

# 2026 legislative session created investments, opportunities for agriculture industry

Agriculture Commissioner: 'Agriculture is economic growth'

Submitted by the  
Kentucky Department of  
Agriculture

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 13, 2026) – The 2026 Kentucky legislative session delivered one of the most impactful and forward-looking outcomes for agriculture in recent history, securing major investments, expanding opportunities for farmers, and strengthening the future of the Commonwealth's farming industry.

"Agriculture is economic growth. With nearly 70,000 farms, agriculture has a nearly \$50 billion impact on Kentucky," Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell said. "This was one of the strongest legislative sessions for Kentucky agriculture we've seen in years. The support our legislators showed for our farm families and rural communities was tremendous, and this budget positions us for long-term growth, innovation, and success across the Commonwealth."

During the 2026 legislative session, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) was allocated \$20.9 million in General Fund dollars for Fiscal Year 2026 and \$22.9 million for Fiscal Year 2027. The budget reflects a continued commitment to programs that strengthen agriculture at every level and support Kentucky communities, including:

- \$886,500 in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$819,300 in Fiscal Year 2027 for the Raising Hope Initiative, addressing rural mental health, suicide prevention, and farm safety;

- \$886,500 in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$819,300 in Fiscal Year 2027 for the Farms to Food Banks program, connecting Kentucky farmers with food banks to fight food insecurity; and

- \$720,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$697,500 in Fiscal Year 2027 for County Fair Grants, supporting improvements to local fair facilities and strengthening community agriculture traditions.

In addition to these investments, legislators appropriated \$5 million annually from the Budget Reserve Trust Fund for the Kentucky Agricultural Economic Development Board (KAEDB). This funding represents a historic step forward — marking only the second time general fund dollars have been dedicated to agricultural development outside of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement.

The KAEDB plays a critical role in driving agricultural innovation, expanding economic opportunities, and supporting long-term growth across Kentucky's rural communities. Through strategic investments, the board is helping position Kentucky agriculture for the future.

Further strengthening the industry, \$35.4 million in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$32.7 million in Fiscal Year 2027 from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement were allocated to the Agricultural Development

Fund. These funds support grants, incentives, and low-interest loans through the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board and the Kentucky Agricultural Finance Corporation, helping farmers modernize operations, diversify, and remain competitive.

The General Assembly also advanced key policies to expand markets and improve quality of life for Kentuckians.

Two major legislative wins centered on the connection between agriculture and health:

- Senate Bill 5 (SB5) creates new opportunities for Kentucky farmers by making it easier for schools to purchase Kentucky-grown products. The bill allows school districts participating in USDA Child Nutrition programs greater flexibility in purchasing local food — helping keep Kentucky food on Kentucky trays while supporting local producers.

- Senate Joint Resolution 23 (SJR 23) declares Kentucky a Food is Medicine state, reinforcing the role of agriculture in improving public health. The resolu-

tion builds on the partnership between KDA and the Kentucky Hospital Association to expand access to nutritious, locally grown foods through initiatives such as medically tailored meals, produce prescriptions, and community-based food programs.

The resolution also directs the Personnel Cabinet to incorporate Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs into state employee wellness benefits — creating new markets for farmers while improving access to fresh food.

Additional legislative achievements further strengthened Kentucky agriculture:

- Senate Bill 30 supports Kentucky's dairy industry by allowing milk haulers to operate more efficiently, increasing allowable weights while maintaining safety standards — reducing costs and improving logistics for dairy producers.

- House Bill 869 positions Kentucky as a leader in the emerging alternative aviation fuel industry by establishing a nonrefund-

able tax credit for producers. This forward-looking policy creates new markets for agricultural products, attracts investment, and strengthens the state's role in a growing energy sector.

Senate Bill 155 enhances animal health protections by giving the Commissioner of Agriculture, in consultation with the State Veterinarian, the authority to declare animal health emergencies — ensuring swift action to protect livestock, poultry, and the broader agricultural industry.

House Bill 56 modernizes regulatory processes by updating inspection requirements and removing outdated statutes, allowing KDA to operate more efficiently and better serve Kentucky producers.

"This session was about more than funding — it was about building momentum for Kentucky agriculture," Commissioner Shell said. "We're creating new markets, investing in our farmers, strengthening rural communities, and ensuring agriculture continues to lead our economy for generations to come."

## Shawnee State University Foundation establishes the Cheryl Bramlette Memorial Scholarship

Endowed award honors Portsmouth family legacy and expands access to early childhood education

Submitted by Jeremy  
Reed

Director of Communications

PORTSMOUTH, Ohio – Shawnee State University Foundation has established the Cheryl Bramlette Memorial Scholarship, an endowed award designed to support students pursuing degrees in early childhood education through the university's School of Education. The scholarship will primarily benefit graduates of Portsmouth High School, with eligibility potential extended to students from surrounding counties and other education programs.

Funded by SSU alumna Sarah Bramlette, the scholarship honors the memory of her sister, Cheryl Bramlette, and their mother, Sharon Bramlette, while creating new opportunities for local students to access

higher education.

"Shawnee State was never just a university to us," Bramlette said. "It was part of our neighborhood and our lives. I don't know where I would be if I didn't have the opportunity to go to college in my backyard. That is exactly what this scholarship is meant to give someone else."

The Bramlette family's connection to Shawnee State spans generations and is deeply rooted in Portsmouth, where they grew up just blocks from campus. As children, Sarah and her siblings attended summer enrichment programs at the university, often walking there from their home on Fifth Street. The family also used the university's dental hygiene clinic for routine care, and their mother, Sharon, took night classes while raising her children. Several

of Sarah's siblings still live in the Portsmouth area.

Cheryl Bramlette enrolled at Shawnee State to pursue a degree in early childhood education. After being diagnosed with aplastic anemia in high school, she balanced her studies with periods of home instruction and part-time enrollment. She died in 1992 during her second year at the university at age of 20. During her time in school, she served as captain of the flag corps, played volleyball, and was active in her church choir.

Following Cheryl's death, Sharon Bramlette returned to Shawnee State, earning both an Associate Degree in Business Administration and an Associate Degree in Nursing — the latter just weeks before her 50th birthday. She went on to work as a registered

nurse at Southern Ohio Medical Center. Sharon Bramlette died in 2022, having long hoped to establish a scholarship in Cheryl's name.

"My mom always wanted this, and Cheryl

never got to finish what she started," Bramlette said. "Establishing this scholarship is my way of honoring both of them, making sure Cheryl's memory lives on and that my mother's wish is fulfilled."

For more information or to discuss establishing your own scholarship, contact the Shawnee State University Foundation at (740) 351-3284 or visit [givetossu.com](http://givetossu.com).

## Early voting for Kentucky primary elections begins Thursday

Mckenna Horsley  
Kentucky Lantern

Kentucky voters can start voting early Thursday morning across the state.

Formally called "no-excuse in-person absentee voting," registered voters have Thursday, Friday and Saturday to vote ahead of the primary Election Day, which is Tuesday. It differs from absentee voting, where voters can cast ballots in-person or by mail if they have an excuse recognized under state law.

Early voting polling locations and hours vary by county. To find local information, visit the State Board of Elections website. Also listed are Election Day polling locations and drop box locations for returning mail absentee ballots.

The deadline to

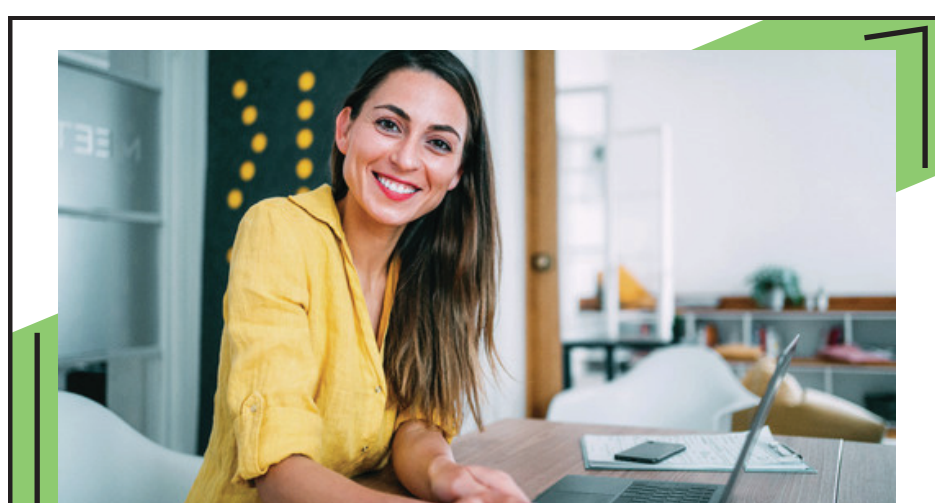
request an absentee ballot has passed, but they must be returned to a voter's local county clerk's office by the time polls close Tuesday, which is 6 p.m. local time.

Voters have several races to decide, including Democratic and Republican nominees for U.S. Senate and the U.S. House. Independent voters may also cast ballots in some local races. To view a sample ballot, visit the Secretary of State's website.

About 17,000 of the roughly 32,000 requested mail-in absentee ballots — or 54.12% — had been returned to county clerk's offices as of Tuesday, the State Board of Elections' turnout data said. For in-person excused voting, nearly 5,000 Kentuckians participated.

To learn more about candidates in the upcoming primary election, visit the Kentucky Lantern voter guide.

<https://www.kentuckylantern.com>



### THE PEOPLE'S DEFENDER IS SEEKING A REPORTER TO JOIN OUR TEAM!

If you are passionate about small-town, community journalism, and reside in the Adams County area, you may be the candidate we are looking for! At Champion Media, our reporters are instrumental in writing stories for both news and features. Reporters also play a key role with special projects in conjunction with sister publications in nearby communities. Photography and social media skills are a plus.

Successful candidates should possess excellent writing, grammar and communications skills. We're looking for a team player that has a strong work ethic and takes pride in producing outstanding community news coverage. This is a part-time position working approximately 30 hours per week.

If you are interested in gaining outstanding work experience as a small-town newspaper reporter, send cover letter, resume and at least three references to Publisher Karen Brown at [kbrown@cnpapers.com](mailto:kbrown@cnpapers.com)

THE PEOPLE'S  
DEFENDER

206 N Pleasant St., West Union  
937.544.2391



Make your voice heard. Shape the future of our Commonwealth.



Primary Election

★ Tuesday, ★  
May 19, 2026

Polls open 6am until 6pm.

Mason County residents Early voting May  
14th-May 16th 8:30am-4:30pm at the  
Mason County Public Library

Mason County voting locations are:

- Mason County Public Library – 218 E 3rd St. Maysville
- Mason County Fieldhouse – 1320 US 68, Maysville (must enter and exit closest to US Bank and park on top level)
- Highland Christian Church – 4037 KY 10, Maysville
- Mays Lick Fire Hall – 5036 Saltlake Circle, Mays Lick
- Orangeburg Community Center/Fire Hall – 8002 Day Pike, Maysville