



FAYETTE ALLIANCE

GROWING OUR CITY, PROMOTING OUR FARMS

Published in the Lexington Herald Leader, October 19th 2014

Written by Knox van Nagell, executive director

Lexington has many factories, and they are made of finite Bluegrass soils and limestone karst topography, not bricks and mortar.

They manufacture unique agricultural products that are limited in supply and demanded by markets all over the world...from horses and cattle, to food and crops.

Lexington is the capital of a signature industry that's inherently tied to and dependent upon a breathtaking and vulnerable resource. Contrary to many forms of manufacturing, our "factories" succeed by existing in a state of harmony with the environment. And the results are profound.

The sheer economics of Lexington farms are staggering and wide-ranging, having a \$2.4 billion annual impact on our diverse, local economy and supporting one in nine jobs in the community.

These numbers are reinforced by the recent Keeneland September Sale which grossed \$279 million in revenues, Fayette County having the highest farm values in the state, and our farms generating millions of dollars in the finance, law, real estate, and construction businesses.

While these facts are powerful, they don't begin to tell the complete story of what our farms mean to Lexington. Their ability to produce the world's best livestock, among other commodities, is not only an economic imperative, but a unique touchstone that helps define our culture, and specifically how we relate to one another and to the world.

For example, last year alone over a million tourists visited our farms and 2,800 acres of rural parkland in Fayette County.



FAYETTE ALLIANCE

GROWING OUR CITY, PROMOTING OUR FARMS

Despite our current strengths, we are beginning to better connect the dots and leverage our working farms in ways that go beyond the fence rows and directly impact our day-to-day lives. It's about ag-tourism, and if done right, the economic and quality of life "multipliers" are endless.

Our community has been at this effort for a while, as evidenced by our burgeoning Farmer's Market and KY Proud Food Show, hosting frequent fitness events along our scenic rural byways such as the Bourbon Chase, and hosting the 2010 WEG and upcoming 2015 Breeder's Cup Festival, just to name a few.

To build on this momentum, refinements to our Zoning Ordinance are also underway in the form of a "Recreational Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment" or ZOTA.

As part of this initiative, Vice Mayor Linda Gorton led a diverse community stakeholder group that met over twenty times during the past two years, to review our Zoning Ordinance and achieve the delicate, but necessary balance of promoting public access and recreation on one hand, and farmland protection on the other.

The guiding principles of the committee's "ZOTA" recommendations were upholding our longstanding land-use plans, reinforcing the "agricultural intent" of our rural zones, establishing an "ag-nexus" between the farm and the proposed ag-tourism activity, proposing new outdoor recreational opportunities for lands not suitable for agriculture, and protections for our sensitive environmental assets.

Without these principles in place, the character of the Bluegrass would be compromised in a blind pursuit of "tourism" and "access" —forever altering and diminishing our rural landscape as an economic, cultural, and quality of life driver in Lexington and beyond.

Therefore, to achieve the goals of the ZOTA, several tourism uses are proposed for the core agricultural areas of Fayette County, including organized farm tours; farm-to-



FAYETTE ALLIANCE

GROWING OUR CITY, PROMOTING OUR FARMS

table restaurants; farm-produce stands; corn mazes and orchards; wineries; and the opportunity for a comprehensive, non commercial trail system in the public rights of way along our rural roads...in addition to the diverse agricultural activities already taking place on our farms today.

And yes, canopy tours, camping, fishing, and other forms of commercial outdoor recreation are recommended for land not suitable for intensive agriculture, such as the steep slopes and gorges of the KY River Palisades, rural business sites, buffer zones, and parkland—provided that planning processes are respectfully followed and sensitive natural resources are protected on subject sites.

These recommendations are important, as they uphold our zoning principles and in turn, the land-use climate essential to attracting local and international investment from the agricultural and real estate sectors to Lexington. Importantly, they advance the goal of public access without compromising the integrity of our zoning ordinance, our urban growth boundary, rural landscape, or Lexington property values.

Fayette Alliance applauds this body of work, as it supports our agriculture, high tech, and healthcare-based economy; advances our unique way of life; and sustains an authentic form of tourism that makes Lexington...well, Lexington.

We will urge the Planning Commission to approve the ZOTA committee's recommendations at the public comment hearing on October 23rd, and in the weeks to come at City Hall.

This is a momentous opportunity, to protect and leverage our agrarian “factory floor” while pursuing exciting new tourism and recreational uses in our rural area. Under this strategy, Lexington's potential is limitless.