Chapter 72
The Bluegrass of Kentucky: An Engineered Image of a Gracious Life

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72.1 Introduction

The Bluegrass region of Kentucky evokes a strong image, locally, nationally and even internationally; an image which conveys a bucolic yet stately beauty, verdant but manicured, bounteous and productive with clear evidence of ample leisure. This region appears historically to have been able to capture the imagination. People respond to what designers call a "sense of place" or identity, where elements of the landscape come together in a unique and specific suite that tells the viewer where he/she is in the world. The Bluegrass is a signature region, which while it comprises less than a fifth of the area of Kentucky, lends its name to the "Bluegrass State." The beauty of this pastoral landscape belies the amount of effort, in economic and social capital, by which it has been created and its image maintained. This essay seeks to explore the engineering, broadly construed, of the Bluegrass as an amenity landscape, from its early colonization and exploitation to modern times.

Initially extolled to settlers for its fertile and productive soil, the Bluegrass became known less for its general agriculture than for the breeding and racing of thoroughbred, standardbred and other horse breeds. This hybrid industry is as much a part of the entertainment or leisure sector as the agricultural one. The celebrity and excitement of racing attracted wealthy industrialists and financiers of the late 19th century who brought substantial capital to the Bluegrass, investing both in the lavish estates, which displayed their wealth and status, and the most modern and science-based facilities for the horses. The excitement of the races, the cachet of the champion horses and the opulence of the farms began to generate significant tourist traffic. Tourism development proceeded hand in hand with business recruitment and suburban expansion, until, by the 1970s, growth began to threaten the landscape with which the region was being promoted to both visitors and businesses.

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The Bluegrass is an area under contention, where economic growth and restructuring are changing the landscape. The farmland which is the "factory floor"[1] for the internationally famous thoroughbred industry is facing increasing development pressure. Many would argue that the beauty of the Bluegrass increases the value of the region for tourism and attracts the businesses and workers of the "creative class" (Florida, 2002) which are central to a post-industrial "knowledge economy." They point out the substantial economic contributions equine operations and support services make locally and statewide, but there is also an imperative to recruit new industry. In the last decade, the influence of tobacco farming has waned and even while some have been calling for farmland preservation and local food production, home building has accelerated.

"The Bluegrass" evokes images of smooth rolling green pastures surrounded by plank fences; narrow country lanes arched over by stately trees and lined with dry laid stone walls; black tobacco barns astride low ridges, and of course, spindly legged colts cavorting in the spring sunshine. But there are also brick "McMansions" on 5 or 10 acre (2.0–6.0 ha) lots carving up former farms, rows of vinyl sided suburban homes springing up at the edges of Lexington, Georgetown, Paris and other nearby regional communities, and street names memorializing race horses which had once lived and trained there (Fig. 72.1). On close inspection, there are many definitions of the region; physiographic, economic, political, social, and visual. The Bluegrass is not, after all, a natural pre-given category, but an image which has been created and reinforced over time, as the underlying landscape continues to change.

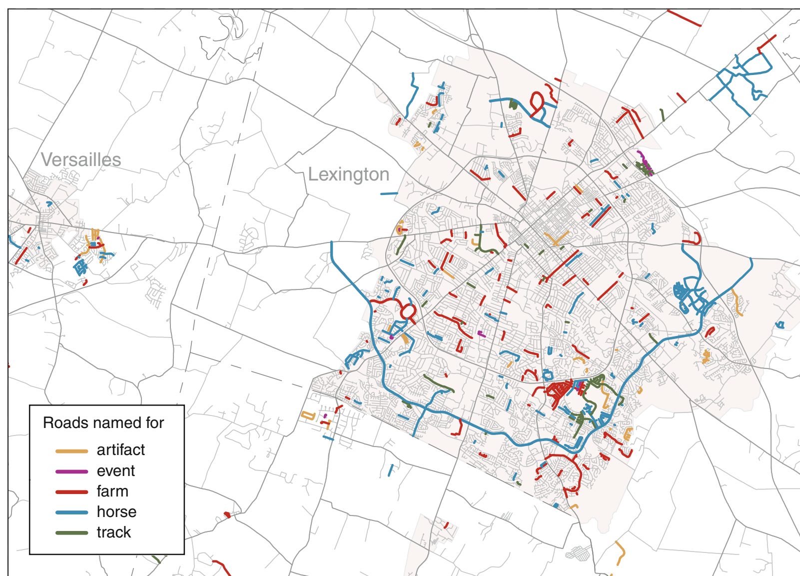

Fig. 72.1 Streets with equine themed names

72.2 Background and History

72.2.1 Geology

The Bluegrass was evident as a physiographically distinct place to the first whites who crossed the rugged Cumberland plateau and entered the center of what is now Kentucky, different in topography, soil and vegetation from the areas they had come through. The geology of Kentucky creates several regions (Fig. 72.2) that are a result of the warping of the ancient sea bed millions of years ago and the differential weathering of the various layers thus exposed. A layer of Ordovician aged limestone, pushed up in a formation called the Cincinnati Arch, generated the deep soil and gently rolling topography of the Inner Bluegrass region. The high phosphorous content of the parent rock makes this area very fertile. Various early accounts of central Kentucky mention timbered areas of Black Walnut, Black Cherry, Burr Oak and Honey Locust, as well as tree-studded savannahs, meadows and extensive canebrake thickets. “Where no cane grows there is abundance of wild-rye, clover, and buffalo grass, covering vast tracts of country, and affording excellent food for cattle” (Filson, 1784: 24). Surrounding the heart of the Bluegrass are rings of younger geologic layers. A band of shale and limestone layers, known as the Eden Shale, is less fertile and has eroded into steep hills. This, in turn, is surrounded by the limestone of the Outer Bluegrass (Watkins & O’Dell, 1994).

72.2.2 Which Bluegrass?

The landscape patterns of farms and fences identified as Bluegrass are not always coincident with its geologic underpinning, extending beyond it in some directions or stopping shy of the geologic edges in others (Wilson, 1941). This indicates that the Bluegrass is a cultural landscape, influenced by transportation routes, social

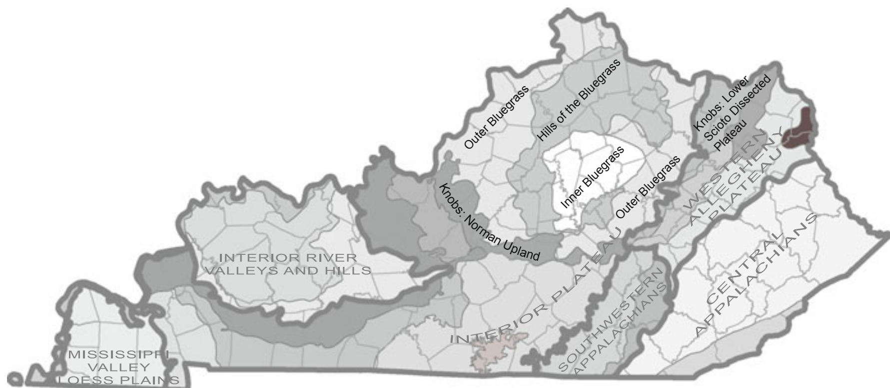

Fig. 72.2 Ecological regions of Kentucky. (Source: Woods et al., 2002)

connections, business opportunities and new technologies or fashions. Political and economic definitions are changing over time. Fayette and the surrounding six counties comprise the most taken-for-granted definition of the Bluegrass. The Lexington-Fayette Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) now consists of the merged city-county of Lexington-Fayette and five of the surrounding counties. Various interest groups define an expanded area according to their focus and frame of reference (Fig. 72.3), all using political (county) boundaries in so doing.

72.2.3 Frontier Days

By the middle of the eighteenth century there was little unclaimed land in the original colonies on which new immigrants, former indentured servants or sons and daughters of the original colonists could settle. The British decreed in 1763 that no one could explore or settle west of the Appalachian mountains, ostensibly to avoid conflict with the Native Americans. But land-hungry colonists continued to venture west. Many were speculators, seeking fortunes through land claims. The Transylvania Company, formed in 1774 and headed by Judge Henderson from North Carolina, “purchased” an immense swath of land from the Indians at Sycamore Shoals, Tennessee, in 1775. They hired Daniel Boone to blaze a trail across the Cumberland Plateau and lead clients to their lands just south of the Kentucky River. This is the edge of what is now called the Bluegrass. Though the Virginia legislature later invalidated the sale and stripped the company of title, the reports and letters of these speculators and early settlers, perhaps exaggerating the bounty of the land, created much enthusiasm for settlement.

Virginia granted and sold large tracts after the Revolutionary War, feeding a steady stream of settlers to the county of Kentucky. Some were homesteaders who received title after proof of “improvement” of the land but many were relatively wealthy planters and merchants, from Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Tales of the fertile region lured plantation owners who had exhausted the Piedmont soils, or their sons seeking their own estates in the west. This was an elite who not only brought with them the hope of developing new landed estates, but a manner and style with aristocratic ambitions.

72.2.4 Early Development

Lexington was established in 1779 as a stockade near the headwaters of the middle fork of Elkhorn Creek, on a site with numerous fresh water springs. Its proximity to several frontier trails helped it quickly grow into a major trade center, supported by surrounding farmland. Hemp, cattle, horses, tobacco and corn were all part of the agricultural mix. Gentlemen farmers had arrived with interests in stock breeding and sporting pursuits, which manifested in the passion for horse racing. By 1805 the *Kentucky Gazette* was publishing a special spring supplement on stud horses (Clark & Spelman, 1942). The “Kentucky Association” was organized in Lexington in July 1826, “to improve the breed of horses by encouraging the sports of the turf”

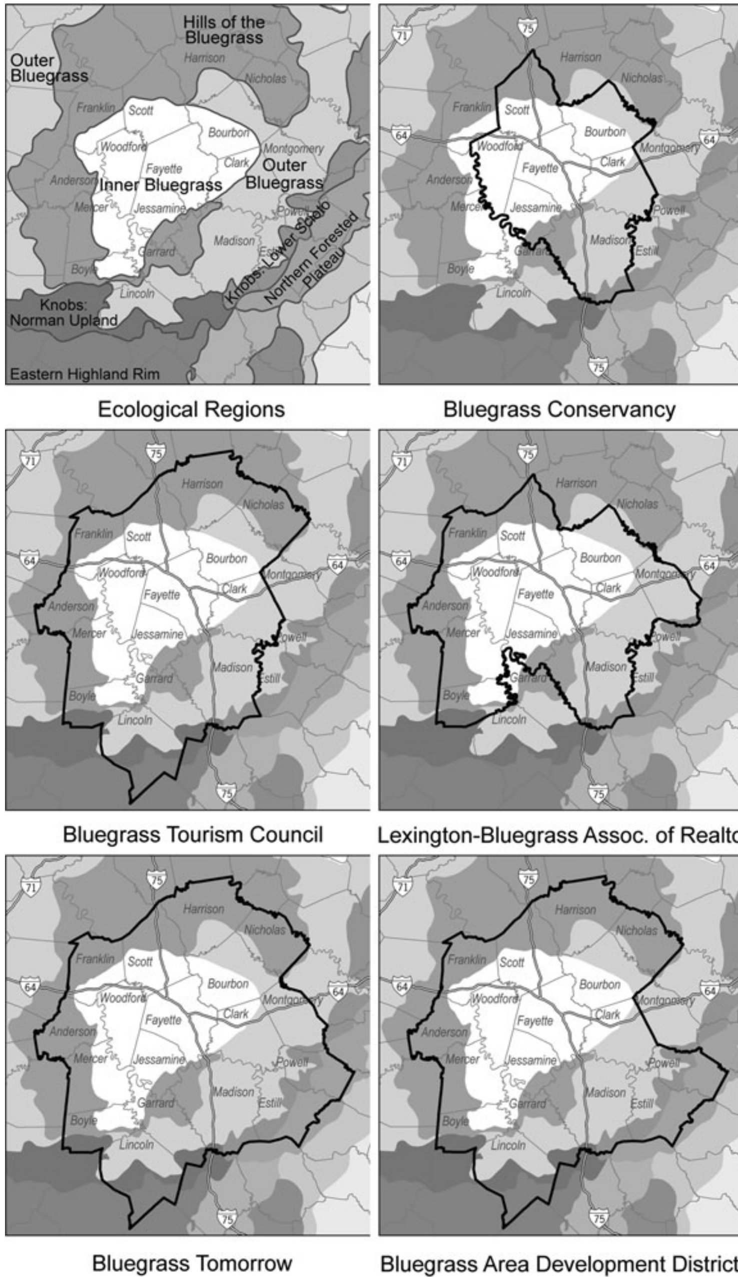

Fig. 72.3 Regions defined by various organizations

(George Washington Ranck, 1872). The first race meet was held in October of that year, and its first fair for the exhibition of stock was held in September of 1833 ("First fair," 1833). Local breeders developed lines of thoroughbred horses, short horn and Alderney cattle, Cotswald sheep, and other stock they had brought with them from Maryland and Virginia plantations. Many imported animals directly from England, along with an English landscape aesthetic which was displayed on the rural estates.

72.2.5 The 19th Century

Though Bluegrass horses, mules, cattle and hogs on the hoof were easily exported, and whiskey justified its cost of transport, the first steamboat to travel upriver from New Orleans to Louisville in 1815 led to that city overtaking Lexington as a trade center. Lexington's economy therefore turned its focus to education, law and leisure pursuits, or by one account was "forced into a dignified, social, literary, and political center…" (Kerr, Connelley, & Coulter, 1922: 740). Transylvania University included Medical, Law and Divinity schools and a College of Arts and Sciences by 1818. A lunatic asylum was chartered in 1816. What became the University of Kentucky was founded in 1865. Medicine and education are still mainstays of Lexington's economy.

During the mid-nineteenth century Lexington continued to develop a diverse economy, with a strong agricultural base supporting local manufacturers, services, retail and an active financial sector. Horse and general stock farms remained important in the landscape, despite turnover in ownership especially during financial crises. One of the most influential estate owners, Robert A. Alexander, of Woodburn Farm in Woodford County, was born in Kentucky but inherited his fortune from a wealthy Scottish uncle. He studied at Cambridge and toured European farms and estates, learning then-current principles of animal husbandry, soil management, forestry and general agricultural practice. He is credited with setting a new standard for record-keeping and business practices, systematically breeding cattle, sheep, thoroughbreds and standardbreds (Domer, 2005; Raitz & O'Malley, 2007).

Lexington business leaders aggressively pursued the development of roads and railways. Turnpikes were financed through "subscription," with investors to be repaid by toll revenue. Based on technology developed by Scotsman John Macadam around 1820, road builders compacted broken rock in layers, and shaped road beds to shed water, assuring the roads would handle heavy wagons and be usable in all seasons. Between 1827 and 1837, Kentucky invested in 27 long-distance turnpike roads, 21 of which were in the greater Bluegrass Region (Raitz & O'Malley, 2007), a measure of the centrality and influence of the area.

The first railroad in operation west of the Alleghenies, connecting Lexington to the capitol, Frankfort, was completed in 1835. Interrupted by delays from various financial market failures, railroads connected Lexington to river ports at Louisville by 1851 and Cincinnati by 1854. The Civil War slowed growth, but railroad development was strong by the 1880s and through the turn of the century,

connecting many of the towns in the region. In March of 1890, the *Lexington Leader* boasted, “Fifty-two trains a day! Does that look bad for a city of thirty thousand?” Investments by “eastern capitalists” toward the turn of the century helped extend lines into the highlands of Eastern Kentucky, enabling the wealth of the developing coal and timber industries to flow through Lexington and the Bluegrass. The railroads took an active part in promoting the Bluegrass not only as a place to do business, but as a tourist destination.

> Mansions of the typical ante-bellum style…and modern palaces, built in most cases by wealthy gentlemen from the East, seem to nearly alternate…If the visitor follows… the beaten paths of travel he will be sure to visit this noble little city so rich in historic treasures and so simply yet exquisitely adorned by both man and nature…. Nor… can he help noting how the divisions between the wooded hillside and the bluegrass pasture, the hemp field and the little park with its private “practice track,” are marked by stone fences here and there prettily clad in the green robe of the wild ivy. (Hughes, Ousley and Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company. Passenger Dept., 1901: 30–31)

72.2.6 The New Landed Gentry

As the country recovered from the Civil War, a new wave of outside investment came to the region. Wealthy capitalists invested in farms in the Bluegrass as well as in railroads and coal lands. A turn of the century map shows over 500 cattle and horse farms in the greater Bluegrass area (*Birds eye view of the principal breeding farms of the Blue Grass Region of Kentucky, U.S.A.*, 1900) (Fig. 72.4). L.V. Harkness of Standard Oil, financier August Belmont, James B. Haggin, owner of gold mines and cattle ranches, Captain Sam S. Brown and many others established fine estates in the Bluegrass during the decades spanning the turn of the century. For these men the farms were both business and pleasure, reflecting their wealth, business acumen and position in international society.

New owners made massive investments in both the functional facilities for breeding and training horses, and the gracious appointments of house, grounds and guest quarters. Haggin built a million dollar marble mansion called “Green Hills” for his bride and a gossip article noted that “Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Haggin are spending the summer at Bar Harbor, reveling no doubt in a brief reprieve from architect, artists, [and] landscape gardeners…” (*Lexington Leader* 14 July, 1901: 6). David M. Look of New York City bought James R. Keene’s Castleton farm in 1912, planning to build a “forty-room mansion there with stables and grounds to correspond,” as well as a private country club for guests. He employed expert foresters to have “the trees on Castleton Farm trimmed and properly cultured” (*Lexington Leader* 2 June, 1913: 1). It is the landscape of this era which has come to represent the Bluegrass, when wealthy owners invested in gracious estates for their personal enjoyment which also supported the racing industry.

Even through the present, capital acquired outside the region continues to come in waves to the Bluegrass. Some owners have lived here but many have their principal residence elsewhere and just visit periodically, usually during the racing seasons. Henryk de Kwiakowski, airplane magnate, rescued fabled Calumet at its bankruptcy

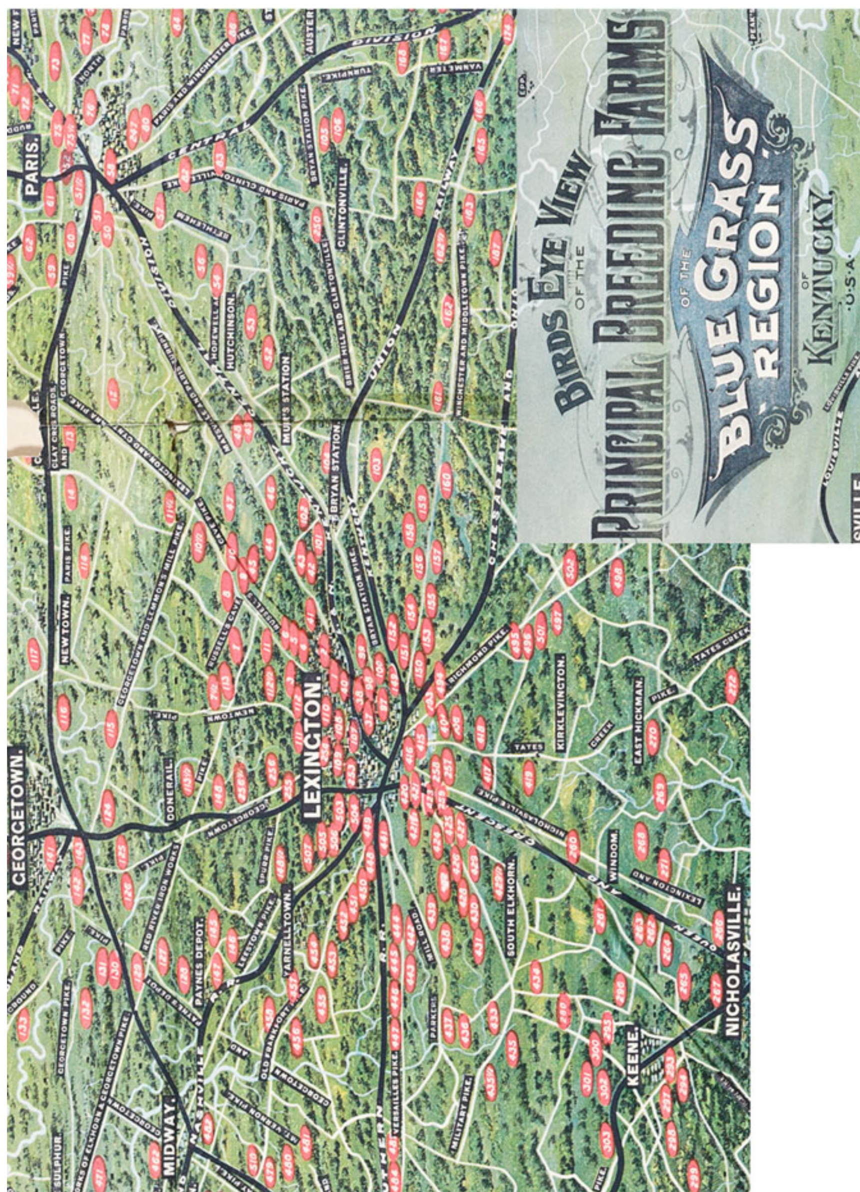

Fig. 72.4 Bird's eye view of the principal breeding farms of the bluegrass region of Kentucky, 1900

sale in 1992. The royal family of Dubai now owns several thousand acres in the Bluegrass. Others include the late T. A. Ryan of RyanAir, the Beck family of the South African coal industry, Saudi Prince Khalid Abdullah, and William Farish, III, a Texan with energy interests. There always appear to be wealthy people who enjoy the glamour and excitement of horses, willing to invest in the Bluegrass.

72.3 Icons of the Bluegrass Landscape

The Bluegrass region is symbolized by elements which have somehow captured the world's imagination. The Bluegrass image is of a rural though sophisticated landscape, which bespeaks wealth and leisure. Certain details of materials and style, in fences, buildings and grounds, are associated with this image, while other materials and styles seen throughout the region, perhaps more frequently, are not taken as emblematic. The iconic elements are not as prevalent or as typical as one might think; their power as symbols comes from their association with an image of bounty and graciousness which has been reinforced in the American psyche since the New World was first sold to immigrants and investors as an Eden on earth. A section in the aforementioned L & N railroad brochure, entitled "Bluegrass Region, Rightly Entitled To The Credit Of Being A Garden Spot," described the Bluegrass as a "a land which it seemed as though the Creator had made first as the habitation of man . . . where life is lived for true living's sake" (Hughes et al., 1901: 32).

What are the elements which conjure up the mythos of the Bluegrass? Of course there are the horses; the thoroughbred, standardbred, saddlebred and many other breeds, although it is the thoroughbred which gets the majority of the publicity. Along with the horse is its habitat – its pastures, paddocks and barns. The rolling, grassy hills, studded with mature trees, create a park-like atmosphere reminiscent of the English landscape tradition. The plank fences, stretching across the rolling topography or enclosing paddocks with curved corners, are pictured again and again in travel brochures whereas the barbed and woven wire fences edging cattle pastures are rarely pictured, even though cattle farms are more numerous than horse farms in the region.[2] The horse barns associated with the Bluegrass have been designed both for their specific functions, whether as stallion barns, foaling barns, breeding sheds, etc., and for their aesthetic appeal and ability to convey the identity of particular breeding or racing establishments. Much like banks communicate wealth with marble and mahogany in the lobby, so, too, barns to be visited by potential buyers of horses or of breeding services may be more richly detailed than many homes (Fig. 72.5). The distinctive cupolas topping the barns are just decorative, now, but originally became significant to barn design as part of ventilation and moisture control systems meant to protect valuable horses from fungal and other ailments. Current day barns are engineered, functional structures that maintain important symbolic value as well.

The dry stone wall or fence is another element associated with the Bluegrass, seen on horse farms and along country roads. These fences might contain stones pulled from the fields, or dug up in 19th century road building projects or specifically

Fig. 72.5 Manchester farm. (T.J. Nieman photo)

quarried for the purpose. Irish stone masons and laborers who emigrated to the United States throughout the 19th century largely are responsible for the form and technique of what we see today (Fig. 72.6). The ragged profile of the top row of stones, stacked on edge, is supposed to discourage horses from attempting to leap over the walls. The durability of the walls meant low maintenance costs. As local turnpikes were built and improved during the 19th century, builders often realigned the routes of the original rude trails, changing the boundaries of farmers' fields and

Fig. 72.6 Stone fence along Pisgah Pike, Woodford County. (T.J. Nieman photo)

requiring new fencing to comply with the law and to protect the crops. In addition, because the turnpikes were toll roads, sturdy fences were needed to keep travelers from cutting across the fields to avoid the toll houses (Raitz & O'Malley, 2007).

According to a survey conducted by Mather and Hart (1954) on a north-south transect from Cleveland almost to Atlanta, plank fences were seen with greater frequency in the Inner Bluegrass than any other segment, and rock fences seen nowhere else. With the advent of mechanized farm equipment, in many parts of the country fields were consolidated and fences removed to take advantage of the scale of production which mechanization made possible. The rolling Bluegrass terrain, however, did not lend itself to extensive fields, and the emphasis on livestock meant that more rock fences survived than in many places.

Wood fences need a lot of maintenance, and the introduction of mass-produced galvanized wire fencing in the late 1800s meant that thousands of miles of various kinds of wood fences were replaced across the country by barbed wire and wire mesh fencing. Mather and Hart (1954) note that "the gentleman-farmer's" plank fences are expensive and ornamental, but also functional where pure-bred cattle or horses are present. Wire fences are difficult for the animals to see, and broken wires or ragged ends could cause injury to the expensive stock. The graceful curves of the plank fences also have a practical purpose, to keep spirited thoroughbreds from crashing into corners by turning them gradually. Double rows of fence keep stallions away from each other, and, along public roads, keep people away from the horses. Aesthetically, the white boards stand out nicely against the lush pastures, but black fences have become more common because they are less costly and require less maintenance. Both white and black board fences have become part of the Bluegrass image (Fig. 72.7), even though, as Mather and Hart commented, tobacco and mixed

Fig. 72.7 Plank fencing on Rice Road, Fayette County. (T.J. Nieman photo)

livestock operations, smaller and with less showy fencing, were “more important, both numerically and areally” than the horse farm estates (1954: 221).

The fences enclose paddocks and pastures. The lush green pastures, carefully groomed and studded with mature trees which provide shade for the horses, also are integral to the Bluegrass image. The mature trees are so important to the desired effect of gracious tradition that owners building new facilities often will plant large trees at great expense to give the illusion that the farm has a long and stately heritage. The pastures are intensively managed, despite a naturalistic appearance, and have more in common visually with the English Landscape tradition of grand estate parks than with the often messy landscape of small general purpose farms, or the industrial character of large corporate farms. A drive in the country in the Bluegrass is a much different experience than a drive in the country in Iowa. Middle class urban residents of the Bluegrass, and the tourism industry, have benefited from this “borrowed” park land up until now.

72.4 The Threat to the Bluegrass Landscape

The post World War II development trajectory of the region began to shift from a strongly agricultural to a more diversified economy, accelerated by efforts of the Lexington Industrial Development Foundation (LIF). Created in the early nineteen fifties, the LIF worked to bring light industry to the area and retain local workers who had developed new skills in wartime factories (McCann, 1998). IBM, which arrived in 1956, became both a major employer and an active corporate citizen. Among the many manufacturers which came in the 1950s and early 1960s were Trane, Dixie Cup, Mengel, Standard Products, Square D and GE Lamp.

This economic recruitment effort converged with work on the Interstate Highway system, spurred by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Interstates 75 and 64, completed in the early 1970s, intersect in the northeast quadrant of Fayette County, slicing through the Bluegrass to connect Lexington with major cities in four directions. Lexington business organization Commerce Lexington boasts that Lexington is “within a day’s drive of 70% of all U.S. markets” (Commerce Lexington 2008).

As the area became better connected to other regions, and employment opportunities increased, so, too, did housing demand. Like many small cities across the country, Lexington experienced a post-war building boom. Fayette County’s population grew dramatically between 1940 and 1980 (Table 72.1).

Another burst of growth was initiated when Toyota Motor Manufacturing Corporation built an automobile plant in Scott County. The first car rolled off the assembly line in 1988. More than forty domestic and Japanese owned suppliers had located in Kentucky by 1989 and in 2008 there were approximately 90 plants in the state supporting Toyota, many in the Bluegrass counties (Mitchell, 2008). Growth in employment fueled demand for homes and it is interesting to compare the growth rates of Fayette and the surrounding counties over the years. In 1958 Lexington implemented the Urban Service Area, delineating locations in

Table 72.1 Growth rates of bluegrass counties

County	1930–1940 (%)	1940–1950 (%)	1950–1960 (%)	1960–1970 (%)	1970–1980 (%)	1980–1990 (%)	1990–2000 (%)
Bourbon	−0.7	−1.0	2.4	1.6	5.0	−0.9	0.6
Clark	2.0	5.1	11.5	14.3	17.6	4.1	12.4
Fayette	15.1	27.7	30.9	32.2	17.1	10.4	15.6
Jessamine	−2.1	2.3	9.4	27.9	50.0	16.7	28.0
Madison	3.3	9.2	7.4	27.6	24.9	7.8	23.2
Scott	−0.6	5.8	1.6	16.7	21.5	9.4	38.5
Woodford	7.9	−5.4	6.3	21.2	23.2	12.2	16.3

Source: Derived from Kentucky State Data Center county population tables

which utilities and services, particularly sanitary sewer lines and treatment, could be “developed logically and economically”(Segoe and Associates, 1958). Suburban development had outstripped the sanitary sewer system and septic systems were proving inadequate, especially in the karst topography of the region. Presented as a public health issue, as well as a matter of efficiency and fiscal responsibility, the Urban Service Area confined development to these areas close to the existing urban core, reducing development pressure on rural agricultural lands for many years. As noted in a rural land planning document, the Urban Service Area created a sharp line between the suburban and rural landscapes in Fayette County, illustrated in Fig. 72.8 (Lexington Fayette Urban County Government, 1999).

Fig. 72.8 Effect of urban service boundary. (Source: LFUCG Rural Service Area Land Management Plan, 1999; Photo by James R. Rebmann)

The Urban Service Area has both expanded and contracted over the years, and has been the subject of many intense political struggles, especially in the late 1990s. Wealthy landowners have always had a great deal of influence over Fayette County development policies, but the expansion of the industrial and business economies created a new set of middle class interests and a sometimes competing set of development goals (McCann, 1998). The equine industry is a major economic sector in the Bluegrass, but gross domestic product numbers for the Lexington-Fayette MSA show that among private industries, manufacturing, real estate, construction and retail trade all contribute significantly more than agriculture or tourism (Table 72.2). While summary economic figures may be somewhat misleading – given the range of support industries related to horses (Table 72.3), many may be categorized as professional services, retail, finance and insurance or real estate – farm owners and horse breeders started to feel threatened by the shifting economic structure of the region. And, as growth management policies in Fayette County raised land values and limited development options, development pressure increased in the surrounding counties, creating new constituencies for a regional farmland protection movement.

Table 72.2 Gross domestic product by metropolitan area, 2005 and 2006 (millions of current dollars)

Industry code	Industry	2005	2006
1	All industry total[a]	20,007	21,238
2	Private industries[a]	17,371	18,420
3	Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	(D)	(D)
4	Crop and animal production (Farms)	422	590
5	Forestry, fishing, and related activities	(D)	(D)
11	Construction	957	932
12	Manufacturing	3,643	3,845
35	Retail trade	1,408	1.439
50	Finance and insurance	775	819
55	Real estate and rental and leasing	2,643	2,786
71	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	176	(D)
72	Performing arts, museums, related activities	116	112
73	Amusement, gambling, and recreation	60	(D)
74	Accommodation and food services	575	607
78	Government	2,636	2.818

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce
[a]Includes industries not listed in this table
(D) not shown in order to avoid the disclosure of confidential information; estimates are included in higher level totals. Updated September 2008

72.5 Preservation

In the early 1970s alongside articles about new subdivisions on famous horse farms, articles about farmland preservation began to appear in the local newspaper, consistent with concerns across the country. Beyond just housing demand, farmland in general and equine operations in particular have been affected both

Table 72.3 Selected equine related businesses in the Bluegrass

Business type	Estimated number
Breeding, bloodstock and pedigree services	100
Equine art and photography	8
Equine database	1
Equine education	9
Equine feed and veterinary supplies	14
Equine Insurance	4
Equine related publications	14
Equine research facilities or hospitals	10
Equine transport	13
Expert witness	1
Farriers	30
Fencing and building contractors	10
Horse farm tours	14
Lawyers specializing in equine law	8
Lobbying organization	1
Real estate agencies specializing in horse properties	12
Rescue organizations	9
Retail specialty stores with equine themed merchandise	5
Tack stores	35
Veterinarians specializing in horses	175+

negatively and positively by a complex mix of economic and policy provisions. These include a 1976 Kentucky State Supreme Court decision to tax agricultural land on the basis of its agricultural value rather than sales of comparable parcels for development; changes to and phasing out of the Tobacco Price Support program; changes in subdivision regulations and zoning policies; and water quality protection programs. There are now state, local and non-profit programs to purchase development rights or accept conservation easements for agricultural land, limiting future development.

Local organizations which sprang up in the wake of uncertainty and conflict over the changing rural landscape include the Land and Nature Trust of the Bluegrass (1975, dissolved 2002), Lexington-Frankfort Scenic Corridor (1988), Bluegrass Tomorrow (1989), The Bluegrass Conservancy (1995), Save Our Irreplaceable Land (1998), and the Fayette Alliance (2006), in addition to the quasi-governmental boards charged with administering the Purchase of Development Rights (2001) and Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement programs (2004) in Fayette County and the State of Kentucky respectively. The boards of all these organizations include prominent breeders, executives of the race tracks and officers of other equine organizations. The Kentucky Equine Education Project (KEEP), founded in 2004, has been active in promoting such programs as the Kentucky Horse Breeders Incentive Fund. Kentucky breeders receive awards based on the performance of Kentucky bred horses in important races, all funded through the sales taxes from stud fees. This program was developed after other states' incentive programs began

to lure both breeding and racing away from Kentucky. The Bluegrass landscape as defined by the horse farms has required a continued "re-engineering" to maintain itself.

72.5.1 Preservation or Re-creation?

An on-going conflict in the last third of the 20th century was the proposal to widen the Paris Pike. This narrow but beautiful country route fronted many well-known horse farms, connecting Lexington to the town of Paris, county seat of neighboring Bourbon County. Road widening initially proposed in 1966 to improve safety was immediately rejected by adjacent property owners. In 1975 the Thoroughbred Breeders Association of Kentucky was urging the state to hire a specialist to "reduce the impact of the $10 million Paris Pike widening on the surrounding countryside" ("Paris Pike," 1975) A citizen lawsuit led by Land and Nature Trust of the Bluegrass won an injunction in 1979 based on the state's failure to consider impacts on the corridor's historic and scenic resources. After fatal accidents in the 1980s, the project was revived. In 1990 Bluegrass Tomorrow gathered constituents representing the various interests to negotiate a solution to the conflict, and in 1992 Lexington Mayor Scotty Baesler convened a committee which came up with this statement of purpose in 1993:

> Creating a well designed, scenic and enhanced parkway that is both safe and beautiful, sensitive to preserving the best of which currently exists, to the maximum extent possible, and that once constructed, the road shall be permanently protected from development pressure so as to maintain the truly unique scenic and agricultural character of the area for the long term benefit of adjacent landowners, area residents and tourists.
>
> (Paris Pike Committee Report, 1993 in Cahal, 2008)

Design work began in 1994, with landscape architects Jones and Jones conducting interviews and focus groups with adjacent landowners and historic preservation experts to identify important historic and cultural features to be retained. They documented sight lines, vistas, tree canopy, and other design elements residents felt were important to recreate the scenic quality for which the old road was known. There was a mandate to preserve mature trees, historic dry-laid stone walls and estate entrances, and minimize disturbance of the land. Where historic walls and entrances could not be preserved, they were rebuilt, and at least one tree was replanted for every one removed. Completed in 2003, the Paris Pike was highly praised, but cost almost twice as much per mile as typical four-lane road construction during that time period. The engineering itself was not unusual; what was novel was the priority accorded to a participatory approach, and to both visual and social design elements. A much-cited example of "context-sensitive design," this project mobilized tremendous resources of time and money to protect or recreate historic and scenic features to perpetuate a particular image of the Bluegrass landscape.

72.5.2 A Working Horse Farm and Educational Theme Park

Another project to protect and profit from the Bluegrass landscape is the Kentucky Horse Park. In 1972 then governor Wendell Ford announced the purchase of part of Walnut Hall Stud Farm on the Ironworks Pike, once owned by Standard Oil tycoon L.V. Harkness, for a state park "devoted to the Kentucky horse industry" (*Lexington Leader* 26 September, 1972: 1). A combination of museum and event venue, the park would include exhibits about racing and breeding history, offer interaction with many different breeds, showcase retired champions, have pony and trail rides, and provide facilities for equine sporting events. Promoted as "a working horse farm and educational theme park dedicated to man's relationship with the horse,"(Kentucky Horse Park, 2008) the park opened in 1978, and for many years struggled to fulfill expectations for tourism revenue.

Located along the I-75 corridor, the park was expected to intercept travelers who would otherwise pass through the Bluegrass, but initial projections of visitorship proved overly optimistic. Offices were built for equine oriented organizations, many recruited to Kentucky with tax incentives, and more than 30 such groups now lease space at the park in the National Horse Center complex. Facilities' development and operations have been subsidized both by the state and private fundraising throughout the park's existence. However, the Kentucky Department of Travel released figures for 2003 stating the park had an economic impact of $163.7 million. High-profile exhibits at the International Museum of the Horse, "Imperial China" and "All the Queen's Horses," were responsible for 192,000 and 175,000 visitors respectively, in 2000 and 2003 ("Horse Park at a gallop in 25th year," 2003).

The other major generators for visits are the various horse sporting events, most notably the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, held each April. Total attendance in 2008 topped 100,000 visitors. This international competition is the only four star event in the United States, and is one of only seven at that level world-wide. The park hosts everything from local events and practices to high-level championships, in sports including polo, rodeo, dressage, steeplechase and cross-country, as well as specialty breed shows. In 2010 the park will host the first ever World Equestrian Games (WEG) held outside Europe. Local officials hope that this will result in an enhanced reputation as a center for equine sports, leading to increased tourism revenue. The state is investing heavily in new facilities for the WEG, including a permanent climate-controlled, 6,000 seat Indoor Arena, and 7,500 seat Outdoor Stadium, both already being reserved for other events, and a number of temporary structures and seating areas.

Its claims to the contrary, the Horse Park is a theme park and not a working farm. The layout of roads, visitor center and museum space make that clear. As a sporting venue, the Kentucky Horse Park serves the tourism economy with its facilities for regional, national and international equine events, drawing in competitors and support staff who require hotels and meals, and spend money sightseeing and shopping. The web page invites people to a farm tour, during which people can "...visit with Thoroughbred celebrities at some of the most beautiful horse farms in the world.... tour[ing] the grounds of historic estates of the

Bluegrass Region as well as shiny-new, multi-million dollar farms of international movers and shakers" (Kentucky Horse Park, 2008). Some popular farms open to public tours include Lane's End (http://www.lanesend.com), Three Chimneys (http://www.threechimneys.com), Gainesway (http://www.gainesway.com), and Darby Dan (http://www.darbydan.com).

72.6 The Bluegrass Brand

In the Bluegrass region one cannot escape the pervasive influence of the horse, from the signs declaring Lexington as "The Horse Capital of the World" and advertising the World Equestrian Games, to horse-themed merchandise in stores, to the names of Turfland Mall and Hamburg Place, to the short-lived Thoroughblades hockey team. Horses and the landscape which supports them are central to the identity of the area, and the way it is presented to visitors.

72.6.1 Tourism in the Bluegrass

Tourism has been an element of economic development in the Bluegrass since the 19th century. Travelogues praised the beauty and fertility of the Bluegrass region as early land speculators sought to bring in settlers. Merchants promoted the area to trading partners and new customers. Stock breeders and farm managers traveled to the Bluegrass to purchase animals or brought their animals there for breeding. With a purpose to produce champion horses, business travel was not far removed from pleasure travel. Races brought breeders, trainers and spectators from all over the country, and racing seasons have always been full of grand social occasions.

With the development of the railroad network, travel increased greatly, and promotion of the Bluegrass as a tourist destination intensified. The Chamber of Commerce of Lexington commissioned "The Guide to Lexington" in 1883 which described the advantages of Lexington and vicinity for the visitor and also for the entrepreneur.

> No American city of its age can more justly claim the attention of the tourist than Lexington. It is rich in historic associations, is a complete epitome of Old Kentucky life and manners, and is surrounded by all the attractions of a region which, for pastoral beauty and fertility, is unsurpassed upon the face of the globe. . . .The location of Lexington in the very centre of population makes it therefore practically certain that manufactures from this city will always command the widest markets with the least carriage. . ..
>
> (George W. Ranck, 1883)

A bicyclists' road map of the region was published in 1899. An ad for the Dewhurst Motor Car Company urged readers to ". . . Rent an Automobile. . .It's a delightful way to entertain your guests. No better roads are found in America and no prettier stock farms or scenery could be desired" (*Lexington Leader* 23 May 1907: 10). In 1910 Lexington was the first lunch stop on the Glidden automobile endurance tour, and Lexington became a popular stop for automobile clubs

in Kentucky and surrounding states. In 1931 during the week of the Kentucky Derby, the Lexington Garden Club held a “pilgrimage” to the “notable estates of the Bluegrass” which drew interest from surrounding states. This fundraiser has continued in some form through the present day. In 1940 in the third annual State Garden Club tour, local volunteers welcomed visitors to such famous farms as Elmendorf, Hamburg Place, Meadow Crest, Greentree, Idle Hour, Mt. Brilliant, Spindletop, Airdrie and Woodburn House (“State Garden Club sponsors annual tour,” 1940). The current day “Open Horse Farm Tour” is run by the Suburban Woman’s Club, and is still quite popular.

The Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau (LCVB) promotes a broad mix of activities, historic sites, tours, events, restaurants and shopping, both in Lexington and the surrounding counties; many are related to horses. It maintains a list of farms open for public tours, as well as tour operators, and its web pages are replete with visual references to horses and rural and equine landscapes.

In the self-guided “Bluegrass Country Driving Tour,” (LCVB 2008) the attractions are laid out in three loops, arbitrarily named *Regal Traditions, Parks and Paddocks* and *Horses, History and Hunt Country.* Each loop includes horse farms, other equine sites, historic churches, parks, and landscape features. The schematic map is filled with Bluegrass symbols; horses, fences, barns, clusters of trees on a broad, green background (Fig. 72.9). For each town there is the same list of things

Fig. 72.9 Bluegrass country driving tour map clipping and LCVB web page header

to do – Dining, Historic and Shopping. This works against a sense of uniqueness for the region, yet reinforces the map's purpose, to entice the tourist into the landscape to spend money. But as more of the landscape is filled with generic residential and commercial development, the imperative to remind people about the special Bluegrass landscape grows stronger.

Concurrent with farmland conversion to other uses, visual and textual references to farms and rural topics have become more prevalent. Subdivisions retained the names of the farms they replaced, or named streets after horses, racetracks or related artifacts. Architectural details associated with horse farms or iconic elements of the Bluegrass are seen in commercial areas, for instance, the green roofs and cupolas at Lexington Green mall, built in 1985–1986 at the intersection of New Circle and Nicholasville Road. Both the Festival Market building downtown (1985–1986) (Fig. 72.10) and University of Kentucky's Young Library (1995–1997) recall the form of Red Mile Harness Track's Floral Hall.

Fig. 72.10 Festival market building, downtown Lexington. (T.J. Nieman photo)

72.6.2 Hamburg Place

Hamburg Place is a famous thoroughbred farm established in 1898, split in half by the routing of Interstate 75. In 1996, 100 acres were developed into the huge retail center Hamburg Pavilion and other large parcels have become residential subdivisions and office developments. In 2005 a horse cemetery containing the remains of the first Triple Crown winner, Sir Barton, as well as over a dozen other thoroughbreds, was relocated to make room for a Wal-Mart. Sir Barton Way is a main collector road, and most of the other streets are named for horses including Pink Pigeon, Alysheba, Star Shoot, Plaudit and Paul Jones. The architecture is a jumble

Fig. 72.11 Architectural details at Hamburg Pavilion. (T.J. Nieman photo)

of standard strip mall types, built out by several different developers, but details are stuck here and there to recall the equine theme (Fig. 72.11).

72.6.3 Thoroughbred Park

In 1989 Lexington's Triangle Foundation, a group of prominent area business leaders, many of whom have deep roots in the horse industry, proposed a park to be built on Main Street at the eastern edge of downtown. Thoroughbred Park was completed in 1992. The designers' stated intention was to reflect "a very few simple elements in the Kentucky landscape. . . in this park. . .so that anyone who comes to this town can capture the essence of what this region and this great American tradition is all about" (*Lexington Herald-Leader* 28 October 1989). In a recent blog post at Saratoga.com, a writer described the park while exhorting the city of Saratoga Springs, NY to do something similar.

> I recently spent several months in Lexington, Kentucky (that other horse place), and drove past Thoroughbred Park every day. It's nice, it's downtown—and it proclaims, for all the world to see—that Lexington is the horse capital of the world. . ..
>
> (Altieri, 2008)

Thoroughbred Park's main feature is a series of seven life-sized sculptures of racing horses, with famous and recognizable jockeys astride them. Thoroughbred Park is designed with the primary focus at the corner of Main Street and Midland Ave., and is a strong visual presence as visitors drive into downtown Lexington from points east and south. It could be called a three-dimensional billboard for the horse industry (Fig. 72.12). It is not well suited to active uses, or picnics, nor is it well

Fig. 72.12 Thoroughbred park. (T.J. Nieman photo)

connected to the retail streetscape, serving mostly as a backdrop as tourists stop briefly to take photos. Extra earth was brought in to build a large, grassed hill on the relatively flat site, creating a pastoral background for the racers as seen from Main Street. This hill also conveniently hides the adjacent low income neighborhood from view, so that the desired image is conveyed without distraction.

72.6.4 Bluegrass Airport

Bluegrass Airport was originally built in 1940, on 523 acres (212 ha) of farmland along Versailles Road, opposite Keeneland Racetrack and close to famous Calumet Farm. It has expanded several times, and tried for many years to acquire land from adjacent farms to build a second, longer runway to meet specifications for modern planes. In 2005 the airport, stymied by resistance from farm owners and neighborhoods, received an exception from the FAA allowing them to build a safety zone on the existing runway shorter than required. A large retaining wall had to be built to create a level area for this extension. A mural, painted to minimize the impact of the massive wall, is a farm scene, with horses grazing in a paddock enclosed by the classic white 4-board fence (Fig. 72.13). A horse barn and an antebellum mansion are in the background. Life sized statues of mares and foals were placed in front. Low stone walls, though not the traditional style of dry laid stone, block views of an access road. With Keeneland across the street, and several active horse farms nearby, it is curious that the theme of the mural was an equine landscape and not related to planes or transportation.

Fig. 72.13 Bluegrass airport. (T.J. Nieman photo)

72.6.5 The Fayette County Detention Center

Fayette County Jail was badly overcrowded, and the state required the county to build a new jail in 1998. They chose a site on Old Frankfort Pike, at the edge of the rural area, not far from some significant horse farms. The facility was built into the hillside, with most of it hidden from the road. Only the main entrance and offices are visible, in a wing which has the design features of a horse barn, with stone facing and cupolas (Fig. 72.14). In front is a broad green lawn, surrounded by a black plank fence. Stone walls bracket the road. Except for announcing the Fayette County Detention Center, they could be mistaken for a horse farm entry gate. The jail is camouflaged to blend into the surrounding landscape, and not disrupt the image of the Bluegrass which city officials would like to perpetuate.

72.7 Conclusion

Specialized livestock were originally part of full agricultural operations in the Bluegrass, albeit often belonging to wealthy farmers. Over time many Bluegrass farms specialized in breeding racing and show horses, with the majority of their acreage devoted to this use. Racing, showing, hunting, jumping, competing or even riding for pleasure are all leisure activities, although producing these activities is serious business with high capital requirements. The landscape which has come to represent the Bluegrass is a combination of influences, including changing agricultural technologies, the science of breeding, and transportation developments. It

Fig. 72.14 Lexington-Fayette county detention center. (Z. Merkin photo)

also is largely the result of wealthy industrialists and financiers, many from outside Kentucky, investing money made in other pursuits in the challenging business and hobby of breeding and racing horses. The landscapes supporting the horses were designed to be both functional and beautiful, creating a park-like environment for the pleasure of the owners and to project an image of wealth, grace and success to potential purchasers of the expensive animals.

These landscapes are picturesque, and are an attraction for tourists, who come to gaze at the opulence and beauty as well as watch races and competitions. The local economy increasingly relies on the tourist dollars which are generated by the equine industry. Local residents benefit from the greenspace surrounding the towns as a sort of privately owned park land, and economic development interests tout this amenity in recruiting new business to the area; Commerce Lexington features Lexington's rank in a variety of lists, many of which are based on "quality of life" factors ("Commerce Lexington," 2009). So far, infusions of outside capital have enabled the establishment of new horse farms and the continuation and improvement of traditional ones, even as some operations have failed in economic downturns, but the persistent pressure of housing and commercial demand has led to the loss of significant amounts of farmland.

Though the rural landscape which is disappearing also includes cattle and mixed crop farms, small settlements and rural service businesses, the symbols which civic leaders and developers have reproduced and enlarged, are those of the landscape of the horse farms. Significant expense has gone into reproducing this vision of the Bluegrass, such as the Paris Pike project. Serious social and economic engineering, through tax laws, planning and zoning restrictions and government and

private mechanisms to transfer development rights, is being employed to prolong the viability of the equine industry and thus its landscape. However, the proliferation of signifiers of the horse industry throughout the region is an indication that the industry itself is losing ground, and we may be left with only the theme park version of the Bluegrass. Arguments for the preservation of the Kentucky Bluegrass landscape call upon the aesthetic in pursuit of the economic, and vice versa, but as the landscape evolves in response to social and economic forces, the rural landscape of the region is being replaced by urban land uses clad in the symbols of what once was.

Notes

1. The phrase "factory floor" is taken from a presentation on the LFUCG Purchase of Development Rights program (King, 2008).
2. Many farms have both cattle and "blooded horses" and so are double counted, but the ratio of farms which sell cattle to farms which sell horses ranged in 2002 from .44 and .91 in Fayette and Woodford Counties respectively, to 2.79 and 3.28 in Madison and Lincoln respectively. (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2009a, 2009b)

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