

Ryan F. Quarles  
Commissioner



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## Kentucky Department of Agriculture

March 26, 2021

Dear County Agriculture Development Council Members and agricultural leaders,

Growing up on my dad's tobacco and cattle farm, I saw firsthand how important tobacco was to Kentucky's economy. When I was a kid, nearly every farm family had a little bit of tobacco. It was a valuable crop that helped me not only pay for my first vehicle, but also helped me pay my way through college. That story is not unique; it's the same one shared by many of you.

When the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement was reached in the late 1990s, Kentucky had tens of thousands of tobacco farms. Now there are fewer than 3,000. In those earlier days, a group of farmers and government leaders saw an opportunity to take half of the funds from the Master Settlement Agreement and wisely invest them into the future of Kentucky agriculture. Since that time, KADF has done incredibly transformative work and has changed Kentucky agriculture for the better. I can tell you that I have seen these changes first hand, as I've visited countless farms across the state in my five years as Commissioner.

As you have likely heard by now, the General Assembly made a policy change two weeks ago and passed Senator Paul Hornback's Senate Bill 3, which moves the administration of the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund from the Governor's Office to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. The new name of the office will be the Kentucky Office of Agricultural Policy.

I am a big believer in the idea that it's better to get it right than to get it done fast. That's why in the first two weeks since Senate Bill 3 became law, I have been meeting regularly with KADF staff to listen to their ideas about how things can be improved and how we can stand on the shoulders of the agricultural giants who envisioned this fund years ago. As the Commissioner of Agriculture, a Kentucky farm kid, and someone who has seen what the KADF has done over the years, I want to make a promise to you: we are going to keep up the great tradition of excellence with the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board and the Kentucky Agricultural Finance Corporation. However, this is also a great opportunity to kick the tires and see what can be done better going forward.

I understand that many folks have questions about this process (including me) and we are working quickly to develop answers as the transition to the Department of Agriculture progresses. For sure, this change is not going to happen overnight. In the meantime, please know that it is business as usual at the Kentucky Ag Development Board and the Ag Finance Board. My office is fully committed to ensuring that these changes are done in a way that does not disrupt the function of the boards, the regularly scheduled meetings, or any of the services that staff have provided so well over the past decades. We plan to do all of this in a nonpartisan way, just like Kentucky agriculture expects us to.

With hundreds of millions of dollars invested over the lifetime of the fund, Kentucky agriculture has been transformed and it's important we continue to work together to make life better for Kentucky's farm families. I look forward to continue working with you in our shared mission to further the good work of this fund and build on the record of success that has been achieved for the Commonwealth.

I also encourage you to share this letter with those you think may be interested in learning more about this transition. Should you have any questions about the transition or the next steps, please do not hesitate to reach out to my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Quarles".

Dr. Ryan F. Quarles  
Commissioner of Agriculture

