



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Bath County

2013

Bath County Extension Staff

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Introduction

The Bath Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a study of the current situation in Bath County. The study consisted of Bath Extension Agents and staff reviewing the latest profile of the county and examining major statistical changes over the last ten years.

The Extension staff decided to use an instrument to survey key informants in the county to assist in identifying issues and concerns and prioritizing those needs to develop a comprehensive listing.

Using the survey information obtained, Extension determined the top issue to focus on in Bath County for future programming; these recognized issues are reported in this document as identified for Extension to make the most impact for a positive change.

Unit Profile

Bath is a rural county located in Virginia's West Central Highlands, with neighboring counties of Augusta and Rockbridge to the east, Alleghany to the south, and Greenbrier County of West Virginia to the west and north. Bath County encompasses 540 square miles of mostly mountainous terrain with Warm Springs serving as the County seat. According to the 2010 Census, Bath County had a population of 4,747. A 2011 census population estimate of 4,814 reflected a 1.4% increase in population since 2010.

Population numbers have fluctuated over the last 30 years. Bath had a significant increase in population between 1970 and 1980, due partially to the influx of temporary residents employed in the construction of Virginia Power's hydroelectric facility. The 1990 data reversed that trend with a 15.5% decline in population, which can be partially attributed to the completion of the Virginia Power Project.

The youth population in Bath County followed the general trend of the overall population within the county. Youth, ages 5-18 years of age, increased slightly in number between the years 1990-2000. In 2006, there was a 2% decrease in population between the ages of 5-18 years old. Between 2007 and 2011 there was a 5.3 % decrease in the population of those 3+ years enrolled in local schools.

The median age of Bath residents has increased significantly in the last 20 years. In 1980 the median age was 33, and rose to 39 in 1990. It rose to 42 in 2000 while the number was 44 in the year 2006. For the 2010 Census it was listed as 50.

In Bath, the racial composition has had little change, with the percentage of white residents increasing from 92% to 96.60% since the 2010 census. The percentage of minority residents declined from 6% to 3.60% for Black/African Americans and 1.5% to 1.03% for Hispanics since the 2010 census.

Bath's per capita income rose from \$16,361 in 1990, to \$24,852 in 2000 and to \$31,520 in 2005. In 2011 the median household income was \$62,391. The unemployment average was

5.4% for the county in 2013. In 2012, the largest percentage of jobs in Bath was held in the service sector with 38.7%. Bath's largest industry is tourism with revenues totaling \$241,724,502 in 2012.

According to data from the 2012 Agricultural Census, trends over the previous fifteen years (1997-2012) show the number of farms still declining and area devoted to farmland waning almost 30%. Livestock numbers decrease for cattle and horses, but gross farm receipts increased from \$15,586 in 1997 to \$52,215 in 2012. This is an increase of 235% from the 1997 figures.

The following data chart summarizes recent agricultural trends:

Agricultural Profile

Bath County	Total Farms	Acres of Farmland	Average Size in Acres	Average Farm Gross Receipts
1997	153	58,271	452	\$15,586
2002	124	52,335	422	\$20,319
2007	120	38,412	320	\$32,242
2012	116	41,332	356	\$52,215
Last 15 yrs.	-24.2%	-29.1%	-21.2%	+235%

Cattle Inventory	Bath	Rank in VA
1997	5,812	61 st
2002	5,348	64 th
2007	3,325	64 th
2012	5,707	57 th
Last 15 yrs.	-1.8%	

Sheep	Bath	Rank in VA
1997	217	46 th
2002	310	38 th
2007	No Data	No Data
2012	280	47 th
Last 15 yrs.	+29%	

Horses	Bath	Rank in VA
1997	233	60 th
2002	154	84 th
2007	236	82 nd
2012	100	91 st
Last 15 yrs.	-57.1%	

Community and Resident Perspectives

A survey of key informants in Bath County, which included community group leaders, department heads and government leaders, responded and commented on the issues of Agriculture, Youth Development, Family and Communities and Environmental Resources. From the results of the survey, the Extension Agents and Staff prioritized the following issues for Bath County:

1. Employment Issues
2. Youth Concerns
3. Health Concerns of Citizenry
4. Agriculture Issues
5. Environmental Quality and Land Issues

Respondents to the county's survey of key informants yielded a number of responses related to youth development. While these responses applied to youth of 4-H age (5 – 18 years of age), they also included young adults. The majority of feedback on youth centered around four key areas:

- 1) Developing a means to keep youth in the county or bring them back to the county after post-secondary education and/or job training.
- 2) Developing vocational skills, life skills, and business opportunities that benefit youth.
- 3) Addressing juvenile crime and at-risk youth.
- 4) Instilling in the younger population a sense of community and service to others.

Gathering Data on County Issues

Bath County Community Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about issues in Bath County. Please take a couple of minutes to share your opinion. The results of this survey will help in shaping Virginia Cooperative Extension programs in our county. The survey is completely anonymous. Please respond by November 15, 2013.

1. Please rank the issues under each heading with 1 being the most important issue followed by 2 the next most important, etc. of the following issues related to Bath County.

Agriculture

- ___ Ag Legal Issues (fence law, farm vehicles, taxes)
- ___ Agri-tourism
- ___ Animal Health Issues
- ___ Farm Labor
- ___ Farm Transition
- ___ Management Issues (land, livestock, bookkeeping)
- ___ Profitability (marketing and production costs)
- ___ Resource Availability (vet services, rental land, custom operators)
- ___ Other _____

Families and Communities

- ___ Aging Issues
- ___ Drug Prevention & Misuse
- ___ Financial Management (consumer issues, debt)
- ___ Food Safety
- ___ Health: Physical & Mental
- ___ Housing (buying, renting, indoor air quality, energy management)
- ___ Nutrition
- ___ Parenting
- ___ Other _____

Environment/Natural Resources

- ___ Environmental Quality
- ___ Forest Health (disease, insects)
- ___ Invasive Species
- ___ Land Use Planning – farmland preservation
- ___ Private Woodland Management
- ___ Property Rights
- ___ Wildlife – hunting, nuisance, sustainability
- ___ Other _____

Youth Development

- ___ Character Building (Behavior)
- ___ Communication Skills
- ___ Leadership Opportunities
- ___ Life Skills/decision making
- ___ Physical activities
- ___ Teen Involvement
- ___ Other _____

2. What do you see as the 3 most important issues in Bath County? Please tell us why you feel they are important and what you think might be done to address them. (Use back of survey if space is needed.)

- 1 - _____
- 2 - _____
- 3 - _____

3. Which category best describes your race?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> More than One Race |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

4. Which category best describes your ethnicity?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic or Latino |
|---|---|

Please return your survey by November 15, 2013 to the Bath County Extension Office, P.O. Box 357, Warm Springs, VA 24484 (Bath County Courthouse, room 228). Your survey can be emailed to parkermg@exchange.vt.edu. Thanks so much for your input.

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Employment Issues

Largely due to lack of industrial employment in the county, many young and middle-aged residents are forced to leave the area to seek employment. Residents in the county recognize with the average age of the county's citizens increasing, they must keep or attract a proportionate amount of young adults to maintain a thriving community.

VCE has many resources to provide programming on starting a small business, agri-tourism, horticulture, as well as building self-esteem in our youth so that they will be more confident, willing workers in society.

Issue 2: Youth Concerns

Bath County residents see youth and young adults as a critical part of the county's future. Even though the youth population is declining and no colleges or training centers are located in the county, they recognize that the educational opportunities, business opportunities, and lifestyle offered should be similar to more urban areas.

VCE can best address these concerns with an internal team approach, combining the efforts of our 4-H, Family & Consumer Sciences, and Agricultural and Natural Resources staff. It will also be important to partner with other local agencies or stakeholders.

While VCE may have little influence in bringing youth to the county, efforts in this direction can be achieved by working with government leaders on local economic development planning.

Extension is well-suited to provide skills training to youth. 4-H educational programs will continue to be a large component of this. Through project work and activities, including those such as High School Financial Planning, Reality Store and Career Fairs, 4-H offers vocational skills, life skills, career exploration, and the ability to launch into small business ventures. FCS can assist with business planning and ANR can provide guidance in farm business management for those looking toward careers in agriculture.

Pledging our "health to better living" can be more than just a slogan. Extension can help tackle the drug and alcohol problem in our communities. Both 4-H and FCS staff can make youth aware that drugs and alcohol are not the right choice. This is another opportunity to partner with other organizations (law enforcement, Social Services, Health Department) fighting the same problem. A newly developed program entitled HEALTH ROCKS! targets middle-schoolers, an influential age in dealing with these topics.

Our county once relied heavily on neighbors helping neighbors. Today, with members of our community service clubs, volunteer rescue squads, and volunteer fire departments aging, there is a direct need for the younger generation to fill their shoes. Again, the Bath 4-H program speaks to this need through service learning opportunities for both members and adults.

Issue 3: Health Concerns of Citizenry

Citizens plagued by health issues and concerns such as diabetes, obesity, cancer and heart health, are looking to their localities for ideas and solutions. These problems affect everyone - the youth, middle-age and rapidly aging populations of the area. These issues provide an opportunity for Virginia Cooperative Extension to partner with health related agencies to deal with concerns as far reaching as nutrition, disease prevention and healthy lifestyles.

4-H, FCS and ANR all present areas of programming to help in this effort. 4-H does a Healthy Snacks program every year; while ANR and FCS sponsor Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaigns and promote resources for growing produce. Family and Consumer Science Programs offer many solutions that can address nutritional needs, caregiving, and family issues. The Bath County Extension Office also serves as a SeniorNavigator Center, helping the elderly in the area.

Issue 4: Agricultural Issues

Agriculture still plays a significant role in Bath County. Bath County has over \$5 million in gross farm receipts. Increased land values and related real estate taxes put a squeeze on agricultural profit margins and farmland available for expansion. Increasing competitive livestock marketing options, proper management of land resources, exploring new sustainable agricultural opportunities and increasing farmers' management, marketing, and production skills are all important components of a thriving agricultural community as identified by the survey.

Agricultural education is a continuous role that Extension provides. Agriculture profitability has been an unceasing issue that has been constantly addressed as an agriculture concern. Extension can provide opportunities to explore agri-tourism, further processing of agricultural products, analysis of new enterprises, and management seminars on improving efficiencies of production practices. VCE will continue to assist producers with the Virginia Quality Assured Marketing program, and other marketing, management, animal health and Ag resources. Flexibility and responsiveness to ever changing agriculture needs and issues is a role that VCE will continue to strive to achieve.

Issue 5: Environmental Quality & Land Issues

Bath County's pristine environment is considered by many as the County's number one asset. Water, land and air pollution are continuously monitored and evaluated for quality purposes. A sustained effort to improve the environment is important for the well-being of citizens and county as a whole. Its influences range from health to financial in regards to the future of the area.

Virginia Cooperative Extension's role in addressing this issue is very important. Along with County government officials; the Mountain, Soil, and Water Conservation District; other conservation organizations; and land owners, we join in addressing issues and offer continuing

education opportunities to aid in maintaining and improving environmental quality in Bath County. Extension is an important player in working with citizens on land use issues including estate planning, financial planning, conservation practices, fence laws, etc. Flexibility and responsiveness to ever changing agricultural needs and issues is a role that VCE will continue to strive toward.