



DOUG THOMAS '81 BELIEVES AGRICULTURE CAN BE THE BIGGEST PLAYER IN A PERMANENT, MULTIFACETED PLAN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR KENTUCKY. THOMAS RECENTLY RETURNED WITH HIS FAMILY TO FARMING IN KENTUCKY AFTER A JOB OUT OF STATE IN FARM BROADCASTING.



agriculture the centerpiece of Kentucky's development effort.

"We can't wait for a federal program to come down the pike to bring economic prosperity to Kentucky. We've waited too long and federal programs have very often been geared toward urban centers, where the problems of economic development are most visible but not necessarily any more pervasive," Little said.

"And we can't continue to chase smokestacks that make us mort-

gage our future to attract

low-paying jobs. We've got to develop our future on a renewable resource-based industry — agriculture," he said.

Little, along with Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation President Bill Sprague and Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture Ed Logsdon, presented the concept to a special meeting of the state's agricultural leadership a year and half ago.

The initial idea of using agriculture as a vehicle for economic development met with enthusiastic support from 150 of the state's agricultural leaders. Fourteen Kentucky commodity groups met throughout the remainder of 1992 to establish targets for their commodities and to hammer out details of accomplishing those goals.

The commodity groups developed a plan to increase farm gate receipts by \$2 billion annually by the turn of the century — an increase from the current \$3 billion level. Economists estimate that such an increase will create 10,000 new full-time jobs directly in farm activities and another 20,000 jobs in secondary and tertiary indus-

tries in the state.

"Clearly, implementation of the agriculture leadership's plan will provide economic stimulation to both our rural and urban areas and provide jobs to all Kentucky's residents. With this plan, agriculture can be Kentucky's growth machine for the '90s," Little said.

Little noted that agriculture has been the backbone of the state's economy and continues to be the most potent force for long-term economic progress.

"If we want Kentucky to develop economically, we must make agriculture the centerpiece of our development efforts," he said.

"Kentucky is truly blessed with an outstanding climate and magnificent soils. Our waterways and highway system, coupled with our close proximity to half of the nation's population, make our state ideal for agricultural growth. In addition, a ready and eager labor supply makes agriculture a natural for economic development."

Doug Thomas, a hog farmer near Elizabethtown, is enthusiastic about the initiative.

"We've got to take care of our future," Thomas said. "Agriculture can be the biggest player in economic development. Too often, community leaders celebrate their successes if they can bring a factory with low paying, low skilled employment into the community. But often, these low paying jobs evaporate in a few years when the factory either shuts down or moves someplace else.

"Agriculture is permanent. Agriculture is multifaceted and can provide employment both on and off the farm, if we develop the right kind of infrastructure."

Thomas, who is a University of Kentucky College of Agriculture graduate (1981), like many others his age left the farm right after graduating from college. Thomas took a job out of state in farm broadcasting, but he returned to Rineyville two years ago to raise his family.

"My twin girls are now six months