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Lawrence County leads Ky. in oil, gas mining

By DAVID E. MALLOY

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David E. Malloy/The Herald-Dispatch Seth Cowgill of Wheelersburg, Ohio, plans on heading to North Dakota to look for a welding job in the fracking industry. Some people working there can make several thousand dollars a week welding.

LOUISA, Ky. - Hydraulic fracturing, a technique used to drill oil and natural gas wells, is making its way to Lawrence and Greenup counties in Kentucky and could be expanding to Johnson County and across the Levisa Fork into southern West Virginia.

"Horizontal drilling in the Berea Sandstone is a game changer," said Andrew V. McNeill, executive director of the Kentucky Oil and Gas Association. "Kentucky's small, independent operators are leading the way in deploying these technologies to responsibly develop Kentucky's oil and gas resources."

Lawrence and Greenup counties, the two counties associated with Berea Sandstone development, accounted for 21 percent of Kentucky's total oil production in 2014, McNeill said. Lawrence County is the number one oil producer in the Bluegrass State in 2014. Oil production value in Kentucky was \$293,513,075 last year, an 8 percent increase over 2013.

"There's been some discussions of drilling in Boyd County," McNeill said.

Fracking has been around some 60 years. Hydraulic fracturing involves the use of water pressure to create fractures in rock that allows the oil and natural gas it contains to escape and flow out of a well.

Kentucky's total natural gas production value for 2014 was \$426,288,724, up \$32.5 million from the prior year, McNeill said. Five southeastern Kentucky counties, including Pike and Floyd, combined for more than 80 percent of the state's natural gas production value, he said.

Drilling in Lawrence County started about two years ago at a depth of 1,000 to 2,000 feet. Since then, there's been a significant increase in horizontal drilling and fracking. More than 530,000 barrels of oil were produced in 2014, up from 222,000 in 2013, McNeill said.