

Investing in agriculture success and thinking big

By John-Mark Hack

Exciting things are happening in Kentucky agriculture all around the state. Producers and business people are starting and expanding a variety of operations, large and small, and are playing major roles in the Commonwealth's future economy.

These innovations are locally-grown efforts, where farmers are making choices that will ensure their communities, counties and regions are places where families can live, work and prosper.

We are facing together the reality that change in agriculture is taking place. Tobacco will yield a smaller portion of income for many families. For some it will cease being a profitable crop at all. There are many reasons for this change. While tobacco will continue to be an important crop, we must look to additional ways of providing for ourselves.

Gov. Patton sees this economic shift as an opportunity to strengthen other agricultural sectors, and to plant seeds for new endeavors. That's why he created the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy and made it a priority to invest in farming and to provide a structure of support for farmers. This investment is serving as a catalyst for local efforts.

One of the landmarks of change in the tobacco industry occurred in late 1998 when 46 states were awarded billions of dollars in damages from tobacco companies for years of health costs related to smoking. Settlement money was awarded to 46 states over 25 years. Gov. Patton worked to set aside half of Kentucky's share for investment in agriculture through 2002.

Since its inception this year, the Agriculture Development Board, which oversees distribution of this money, has invested in more than 250 project proposals for over \$57 million. The board reviews proposals monthly and targets the money to projects that have the most potential for impacting local economies. These projects have included significant funds to improve the livestock industry, expand farmers markets and build resources for agricultural education in schools. It has funded farmers who produce corn, honey, tomatoes, grapes and even shrimp. It has assisted cooperatives and businesses in building storage and processing centers for crops and livestock. And, it has funded business planning and marketing efforts that are crucial for agriculture's profitability.

Our state has been given the resources to make this time of change a positive development. It makes sense, in a state like Kentucky, to invest

significantly in agriculture's economic progress. Soon the Kentucky Legislature will begin reviewing the success of these investments and deciding whether to continue to set aside funds for agricultural development after 2002.

During the legal battles over tobacco, Gov. Patton fought for assistance for tobacco farmers expected to suffer income losses because of changes in the tobacco companies' practices. His efforts resulted in a "Phase II" settlement that directed the four largest tobacco companies to pay into a separate fund that would be distributed to tobacco farmers only. In three years, almost \$300 million has been paid out and these annual payments will continue through 2010. This money is providing needed income in changing times, and providing resources to plan for the future.

If you are on a complex journey, you need a roadmap. One with details that can take you all the way to your destination. That's why Gov. Patton has spent time and resources on developing Kentucky's Long-Term Comprehensive Plan for Agriculture Development. The plan has been locally driven, literally hammered out county by county. Eleven regional meetings took place, and a two-day gathering of state, national and international experts and state agricultural leaders assessed issues critical to future success.

We've published a draft of the plan encouraging public comment that will continue to refine the information and goals included. Gov. Patton encourages comments - negative or positive - that will add constructively to the plan.

The plan reviews the history of farming in the state, assesses its current status and strengths and points to a variety of promising investments into new and existing business ventures that merit support. It recognizes and calls for investment in cooperation among producers to achieve economies of scale, and a sophisticated marketing structure that explores every opportunity for farmers to sell their goods locally, regionally, nationally and even internationally.

A lot is happening in agriculture in Kentucky. Many people in small, rural communities are thinking big and taking risks to build an economy that can provide a high quality of life to future generations. Gov. Patton supports local innovation. We're asking for your continued support, too. Let your legislators know that investment in your local farming community is important to you, and give us your comments on the Long-Term Plan. You'll play a role in a bright future for Kentucky agriculture.



Modern Woodmen of America, a fraternal life insurance society, provided new furnishing and decor for the children's visitation area in the Rockcastle County Family Services office. Supervisor Cheryl Franklin, MSW, and Modern Woodmen of America district manager, Jan Gill are pleased with reaction of the children who have been able to enjoy the new surroundings. Gill said "Modern Woodmen is very supportive of any contribution that can be made to improve the lives of children and promote family unity."

Tips to help avoid holiday depression

"Happy Holidays!" These are the words we often hear this time of year. However, grief, loneliness, and stress are often intensified during the holidays, which can result in feelings of unhappiness instead of joy. Unrealistic expectations of a picture perfect, Norman Rockwell Christmas; over-commercialization; and the added pressures of shopping, gift giving and cooking may further accentuate these feelings.

Although many people experience feelings of depression and anxiety during the holiday season, these feelings may be even more prevalent this year due to the recent events like the Sept. 11 terrorist bombing, anthrax scares, the war in Afghanistan, and the recession.

"It is normal to experience feelings of anxiety in reaction to a stressful event such as the holidays and these reactions may be further compounded by the recent national tragedies," said Margaret Pennington, commissioner of the state's Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services.

If you think that you are experiencing the holiday blues or want to try to avoid them this year, here are some tips to help you cope.

- Keep expectations manageable by setting realistic goals; pace yourself and organize your time. Make a list of things you need to do. The take a look at your list and see which things must be done. Is there anything you can put aside for a while or let go of completely? Can someone else do or help you do things on the list?

- Realize that the holiday season does not automatically banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely. Allow yourself room for these feelings and then decide what you can do to move beyond them. For example, sometimes getting out of the house is helpful. Also, every now and then turn off the television and radio for a while and listen to a favorite compact disc, read or spend time on a favorite hobby.

- Life is full of changes. Don't be disappointed if your holiday isn't exactly like the past. Each holiday season is different and can be enjoyed in a unique way. Try different ways to celebrate the holidays; create new traditions. Find small ways to help others, as it may help ease your own negative feelings.

- Enjoy holiday activities that are free, such as driving or walking around to look at holiday decorations.

- Go window-shopping or visit with others. Check your local newspaper or listen to the radio or television for free activities you might enjoy.

- Avoid using alcohol and other drugs. Substances may block the pain for a while, but they will keep you from dealing with your pain and healing.

- Take care of your mind and body. While holiday foods are rich and yummy and you can enjoy them, try to do so in moderation. A little exercise can help to lift depression and also can help you sleep better.

- Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Reach out to make new friends or contact someone with whom you have lost touch.

- Others may be experiencing the blues as well and appreciate your contacting them.



HOLIDAY GREETINGS

May your holiday season greet you with plenty of good friends and good cheer. Our deepest thanks to you for making our year a ringing success!

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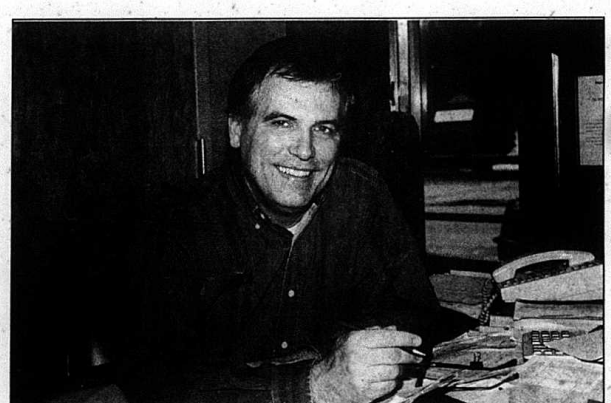
Humbly they came in wonder and adoration, bearing gifts to the newborn babe.

May the peace, hope and joy of the Christmas season fill your holidays.

Appalachian Medical Supply
 Gary Cromer, owner
 45 Newcomb Avenue, Mt. Vernon



Merry Christmas



May this great season find each of you in health and good will for your neighbors and families.

My personal wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

County Judge-Executive Buzz Carloftis