

Lincoln County Futures Report February 2015

Introduction

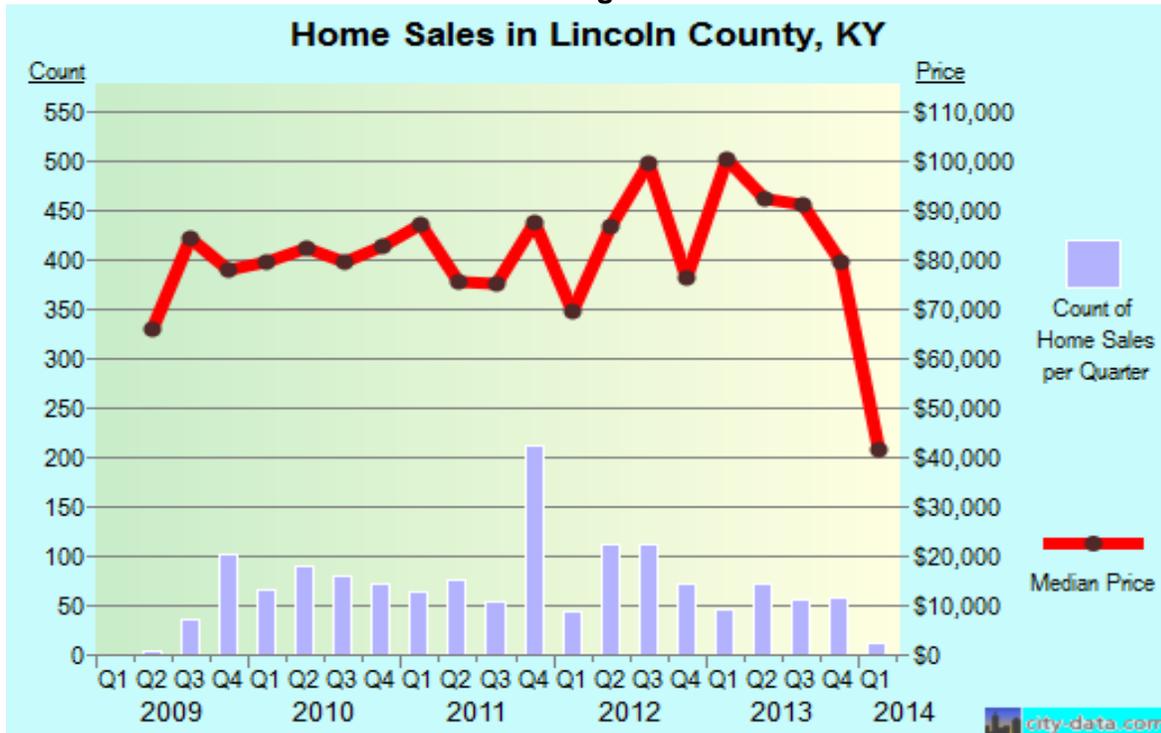
In 2014, Lincoln County Futures, a group of community leaders, initiated a planning process to provide direction for future development. To maximize the opportunity for residents to express their hopes and dreams about the future of the county, a survey was distributed to both adults and youth and four town hall meetings were held. 200 youth and 218 adults completed surveys, while just around 40 persons participated in the town hall meetings. Based on these results and the deliberations of the Lincoln County Futures committee, a strategic plan has been developed. This report provides a context for understanding the plan recommendations by considering first, the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of Lincoln County and then reviewing the survey and town hall results.

An overview of Lincoln County

In 2013, Lincoln County population of 24,370, was 1.6% smaller than it had been in 2010. Nearly one quarter (23.6%) of the population is 18 and under, but a little more than one in six (16.2%) are 65 or older. Another 27.6% of the population is between the ages of 45 and 64, so the population will continue to age up in the coming decade.

Just over three-quarters (76.8%) of the adults age 25 and older have a high school degree and nearly one in ten adults (age 25+) have a Bachelor's degree. Median household income in 2012 is \$35,530, and 25.6% of the population is in poverty (see Attachment A for additional information).

Figure 1



Between 2009 and 2014, there has been a decline in the both the number of homes sold as well as the median price of sold homes.

In 2013, Lincoln had a per capita personal income of \$27,307, which ranked 97th in the state and was 75 percent of the state average (\$36,214), and 61 percent of the national average (\$44,765). While the 2003-2013 compound annual growth rate of per capita income in Lincoln County was 3.7%, compared to 3.1% for the state, Lincoln County still slipped from 90th in Kentucky to 97th.

**Lincoln County, Kentucky: 2013
CA30 Regional economic profiles**

Total full-time and part-time employment (number of jobs)	7,725
Wage and salary jobs	4,554
Number of proprietors	3,171
Number of nonfarm proprietors 7/	2,084
Number of farm proprietors	1,087
Average earnings per job (dollars)	28,134
Average wages and salaries	30,283
Average nonfarm proprietors' income	13,423

In 2013, there were 4,554 wage and salary jobs in Lincoln County. In addition, there were 3,171 proprietors Jobs are expected to increase by 14.0% between 2012 and 2022. Figure 2 illustrates the top 5 employing industries in Lincoln County, while Attachment B presents 2012 data on employment and wages by industry and Attachment C presents the major industries in Lincoln County in 2014.

In 2012, the employment share of the health care industry in Lincoln County was 13.3%. Health care was the fourth largest industry employer in the county with 561 workers. Also in 2012, the health care industry brought in 8.0% (\$30,223,811) of the county's gross product.

In 2013, there were 8,975 employed residents in Lincoln County and another 1,119 were unemployed, for an unemployment rate of 10.4%. 2,211 or 51.0% of residents live and work within Lincoln County and another 6,250 commute out of the county for employment. Mean travel time to work (commute) is 26.9 minutes. Finally, 2,128 employees commute into the county for employment.

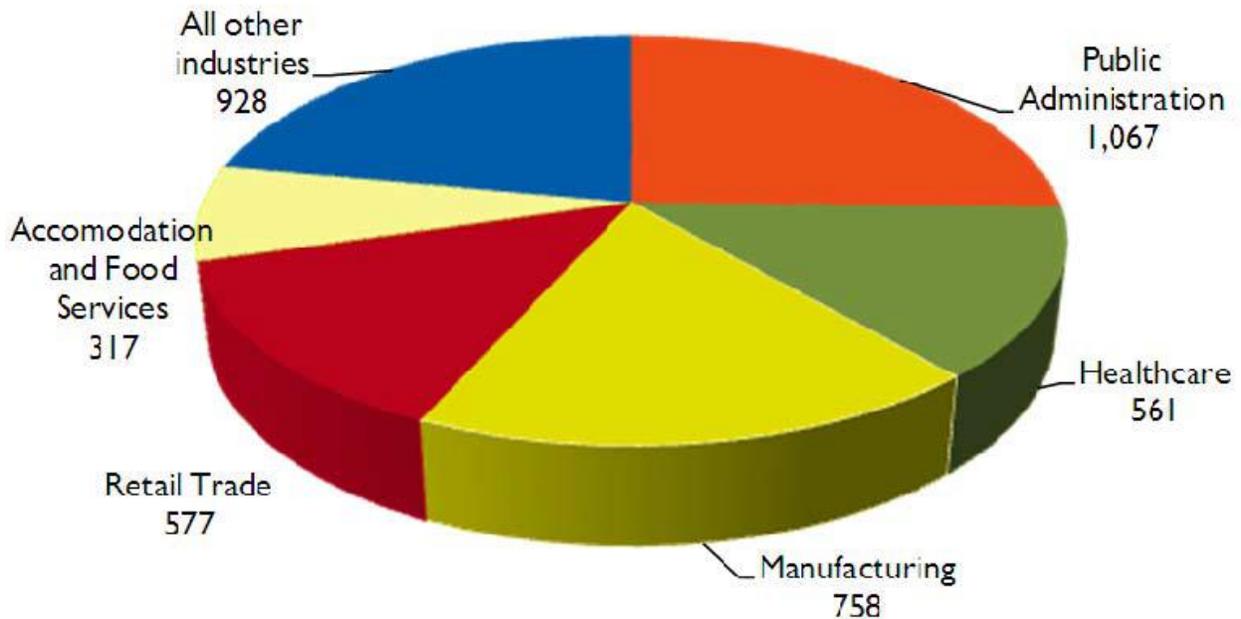
Small businesses with less than 20 employees constitute 97% of all businesses and employ 25% of all employees in Lincoln County. In 2010, there were 86 retail businesses in Lincoln County which accounted for 8.4% of county sales and 9.0% of county jobs. Between 2002 and 2010, there was a 12.5% increase in retail sector jobs and a 3.3% increase in retail sales. The four largest retail subsectors in Lincoln County in 2010 and their share of total retail sales were:

general merchandise stores (28.0%), gasoline stations (22.9%), food and beverages (17.7%) and, building materials/gardening stores (10.1%)

Agriculture is a significant economic sector in Lincoln County. In 2012, over 80% of the land area of Lincoln County was in agricultural production on 1,202 farms. 46% of farm operators stated that farming was their principal occupation, and 25.6% of Lincoln County farms were operated by women.

While we always recognize that farmers sell products to diverse markets, we often forget that to do so, farmers must purchase inputs and contribute to the local economy in other ways (e.g., wages for hired labor, property taxes). \$57,370,000 is the total market value of all agricultural products sold by Lincoln County farms in 2012 which is an average of \$47,729 per farm. Farms in Lincoln County spent \$60,272,000 for production expenses in 2012, which is an average of 50,143 per farm. Moreover, in 2012, 279 Lincoln County farms employed 782 workers with a payroll of \$2,677,000.

Figure 2
Lincoln County Jobs by Kentucky's Top 5 Industries (2012)



Summary of the community surveys

The Lincoln County Futures planning team developed a survey to be distributed to residents through a variety of organizational settings and also on line. Attachment D presents the results of the community surveys completed by 219 residents. The survey covered a variety of topics and provides insight into what residents see as the challenge and opportunities in the county.

What are the characteristics of those who responded to the survey? This was determined by asking them the name of the elementary school they lived nearest to. Respondents came from all around Lincoln County with the largest group (38%) living near Stanford Elementary, 19% each living near Waynesburg and Highland Elementary schools, and the rest living near Crab Orchard, Hustonville and McKinney Elementary schools. 81% have lived in Lincoln County for more than 10 years, 79% of the respondents were women, and 62% have children of school age living with them.

In terms of education, 21% have at least a high school degree or GED, while 25% have attended some college, 10% have an associates degree, 13% have a Bachelor's degree and 28% have a graduate or professional degree. Thus, respondents have significantly higher educational attainment than the average for all of Lincoln County. 71% of participants are employed full-time or self-employed. 82% own their own home and their median income is close to \$48,000. Finally, reflecting the significance of the agricultural economy, 62% self identify as farmers and 34% operate 50-179 acres while 24% have farms of 180 or more acres.

The first set of questions on the survey focused on identifying their level of satisfaction with various aspects of community life. The five aspects of life which received the highest number of "somewhat" and "very" satisfied responses (based on the mean score) are: "Lincoln County as a place to live" (3.1), "Fire protection" (3.1), "Law enforcement" (3.0), "Emergency medical services" (3.0) and "Lincoln County as a place to raise children" (3.0). In other words, residents are especially satisfied with Lincoln County as a place for their families to live and the quality of protective services. It is important to note that given the extensive list of aspect of life to evaluate, the lowest mean was 2.1 (access to safe walking trails). This means that these respondents feel at least a limited amount of satisfaction with most aspects of life in Lincoln County.

In response to the question, "How proud are you to say that you are from Lincoln County?" 58% stated that they were "somewhat proud" and another 10% stated they were "very proud." Furthermore, the respondents act on their commitment to Lincoln County by volunteering. 22% of the participants reported volunteering over 10 hours a month in community service, and another 22% volunteer between 6 and 10 hours a month. The schools, voluntary organizations, churches and other groups in Lincoln County benefit from this significant level of volunteerism. Indeed, Volunteering in America (<http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/KY>) reports that in 2013, 24% of Kentucky residents volunteer any time, so the voluntarism rate in Lincoln County is higher than the state as a whole. The Independent Sector estimates the value of a volunteer hour in Kentucky is \$19.68 (2013) (http://independentsector.org/volunteer_time) .

Another part of the survey explored the shopping patterns of respondents. When asked where they buy the majority of a set of goods and services (1=Lincoln County, 2=Richmond, 3=Danville, 4=Somerset, 5=Lexington, 6=On-line), the two most commonly purchased in Lincoln County are gasoline and prescriptions (73%) which typically are items that one buys close to home. Danville is the location where a large number of residents purchase goods and services. 59% buy hardware and building supplies in Danville; 53% use restaurants in Danville; 40 to 43% of respondents purchase groceries, furniture and household appliances, and farm machinery in Danville; while 40 to 42% find their doctor, dentist and hospital services in Danville. Lexington is where respondents go when they want to purchase jewelry (37.7%), clothing (36.8%), and sporting goods (35.9%). 20-24% of respondents say they purchase farm machinery, furniture and household appliances or arts and crafts as well as sewing supplies and fabrics in Somerset. Very few respondents report shopping in Richmond and on-line shopping is significant only for books, cds and electronics (26%).

Respondents were then asked what type of amenities or activities would bring them back to downtown Stanford. 81% state they would be very likely to come downtown for a franchise sit-down restaurant, 75% would come for a grocery store, 69% for a café or locally-owned restaurant, 67% for a clothing store, 68% for a movie theater, and 60% for a household goods store. Together, the responses to these sets of questions indicate new business opportunities for entrepreneurs in Lincoln County. Furthermore, additional market research could determine whether Stanford would be an appropriate location for a franchise restaurant.

Participants see few significant community problems. When asked to what extent a list of issues were a problem, the only two identified by half or more of the respondents as "very much a problem" were drug use (52%) and "the availability of jobs" (51%). Between 20 and 30% identified "retention of existing businesses" (29.3%), "support for local businesses" (22.6%), and "lack of pride in the community" (21.5%) as very significant problems. When you evaluate the responses to this set of questions, it is apparent that Lincoln County provides a more than satisfactory and comfortable place for families to build the kind of life they desire.

Another set of questions focused on factors influencing decisions on the purchase of foods. When asked how important a list of characteristics are in deciding what foods to purchase, the following were said to "somewhat" or "very" important: freshness, cost, nutritious or healthy, convenience, and locally produced or grown. Moreover, 80% or more "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the following statements:

Locally grown food is healthier than food shipped in from elsewhere.

Given the choice, I would prefer to buy locally grown food.

It is easy to find locally grown produce in this area during the growing season.

Together, these responses suggest that there is a consumer demand for a source of locally grown foods that is not necessarily being satisfied by current choices. There is also an opportunity for local farmers to produce for this market year round, especially if they collaborate to assure a diversity of fresh goods.

The next section of the survey explored respondents' views on the different meanings of health. First, they were asked to identify "the three most important factors for a "healthy community...In other words, what factors most improve the quality of life in a community?" The top 3 factors are: "Good jobs and healthy economy" (55%); "Good place to raise children" (48%); and "Good schools" (47%). Respondents were then asked to identify "the three most important "health problems" in our community...In other words, which of these problems have the greatest impact on overall community health?" Here, there was overall agreement (71%) on one key problem, "drug addiction." The next two problems were "obesity" (36%) and "child abuse and neglect" (32%).

Participants then considered "the three most important "risky behaviors" in our community...In other words, which of these behaviors have the greatest impact on overall community health?" Again, the most important risky behavior by far is "drug abuse" (74%), followed by "alcohol abuse" (44%) and "tobacco use" (34%). Putting these assessments together into two summary evaluations of how they would rate Lincoln County as a "Healthy Community" and their own "personal" health shows an interesting contradiction. 67% rate Lincoln County as an "unhealthy" community and yet 66% state they are personally "healthy."

The final section of the survey explored how to improve the level of residents' access to community information. When asked how frequently they would use different types of information sources "if Lincoln County local governments used them to communicate with residents," Facebook would attract 57% "very frequently." 41.8% indicated that they would very frequently use an automatic call system. Yet, 62% say that they have a cell phone only and 34% have both a cell phone and a landline at home. If the county is interested in establishing an alert system an automatic call system would cover the community most effectively.

Summary of the teen surveys

In the fall of 2014, the Lincoln County public schools distributed a survey (see Attachment E for the survey results for 197 teens) to juniors and seniors in the high school. The survey questions reflect a collaboration between the faculty at the high school and the members of the Lincoln County Tomorrow planning committee.

What are the characteristics of the students who responded to this survey? More than 9 in 10 are age 17 and older. Nearly two thirds (65%) have lived in Lincoln County their entire life and 18% have lived in the community for 6-10 years. The teen respondents are evenly split between those with one or both parents born in Lincoln County and those whose parents were born elsewhere. 52% of those responding were males and 30% of the teens participating live in single parent households. Between a quarter and a third of the teens indicated they were involved in some type of organized activity from school clubs (37.9%) to school sports (35.4%) to church youth groups (32.3%) to volunteer activities (24.1%). Nearly 3 in 10 of the teens reported having a part-time job.

The survey begins by asking teens their view on life in Lincoln County. 70% and more of the teen respondents stated that they agree or strongly agree with the following statements:

There are people in the community who are proud of me when I do something well (76.4%).

There are people in this community who encourage me to do my best (72.7%).

I feel safe in this community (71.4%)

There are people in this community other than my family who really care about me (71.2%).

These responses indicate that teens feel strongly supported by the community and that this is a safe community. This interpretation is reinforced by the questions that the responding teens disagreed or strongly disagreed with. For example, three quarters of the teens disagreed with the statement "I don't feel welcome at local businesses (75.2%)", and two thirds disagreed with the statement "If I am upset about something personal, there is no one in this community to whom I can turn (67.3%)."

On the other hand, nearly two thirds of the teen respondents disagree or strongly disagreed with the statement "There are plenty of things to do in my free time here (65.1%)." When asked, what they consider the greatest challenges for youth in Lincoln County this sentiment is reinforced by their top two responses:

No places for youth to simply hang out and feel safe, (52.3%).

Lack of places to play music, perform or do more creative activities (39.5%).

The next two most significant challenges these teen identified are:

Underage drug and/or alcohol use/partying (38.5%).
Limited or no part-time employment opportunities (33.8%).

From a general perspective, the responses to these statements about the characteristics of Lincoln County reflect a very positive view of life and opportunities in this community. The only cloud on this very sunny assessment is the lack of entertainment and things for youth to do which may be related to the concern about underage drug and alcohol use by youth.

The second part of the survey asked teens their view on school life. 84% indicate that they plan on "going to college or a technical school" when they graduate. 81% say they "have lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities," and 78% agree or strongly agree that "there are lots of chances for students in my school to get involved in sports, clubs and other school activities outside of class." 72% state that "most of the time, I try to do my best work in school, and 70% agree or strongly agree that "there are lots of chances for students in my school to talk with a teacher one-on-one." These responses indicate a very positive view on the support they receive at school as well as the opportunities they have and this leads to a very high expectation of post-graduate education or training.

On the other hand, more than 6 in ten of the students "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement "The school lets my parents know when I have done something well," while more than half (55.8%) gave the same responses to "In my school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules." Finally just over half (51%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The schoolwork I am assigned is meaningful and important." These responses suggest that students would like the schools to provide more information to their parents on the quality of their work and to have more opportunities to shape their classroom experience.

Students were also asked about their experience with bullying in school. First, 74% say they "feel safe at my school," and this general statement seems to be reinforced by their accounting of the frequency of different forms of bullying they have experienced at school. Nearly 47% say that once or more others have "told lies or spread false rumors about" them, 29% say others have called them "mean names, made fun of them, or teased them in a hurtful way," and 26% say that others have "left them out of things on purpose, excluded them from their group of friends, or completely ignored them."

How serious is this incidence of bullying? 2014 national data shows that 37% of students report being bullied at school. More specifically, 10% have had rumors or gossip spread about them and 5% have been excluded from activities they wanted to be involved in. In addition, 2 in 3 victims report being bullied once or twice during the school year; 1 in 5 were bullied once or twice a month and 1 in 10 report being bullied daily or several times a week (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/cyber-bullying-statistics/>). So, while three quarters of students say they feel "safe" in school, the reported levels of bullying are actually higher than reported nationally.

Summary of the Town Hall Forums

In the fall of 2014, four town hall meetings were held in each of the major communities (Standford, Waynesburg, Hustonville, Crab Orchard) in Lincoln County. Nearly 50 persons participated in these discussions and all the comments gathered through these meetings are in Attachment F. The questions that guided the discussions and the key themes associated with each is presented next.

What did the first settlers need to establish a successful community of "firsts"? Which of these characteristics are missing today in this community?

The purpose of this question is to encourage forum participants to focus on the long history of Lincoln County and the resilience of those who built it. Participants identified the "rich land with abundant resources" as the economic foundation for Lincoln County's development that remains a significant opportunity today. They also noted a "vision" for a better life that the settlers shared and the "strong work ethic" that enabled them to act on their vision. Finally, participants highlighted the "sense of community" that led the settlers to work together to accomplish their shared vision.

What are the challenges facing Lincoln County today?

In discussing the challenges that Lincoln County faces today, participants noted the absence of some of these important qualities today. "We don't have a shared vision of what Lincoln County can be so we don't have a commitment to work together." This lack of a shared vision means that many "fear change and how it would affect the community." If you have no vision for what you want your community to become, then any change is threatening. Participants also commented on the "lack of a strong work ethic among everyone" which makes focused change difficult. Finally, the "prevalence of substance abuse" combined with "population loss" are significant challenges that make moving forward more difficult.

What do you like about Lincoln County?

The participants had a high degree of consensus in their replies to this question. "The small town feel" remains even though other things have changed. "Lincoln County has grown but held on to its small town integrity," and this includes the sense of connection and trust that defines how people interact within the county. Another participant said "You feel a part of something special in Lincoln County," and from the perspective of those who live here, Lincoln County is the kind of place they choose to live in.

Imagine it is 10 years from now. What is your vision for Lincoln County? What do you want this community to have? What do you want people to be able to do here? What do you want this community to be to other people?

Participants dream of a Lincoln County "where people can live a satisfying and productive life" because it continues "to be a place with a strong sense of community." Lincoln County will also be "a tourism destination based on our diversity of natural and cultural resources" and have "attractive and interesting downtowns where people can sit at sidewalk cafes and have a glass of wine or beer."

Lincoln County will be a place where people see "the many economic opportunities...waiting for someone to take advantage of them," and create a "mix of new job opportunities" including those that take advantage of the agricultural wealth of Lincoln County. There will be "an improved infrastructure" so that Lincoln County can support new residential and business growth. Finally, Lincoln County will have "a great educational system that prepares youth for jobs in the future," as well as "a broad variety of critical social services" for those with personal challenges.

The final question "What are some community development projects that could move you toward the future you desire?" produced a set of recommendations that became the foundation for the strategic plan.

Summary of key perspectives on Lincoln County

The evidence gathered from these different sources reinforce the sense of Lincoln County as a great place to live and raise a family. Adult respondents report a high level of satisfaction with most aspects of life in Lincoln County. Youth confirm this conclusion as they feel they live in a community that provides many kinds of support from neighbors as well as their school. Adults identified good jobs and healthy economy, good schools, and a good place to raise children as the characteristics of a healthy community.

But there are concerns related to particular aspects of community life. The lack of a diversity of well-paying jobs within the community means that many residents must commute to other communities for employment. The commute reduces the time they have to spend with their families or be involved as a volunteer with the community. Youth also express a concern with the availability of professional jobs because this may determine whether they have an opportunity to return to Lincoln after they complete their education.

But the time spent in other communities for work typically means that consumer dollars are spent elsewhere, and this is confirmed by the identification of where respondents buy particular goods and services. Whether because of distance or retail choices, Danville is where a significant number of respondents purchase many goods and services.

There is a strong interest in purchasing local foods and 69% say they would come to downtown Stanford to dine at a locally owned restaurant that served local foods. But three quarters also would come downtown to shop at a grocery store and 8 in 10 would come for a franchise restaurant.

Both adults and youth identify drug and alcohol abuse as significant challenges for the community. To this youth would add the lack of things to do and places to simply gather and hang out. In the forums, several adults also spoke to the need to create more diversity in the after-school activities and recreational choices for youth and families.

A vision and plan for the future

When adult respondents answered the question about their hopes for the future they talked about a Lincoln County with a strong sense of community where people take care of each other. It will be a place where families can live a satisfying and productive life and tourists visit for a variety of natural resource based experiences. It also will be a place with a diversity of jobs and choices for shopping and services.

Based on the evidence gathered, the following vision statement guides the community plan:

*In 10 years, Lincoln County will be a community where:
Families find economic opportunities and a quality educational system that prepares youth to be productive citizen-leaders;
Residents have retail choices and diverse recreational opportunities;*

*Visitors are attracted by the strong agricultural and natural resource-based activities available; and
Others recognize the county as a leader in providing essential social and human services to all residents within the county.*

From this vision, a community plan was developed and reviewed by the Futures Committee (see Attachment F). Lincoln County Futures will begin implementing this plan in the spring of 2015 by hosting the first annual spring festival. This will be an event designed to bring families together for a day of fun celebrating the return of spring. In addition, local nonprofits and civic organizations can highlight volunteer opportunities and the diversity of services available.

Summary

Over 12 months, the Lincoln County Futures Committee has worked hard to engage the larger community in a visioning and planning process that would chart the path to a better tomorrow. As the specific strategic actions are implemented over the next 5 years, Lincoln County will move toward greater economic opportunities, a more innovative educational system and new recreational/entertainment choices for families and youth. The downtowns will have a new vitality as new businesses attract more residents and visitors. Lincoln County will also be a destination for tourists seeking diverse outdoor experiences.

This is the future residents say they hope will occur and believe can happen. Lincoln County has the natural, human and organizational assets that can enable this future to happen. But it will take cooperation among the local governments and a strong sense of community that leads people to work together for their shared vision. Whether these choices actually happen will be up to the community. Community change and improvement is a choice, and this effort demonstrates that Lincoln County residents and government officials have decided to shape the future they know is possible.