

Tobacco culture: What Kentucky agriculture has lost along the way

BY LIAM NIEMEYER
KENTUCKY LANTERN

Kenneth Anderson’s father taught him what to look for in high-quality tobacco, cured for weeks in the rafters of a Clark County barn. How to “grade” or rate the quality of the different parts of the plant, looking for slight variations of the deep brown color of the dried leaves.

“Tobacco’s always been a crop that you survived on,” Anderson said as he drove his truck over the rolling hills of his land on an early September morning. “Tobacco paid the bills. It paid for the farm. It sent kids to school.”

Growing the cash crop is a part of a family tradition that’s stretched across four generations for Anderson. He first rode a tractor when he was six years old. By the age of 14, he was high in the tobacco barn rafters himself as he placed plants along tobacco sticks to be cured in the fall.

In high school, he’d go on to win ribbons in county and regional tobacco competitions through Future Farmers of America. Just this year, he won several tobacco contests at the state fair.

Growing up was a time when “every farm had a small acre, small acres” of tobacco, Anderson said. In 1978, a few years after he graduated from high school, more than 700 of the 962 farms in Clark County grew the crop, according to federal data.

It was a product — dark tobacco traditionally grown in Western Kentucky and burley tobacco grown elsewhere — that dominated the state’s farm economy, bringing in on average about a quarter of approximately \$3.4 billion in annual revenue for Kentucky farms each year during the 1990s.

Anderson, now 69, also believes change is inevitable. That change has been dramatic over the roughly two decades for the crop he’s grown to know so well. Nearly 60,000 farms grew tobacco in the 1990s to now less than 1,000 as of 2022, according to federal agriculture census data.

By his estimate now, there’s less than 10 tobacco growers left in Clark County. “I didn’t foresee it, the changes that have happened,” Anderson said in his soft-spoken voice. “I’ve always heard it said, ‘You may not want to be the first to change, but you don’t want to be the last.’”

Anderson pulled up in his truck next to a tobacco barn, where one of the last few tobacco growers in his county was having migrant workers from Mexico hang the plants in the rafters. Anderson doesn’t grow the crop anymore, but he leases his land to 45-year-old Jeremy Jones, who grows it



LIAM NIEMEYER/Kentucky Lantern

Clark County farmer Kenneth Anderson has been around tobacco his entire 69 years and feels the impact of societal and agriculture change.



LIAM NIEMEYER/Kentucky Lantern

Workers stand on rails amid rafters in the tobacco barn and plants are passed by hand to be hung inside the barn to cure.

on contract for a tobacco company.

The laborers, hired as seasonal labor through H-2A visas, worked to music as they lifted themselves on the beams high in the barn to do the labor of “housing” the tobacco. Over several weeks, the air will cure the tobacco, draining moisture from the plant’s stems and wrinkling the leaf into a dark tan.

“You see it from start to finish. You’ve touched it. You’ve done it. You know, it’s a sense of pride in the end to know that you’ve started it and completed it, and that’s what you do to make your living,” said Jones, standing inside the barn.

For the farmers who still grow it, there’s a feeling of accomplishment with raising the labor-intensive crop from a seed as small as a “pinhead.”

But even as Kentucky agriculture has moved beyond reliance on the crop, some of those farmers also wonder what’s been lost — community, culture and learned practices and knowledge handed down by generations — as the number of tobacco farmers continues to dwindle in the state. University of Kentucky

agriculture economist Will Snell points to multiple reasons for the dramatic decline of Kentucky tobacco.

Rates of smoking and tobacco consumption across the country have fallen drastically over the decades, driving down demand for domestic tobacco. The falling rates coincide with nationwide efforts to discourage smoking and tobacco consumption, cited by the American Lung Association as a driving reason why Kentucky remains among the top states for new cases of lung cancer.

Newer products with nicotine — vapes, nicotine pouches — generally use little to no nicotine from Kentucky tobacco.

That trend of falling demand, along with competition of cheaper tobacco grown overseas, led Congress in 2004 to end the federal price support program for tobacco farmers that had been in place since the Great Depression. The program controlled how much tobacco each farmer could grow in an effort to manage the supply and selling price of the cash crop. Farmers received more than \$9 billion in buyout payments

when the program ended; Kentucky received about \$2.5 billion in payments.

Snell, who was working at the University of Kentucky at the time of the buyout, calls the roughly 20 years since the buyout in Kentucky agriculture to be the largest “structural change of any ag economy of any state.”

“We’ve lost about 80% of the market, maybe 90% of the growers,” Snell said about Kentucky tobacco. He compared it to if Illinois lost 80% of their corn production, or if Wisconsin lost 80% of their dairy production.

“How in the world would they survive?” Snell said.

Overall, Snell said Kentucky agriculture economy has been able to largely rebound from a past reliance on tobacco.

In the 1990s, according to federal data compiled by Snell, Kentucky’s farm economy averaged about \$3.4 billion in annual revenue, with tobacco making up about 25% of the revenue. Tobacco now accounts for only a little more than 2% of revenue in 2025, according to a University of Kentucky

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Kenneth Anderson sorts through tobacco inside one of this barns on his Clark County farm.

SECTION 00010 ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

City of Lebanon
240 West Main Street
Lebanon, Kentucky 40033

Separate sealed Bids for the construction of **Wastewater System Improvements - Contract 1 - WWTP Improvements consisting of new aerobic digesters, new sludge pump station, one (1) influent screw pump and 2022 Wastewater System Improvements Project - Contract 2 - Collection System Improvements.** The project consists of approximately 670 LF of 8” PVC gravity sewer replacement, 3,775 LF of 8-inch PVC force main, 2,000 LF of 8-inch gravity sewer lining, rehabilitation of 6 manholes, equipment replacement in the existing Rose Wood lift station, and all related appurtenances as shown on the DRAWINGS and described in the SPECIFICATIONS will be received by City of Lebanon at 240 West Main Street, Lebanon, Kentucky 40033 until **10:00 a.m. (EDT Local Time) Tuesday, October 6, 2026**, and then at said office publicly opened and read aloud.

Bids will be received for a single prime Contract. Bids for Contract 1 shall be on a lump sum price basis and Contract 2 shall be on a unit price basis as indicated in the Bid Forms.

The Contract Documents may be examined at the following locations:

KENTUCKY ENGINEERING GROUP, PLLC., 101 High Street, Versailles, Kentucky 40383
Phone: (859) 251-4127

CITY OF LEBANON, 240 West Main Street, Lebanon, Kentucky 40033. Phone: (270) 692-6272

Copies of the Contract Documents may be obtained from **LYNN IMAGING - Lexington** located at **328 Old Vine Street, Lexington, KY 40507, 859-255-1021. Website: www.lynnimaging.com.** Printed copies of the Contract Documents may be obtained upon receipt of a non-refundable amount of **\$400.00** for Contract 1 and **\$350.00** for Contract 2 for each complete set of documents. Included with the printed copy of the contract documents is an electronic download (as portable document format PDF) upon request.

All bids must be made on required Bid Form and must be fully completed and executed with original signatures and corporate seals. All bidders must be listed as plan holders by the plan distributor.

This project may be partially or entirely funded by the Kentucky Infrastructure Agency State Revolving Fund Loan.

Bidders must comply with President’s Executive Orders No. 11246 and No. 11375 and any amendments or supplements to those Executive Orders. Attention of bidders is particularly called to the requirements as to conditions of employment to be observed under the contract, Section 3, Segregated Facility, Section 109 and E.O. 11246.

Bidders must certify they do not and will not maintain or provide for their employees any facilities that are segregated or based on race, color, creed or national origin. Bidders must comply with 41 CFR 60-4 in regard to affirmative action and to insure equal opportunity to females and minorities, and all that are applicable. Minorities and small businesses are encouraged to submit bids on this project.

Bidders must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Anti-Kickback Act, and the Contract Work Hours Standard Act.

The procurement and performance of this contract are subject to the requirements of the Kentucky DOW including the Davis-Bacon Act.

Successful Bidder shall make positive efforts to use small, minority, women owned and disadvantaged businesses.

Contractor shall comply with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Buy America Requirement in 23 C.F.R. § 635.410 and all relevant provisions of the Build America, Buy America Act (BABA), contained within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, §§ 70901-52 enacted November 15, 2021. The BABA requires iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used in infrastructure projects funded by federal financial assistance to be produced in the United States. Comply with 2 C.F.R § 184.

City of Lebanon, reserves the right to waive any bidding informalities and to reject any or all bids, for any reason. The right is reserved by the Owner, in the exercise of its sole judgment to reject any or all Bids, and to re-advertise and award the Contract in the regular manner or to waive any informalities, irregularities, mistakes, errors, or omissions in any Bid received and to accept any Bid deemed to be responsive to this invitation and favorable to interests of the Owner.

The sealed bid for this project shall be clearly marked on the outside of the envelope: “Sealed Bid for **Wastewater System Improvements - Contract 1 - WWTP Improvements” or “2022 Wastewater Improvements Project Contract 2 - Collection System Improvements”** for the City of Lebanon. The bid may be mailed to: City of Lebanon, 240 West Main Street, Lebanon, Kentucky 40033. A certified check or Bid Bond payable to the City of Lebanon in the amount of five (5) percent of the Bid shall accompany the Bid.

The contract award will be made in writing to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder.

Gary D. Crenshaw, Mayor Date: September 2026

City of Lebanon

ORDINANCE NO. 2026-002

AN ORDINANCE FIXING THE TAX RATE AND LEVYING AN AD VALOREM TAX FOR CITY PURPOSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 AND PROVIDING HOW THE FUNDS SO RAISED SHALL BE EXPENDED

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LORETTO, KENTUCKY:

SECTION I

There is hereby levied for the tax year 2026 and ad valorem tax of .1250 cents of each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of taxable property assessed and assessable of every kind, other than tangible personal property and bank deposit taxes, liable to taxation in the City of Loretto, Kentucky; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes and expenses of said City.

SECTION II

There is hereby levied for the tax year 2026 and ad valorem tax of .1250 cents of each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of taxable tangible property assessed and assessable, liable to taxation in the City of Loretto, Kentucky; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes and expenses of said City.

SECTION III

There is hereby levied for the tax year 2026 an ad valorem tax of .1250 cents on each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of fair cash value of motor vehicles assessed and assessable, liable to taxation in the City of Loretto; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes of said City. Said tax shall be collected by the Marion County Court Clerk in accordance with applicable statutes of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

SECTION IV

If any section, sub-section, sentence, clause or phrase or portion of this ordinance is for any reason held invalid or unconstitutional by any Court of competent jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed a separate, distinct, and independent provision and such holdings shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions hereof.

SECTION V

This Ordinance shall take effect upon its second reading, passage and publication.

CITY OF LORETTO, KENTUCKY

BY: *Sammy Medley, Mayor*
Sammy Medley, MAYOR

ATTEST:

Pat Edelen, City Clerk
PAT EDELEN, CITY CLERK

First reading given on 9-11-2026
Second reading given on 9-23-2026
Published in The Lebanon Enterprise on

Pat Edelen, City Clerk
PAT EDELEN, CITY CLERK

ORDINANCE NO. 2026 -11

ORDINANCE FIXING THE TAX RATE AND LEVYING AN AD VALOREM TAX FOR CITY PURPOSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF 2026-2027 AND PROVIDING HOW THE FUNDS SO RAISED SHALL BE EXPENDED

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LEBANON, KENTUCKY:

SECTION I: There is hereby levied for the tax year 2026 an ad valorem tax of 16.70 cents of each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of taxable property assessed and assessable of every kind, other than tangible personal property and bank deposit taxes, liable to taxation in the City of Lebanon, Kentucky; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes and expenses of said City.

SECTION II: There is hereby levied for the tax year 2026 an ad valorem tax of 16.88 cents of each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of taxable tangible property assessed and assessable, liable to taxation in the City of Lebanon, Kentucky; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes and expenses of said City.

SECTION III: There is hereby levied for the tax year beginning January 1, 2027 an ad valorem tax of 24.33 cents on each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of fair cash value of motor vehicles assessed and assessable, liable to taxation in the City of Lebanon; said levy and all taxes realized therefrom to be used for and solely devoted to the general municipal purposes of said City. Said tax shall be collected by the Marion County Court Clerk in accordance with applicable statutes of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

SECTION IV: If any section, sub-section, sentence, clause or phrase or portion of this ordinance is for any reason held invalid or unconstitutional by any Court of competent jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed a separate, distinct, and independent provision and such holdings shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions hereof.

SECTION V: This Ordinance shall take effect upon its second reading, passage and publication.
CITY OF LEBANON, KENTUCKY- GARY D. CRENSHAW, MAYOR
- ATTEST: Gina N. Wheatley, City Clerk