people who have never been associated with farm activities. There are opportunities for farmers to host urban neighbors for a day on the farm. This can also mean additional revenue for hotels and restaurants in the county.
2. Assist with marketing and establish favorable policies. The Muskingum County Planning Commission can provide opportunities, assistance, and awareness for development. Farm Bureau, ag-related businesses, and the Muskingum County Convention and Visitors Bureau can promote such activities. Township trustees can implement zoning policies favorable to their success.
3. Assist farmers and ranchers with insurance and legal issues. Legal/liability for such activities is always a concern. ORC 901.80 provides some immunity from liability in civil action for harm done that is a result of a risk inherent in the activity. This immunity varies depending on the type of farm visitor: trespassers (exception for children), licensees (on the property with permission but of no economic benefit to the owner), and invitees (on the property with permission but provides economic benefit to the owner). Liability is different in each of these situations, and the owner/operators should consult with their individual legal counsel and insurance carrier.

- F. Urban Agriculture – Support the growing trend among cities to fight food insecurity and rehabilitate blighted neighborhoods by turning vacant land into places to grow food. Examples can be found in cities all over the country from large-scale “agrihoods” in Detroit and mid-size urban farms such as Franklinton Farms in Columbus to fully automated indoor farms such as 80 Acres Farms in Cincinnati, which is built in an old warehouse. Urban farms can include such innovative systems as rooftop gardens, aquaponics, and large-scale container gardening in abandoned parking lots. Urban farmers are thinking outside the box to create systems that produce food on a large scale and are profitable.

The community garden effort in the City of Zanesville has become more robust since 2016 and has expanded its reach into the rest of the county with the establishment of a community garden in the Village of New Concord. Community gardens can help educate citizens about where their food comes from, combat food insecurity by encouraging people to grow their own healthy food, and can be a jumping off point for larger scale urban agriculture initiatives. Communities within Muskingum County that lack a grocery store (e.g., Frazeytsburg, Chandlersville, Dresden, and Roseville) should be encouraged to create their own community gardens.

- G. Alternative Energy – Enable farmers to be a key part in the expanded production of alternative energy resources. Production of corn, soybeans, and other crops for ethanol and bio-diesel fuels will require that the county maintain the current farmland. There is potential for farmers to participate in the development of solar and wind energy.

- H. Support Local Agribusiness – Promote the Muskingum County Livestock Auction and grain elevators to ensure a local sales avenue for farm production. Also support the agriculture industry suppliers.

- I. Internet/Cell Phone Service – Promote the extension of Internet and cell phone access to the rural parts of the county. This is an issue for all county residents who do not have service or have limited service such as DSL or satellite. Lack of high-speed Internet service is already a limit on education, medical, small-business, and entertainment opportunities as well as agricultural operations. This negative impact will increase as the technology revolution continues.

- J. Quality Assurance/Food Safety – Support producers in complying with quality assurance standards and applying best management practices. This is necessary for public confidence and access to markets

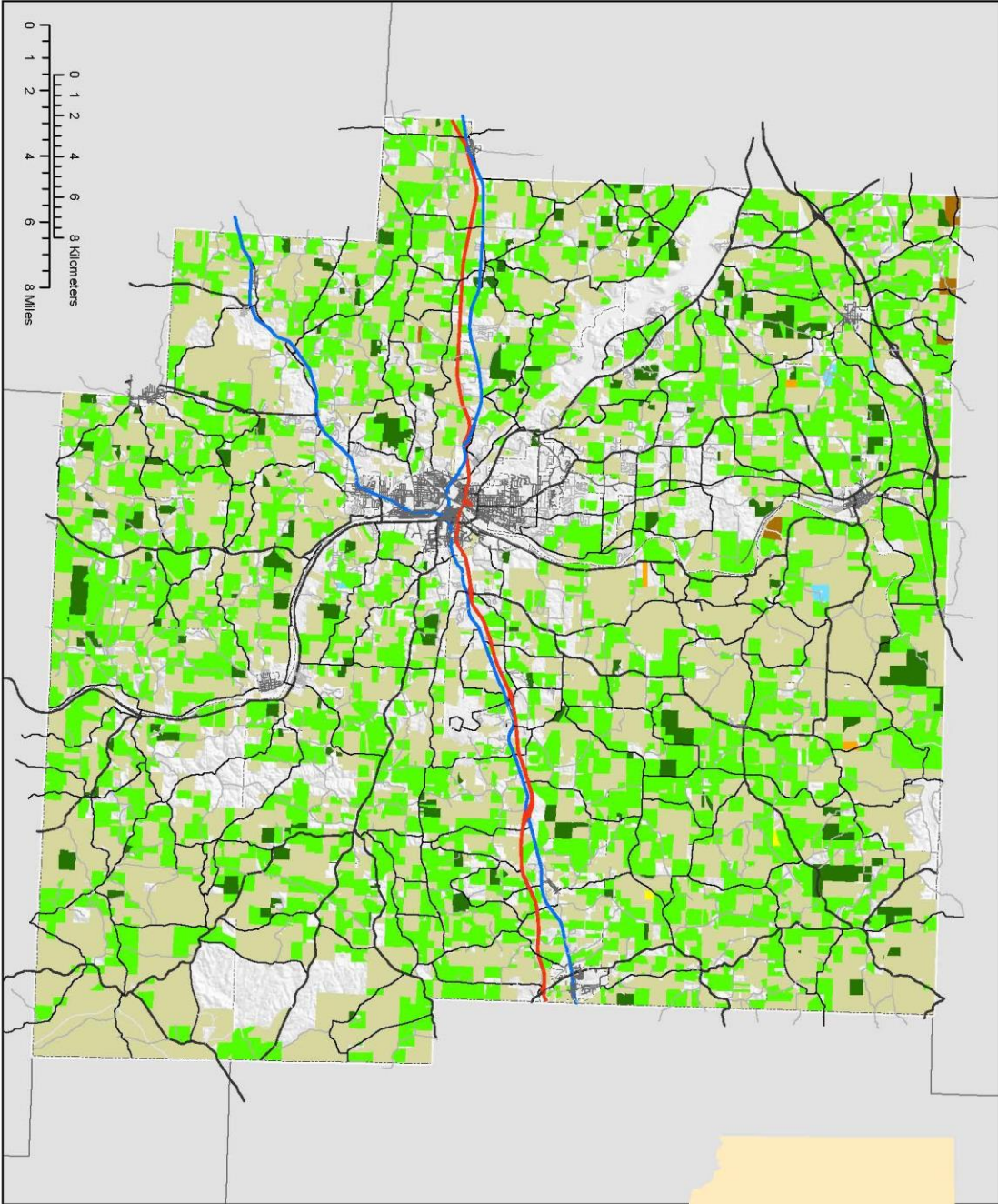
- K. Livestock Contracting Operations – Encourage individuals who are considering developing a contract for livestock or poultry production to conduct due diligence before signing a contract. Considerations include initial building costs, financing, zoning and permits, nutrient plans, labor, access to water, local and state regulations, record keeping, utilities, etc.

Goal – Educate the community about agriculture

A separation often exists between what the public believes about the agriculture industry and the reality of agriculture. Many people do not know where their food comes from or understand what is needed to grow, support, transport, or process food for use or sale. This is a gap that continues to widen across all socioeconomic levels as people become further removed from agriculture.

Raising awareness about local agricultural activities can be encouraged in the following ways.

- A. Increase conversations with local farmers to learn about their practices through such things as interactions at farmers' markets, on-farm visits, and technology such as social media and webinars (especially good for bio-sensitive farms that are not open to the public).
- B. Increase agriculture education within schools by:
 - 1. Strengthening Ag Science/FFA programs, which in turn, better equip students to take over existing family farm operations, provide a work force that has the skills that local farms are looking to hire, and/or encourage students to start new agriculture operations.
 - 2. Increasing school gardens to teach children where food comes from and to encourage healthy eating.
 - 3. Initiating local Farm to Cafeteria programs and then making connections between students and said farms.
 - 4. Expanding current agricultural educational programs so that a wider audience can be reached, including OSU Extension programs (especially 4-H), Muskingum Soil & Water Conservation District programs (especially Urban Greens), and Farm Bureau activities (such as Farm City Day).
- C. Encourage local decision makers to become more aware of the different types of farms in our county. When they know and understand local agriculture, there will be more informed decision making on agricultural issues. (Attending events such as Farm City Day, Dinner on the Farm, and scheduling private tours are great ways to facilitate this.)
- D. In turn, farmers are encouraged to become more involved with boards and committees that may make decisions that will impact their livelihoods (e.g., attending Farm Bureau public policy meetings or running for the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors).



Muskingum County
Planning Commission

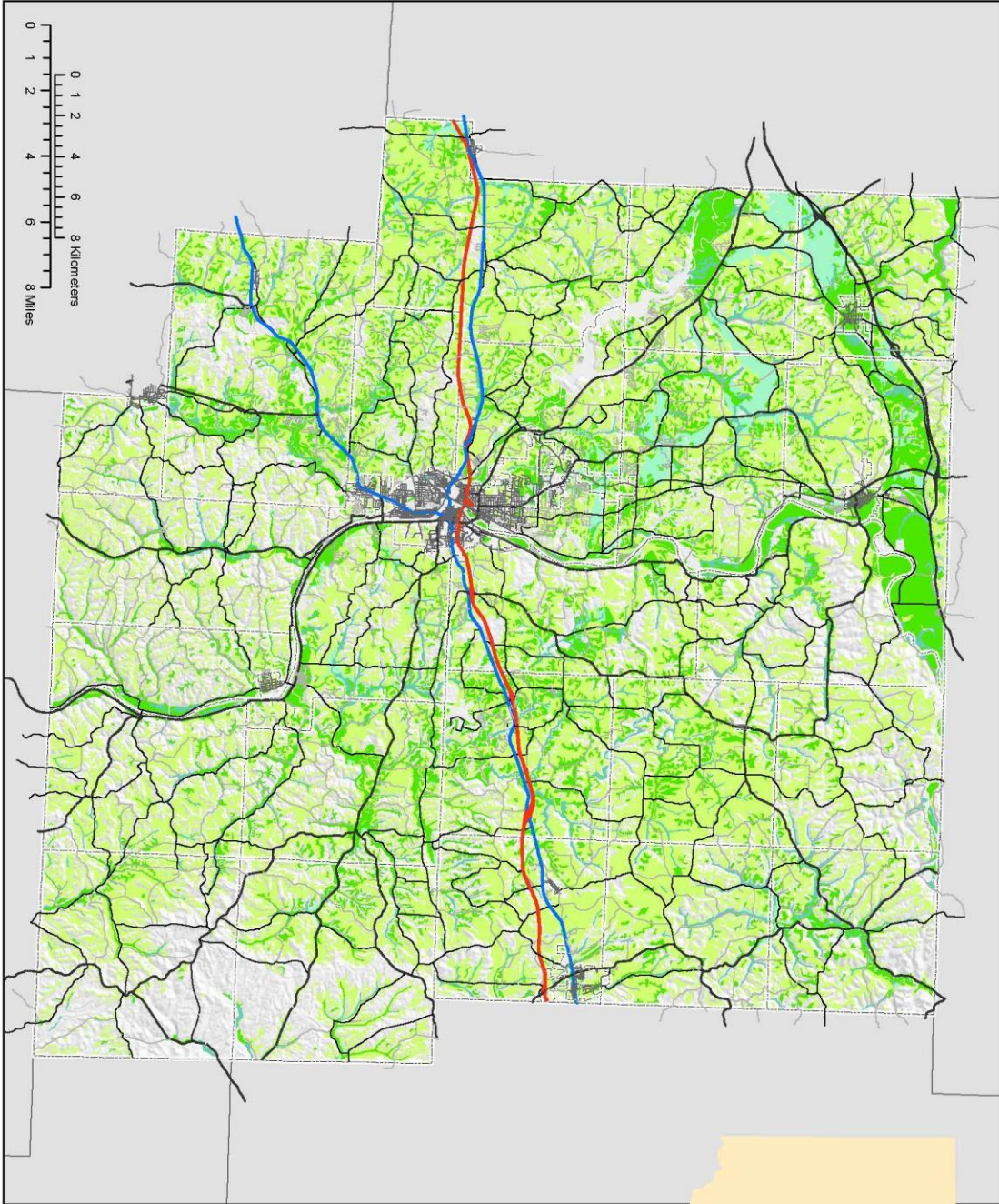
MUSKINGUM COUNTY, OHIO

CURRENT AGRICULTURAL USES



Legend	
LandUse	
■	VACANT AG LAND
■	GENERAL FARM
■	LIVESTOCK
■	DAIRY
■	POLTRY
■	FRUIT/VEGETRY
■	TIMBER





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MUSKINGUM COUNTY, OHIO

PRIME FARMLAND SOILS



Legend

- Prime Farmland
- Local Importance
- Prime Farmland
- Prime if Drained
- Prime if Drained and Protected

