



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**

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# Situation Analysis Report

## Bedford County

# 2013

### Bedford County Extension Staff

Scott Baker, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent  
Susan Prillaman, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent  
Nicole Lanore, 4-H Youth Extension Agent  
Annie Jenkins, Family Nutrition Program Assistant

### Bedford County Extension Leadership Council

Jim Revell  
Audrey Lee  
Yvonne Dinish  
Jeff Powers  
Daniel Hale

## Introduction

The Bedford unit conducted a situation analysis during the calendar year 2013. The situation analysis process, conducted by unit staff in consultation with key stakeholders and VCE volunteers involved reviewing data from the Unit Profile as well as gathering community and resident perspectives on issues in the county. Data and information from these two activities were analyzed and priority issues were identified.

## Unit Profile

Bedford County is located in the central part of Virginia. The County encompasses 754 square miles, making Bedford the 5<sup>th</sup> largest county in land area. The close proximity to two relatively large cities (Lynchburg on the east and Roanoke on the west) and a growing recreational and retirement area at Smith Mountain Lake has led to an increasing population that is on average older and more affluent. Many local attractions including the Blue Ridge Parkway, Peaks of Otter, National D-Day Memorial, Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, and Smith Mountain Lake have made Bedford County a tourist destination.

Many of the aspects in the unit profile show similar trends to past analyses. The population continues to grow; however, the rate of growth is reduced compared with earlier time periods.

Bedford continues to have an older median age than the state average and the percentage of the population greater than 55 years of age has grown from 28.12% in 2007 to 30.97% in 2011. A notable decrease in the percent of the population 25-34 years of age was observed (26.02% and 23.21% respectively). The increase in older age groups leads to questions about health care, lifestyle issues, and senior recreation activities in the county.

As in previous analyses, Bedford households also have a higher median income than the state average and adjoining localities.

The population mix is similar when compared to past analyses, although the percentage of the population classified as white is slightly lower than in recent years (88.44% vs. 90.7%). The African American population remains relatively constant at approximately 6.5% with the balance comprised of very small populations of Asians and Hispanics.

Bedford citizens are becoming more educated. Educational attainment has grown the past three years but is lower than the state and national average. The percent of the population with a high school diploma or some college education has increased the past three years with those over the age of 25 with a high school diploma or higher increasing from 2007 to 2011 (84.1% to 88.1%). However, the percent of residents that have completed a bachelor's degree or higher have remained flat (25.7%) and is below state and national average.

The high school dropout rate has been relatively stable in recent years (5.1-6.5%) and is equal to or slightly lower than the state average.

Agriculture and natural resource industries are important sources of economic activity in Bedford County. Agriculture and Forestry is by far the largest land use in the County. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture data, Bedford County ranks in the top ten among Virginia counties in beef cattle, horses, goats and hay production and generates \$23,647,000 annually in farm sales. According to a recently completed study by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, the total economic impact of agriculture and forestry in Bedford (includes secondary multiplier effects) was \$135,731,096 and the combined industries accounted for 2,889 jobs. According to Virginia Department of Forestry data, Bedford is consistently in the top ten counties with regard to annual timber harvest acreage.

Reversing past trends, Bedford gained farms and acres in farmland from 2002-2007 (the most recent period for which data are available). The average farm size decreased in the same period indicating that the growth is being driven by the increase in small farms (50 acres or less). Land values increased dramatically from 2002-2007 (\$2,920.00 to \$4,727.00). The average age of the farmer remained at 59 from 2002-2007. However, the number of farmers 65 years or older increased during this time frame. This combined with the fact that less young farmers are entering agriculture leads to concerns with regard to where the next generation of farmers will come from. There has been a decrease in traditional farming enterprises such as dairy and row crops; however, non-traditional agriculture enterprises including horses, nursery greenhouse and wine grapes are on the rise.

The unemployment rate is higher than in previous analyses; however, it remains consistently below the region and state average. Top employment sectors are manufacturing, health services and government.

While the adult obesity rate in Bedford is slightly less than the state average, physical inactivity and morbidity are higher. Data reveal that Bedford residents have less access to recreational facilities and healthy food compared to state and national averages. Diet and lifestyle choices affect health and well-being, as do food safety policies and practices. Providing education concerning diet, health issues and nutrition is key to well-being of young families as well as the elderly.

Teenage pregnancies have decreased in recent years and are lower than the state average. Sexually transmitted diseases have increased the past three years but are lower than state average.

The child well-being data indicate that children in poverty have increased in recent years but remains below the state average. The percent of children in single parent households (23%) is lower than state average (30%) but higher than national average (20%). The overall poverty rate is also below state average.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

To assess resident perspectives, a community survey was developed. This survey was distributed widely. In addition to being posted on the Bedford County Government homepage and the Town of Bedford Government homepage, we also sent a survey request directly to the

following – Bedford County Board of Supervisors; Bedford County Administration; all Bedford County employees; the County Planning Commission; the County Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board; the School Board and Superintendent of Schools; the Town Manager and Town Council; public school cafeteria managers; agency partners, the Farm Bureau Young Farmers Association; the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors; and VCE volunteers. One hundred and five (105) surveys were completed. A review of the respondent characteristics confirms it was reasonably representative of the community with regard to race and gender. Demonstrating that we reached a new audience, over 40% of respondents indicated they had never attended a VCE educational program.

An additional source of information that was reviewed included a needs assessment recently conducted by the Bedford Community Health Foundation.

A trend identified in the responses illustrate that many of the top issues are linked and interdisciplinary. Community planning, local government, leadership, environment, and land use are important issues in Bedford. VCE can provide expertise in addressing aspects of these top issues that cut across age and program area. The issues of nutrition and health are wide in scope and once again relate in different ways to each VCE program area. Similarly high rated issues include those relating to agriculture (profitability, sustainability, marketing, local food systems, food safety and farm transition). These individual issues are intrinsically linked and need to be addressed in a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach. With our history of interdisciplinary and regional programming, coupled with our capacity at grassroots community partnership development, VCE is uniquely positioned to respond to these complex issues at the local level.

## Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following priority issues were identified for Bedford County.

### **Profitable Agriculture and Natural Resource Production (Sustainability, Farm Transition, Local Food Systems, Marketing)**

Bedford has a strong agricultural industry generating approximately 23 million dollars in cash receipts annually ranking 34th among Virginia counties (2007 U.S. Agriculture Census). However, many challenges threaten the viability and sustainability of agriculture including residential growth, farm profitability and increasing age of agricultural producers. Issues directly related to the agriculture community identified through the situation analysis and by stakeholders include growth management, farm transition, farm profitability, water quality protection, and raising awareness among the non-farm community about the benefits of agriculture. In a climate of rising input costs, producers need relevant and timely production related information in order to make well informed decisions.

This issue is being addressed by VCE resources. Examples include individual consultations and educational programs on agricultural Best Management Practices; coordinating the Bedford cooperative cattle marketing project which has increased income for participating

producers; facilitating the creation of the Forest Farmer's Market; and securing grant funds from the Virginia Tobacco Commission for regional agri-business initiatives. The creation of the Bedford County Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board, on which VCE has a permanent seat and plays an integral role, demonstrates that there is a desire among citizens and local government to work towards sustaining a viable agricultural industry in Bedford County.

### **Community Planning (Leadership, Local Government, Land Use)**

County government assumes the lead role in addressing community planning. However, VCE can and does play an important role as a partner. Many sub-issues are tied to the larger issue of community planning including leadership development for citizens and elected officials, land use policy planning that facilitates maintaining a viable agricultural land base, and managing the suburban/rural interface as our population grows.

This issue is being addressed to some extent by VCE resources. Offerings include but are not limited to providing unbiased information so citizens and landowners can make well-informed decisions on land use and training more Master Gardener volunteers to deal with an increasing demand for horticultural education. As mentioned previously in the priority issues related to agriculture, the creation of the Bedford County Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board demonstrates that there is a desire to proactively plan for sustaining a viable agricultural industry in our community. Based on the situation analysis, it would appear more effort and collaborations need to be explored to better address this issue.

### **Environment and Water Quality**

As our population grows, there is increasing pressure on our natural resources. The issue of protecting water quality is gaining more visibility with Smith Mountain Lake and tourism becoming growing influences in Bedford County. Residential development results in more fertilizers and pesticides being applied. Without adequate knowledge of proper use, the risk of excess nutrients and pesticides reaching our water is real. In the same way, agriculture can be a source of non-point source pollution.

VCE currently partners with other agencies including the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Bedford County Department of Natural Resources to provide homeowners, contractors and farmers with information they can use to make safe and effective decisions that will help protect our natural resources. We engage our Master Gardener volunteers to extend and enhance our educational reach. Based on the situation analysis, it would appear more effort and collaborations need to be explored to better address this issue.

### **Parenting and Child Development**

Regardless of age, race, marital or parental status, parents face many challenges in raising children. Children are exposed to a wide array of influences; this exposure has increased through advances in technology. Parenting challenges are compounded by the increase in

single parent households as well as dual career families. Consequently, parents spend more time away from their children and rely more on child care. Therefore, there is a need for quality childcare as well as access to programs that will allow parents to increase parenting skills and apply these techniques toward effective family functioning.

Nearly five children die every day in America from abuse and neglect. According to the National Children's Advocacy Center, more than 78% of reported child fatalities as a result of abuse and neglect were caused by one or more of the child victim's parents. Approximately 1,500 teenagers will attempt suicide in the next twenty four hours and twenty percent of teens will experience depression before they reach adulthood. Research has shown that one of the greatest deterrents of child abuse is quality and practical parenting educational programs, and often simple, open and honest conversation between teenagers and parents can prevent a suicide attempt.

This issue is being addressed by VCE resources. For example, *Parenting University* (addressing all 4 year olds attending Bedford Public School System/Head Start) provides parents with information that will help them to better understand their children's growth and development, as well as practical tools to help them manage their children's behavior. This program provides a supportive environment where parents can feel free to share ideas and ask questions.

*"Potpourri for Providers,"* is offered bi-annually as a regional program to child care providers as an on-going in-service training on topics that affect the quality of their child care facilities and assistance in fulfilling state requirements.

### **Financial Management, Small Business Development, Entrepreneurship, Careers**

Research by the Federal Reserve indicates that household debt is at a record high relative to disposable income. As the recession recovery finally sets in for many Americans, Virginia residents rank sixth out of all fifty states for the highest in median revolving debt per borrower. Virginia also has the eleventh highest rate for Chapter 13 bankruptcy filings. Some analysts are concerned that this unprecedented level of debt might pose a risk to the financial health of American households. A high level of indebtedness among households could lead to increased household delinquencies and bankruptcies, which could threaten the health of lenders if loan losses are greater than anticipated. Virginia Cooperative Extension programs have a long history of helping families with credible, unbiased information they can use to better utilize and manage financial resources.

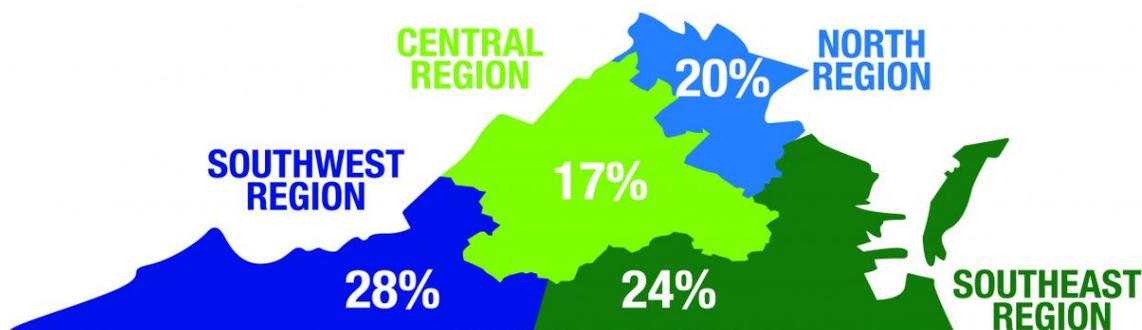
This issue is being addressed to some extent by VCE resources. The Family Consumer Science programs address financial planning process, goal setting, career decisions and entrepreneurship, budgeting and cash flow, credit, insurance, saving/investing. The Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program and Family Nutrition Program both address budgeting of family food dollars. The VCE Bedford office works closely with local government in the area of agricultural economic development. VCE in our region is actively engaged in addressing and promoting local foods systems as economic drivers. The VCE Community Viability program area can provide educational programming to address needs in small business development

and entrepreneurship. A prime example is in educating farmers interested in alternative forms of agriculture and direct marketing to capture more income from this growing consumer base. This issue could be more fully addressed by VCE if additional staff resources were available. Additional efforts need to be explored to better address this issue.

### **Nutrition and Health (Food Safety/Preservation/Aging Population)**

Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. The numbers are even higher in African American and Hispanic communities, where nearly 40% of the children are overweight or obese. If we don't solve this problem, one third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes at some point in their lives. Many others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and asthma. Here in Virginia, more than 60 percent of the adult population is also obese or overweight.

### **Prevalence of obesity/overweight in Virginia youth under age 18**



SOURCE: Virginia Obesity Survey Research Report  
April 2010, Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth

In the United States alone, food borne illness is responsible for about 9,000 deaths each year, with yearly incidences ranging from 24 to 81 million cases and yearly costs ranging from about \$5 to \$25 billion. According to ERS, food safety research focuses on analysis of the human-illness costs of food borne disease and assessment of food safety incentives and activities of industry, consumers, and government. Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential to prevent food borne illness.

The 45+ age groups are consistently growing at a faster rate than average and indications are this growth will continue. As our population grows older, issues related to aging such as health care, nutrition and recreational activities will become increasingly important needs within the community.

This issue is being addressed by VCE resources. VCE plays an important role in providing education concerning diet, health issues and nutrition; this is a key to well-being of young families, as well as the elderly. Funding provided by the Bedford Community Health Foundation enables VCE to continue to serve Bedford Children/Adults in Nutrition/Wellness issues each year. A new community-wide *Energies Bedford* Coalition has embraced working with many partners to address obesity in Bedford County.

Offerings include, but are not limited to Balanced Living with Diabetes, Food Friends, Parent University, Healthy Weight for Healthy Kids, after-school and summer nutrition/cooking classes, PTA/community-wide Nutrition and Health workshops, and school and community health fairs.

VCE implements unbiased educational food safety programs to address consumers as well as businesses in preventing food borne illness. Offerings include but are not limited to providing ServSafe, National Restaurant Association Education Foundation coursework and examinations, occasional quantity food preparation (Cooking for a Crowd), home-based food business and food preservation techniques/workshops (Home Canning, Freezing, Drying Pickling/Jam/Jellies).

### **Development of Life and Decision Making Skills for Youth (Leadership, Science and Technology, Community Involvement)**

As one survey respondent so eloquently stated, “Without healthy, well-educated children to grow up and start families and businesses, Bedford County will not be able to move into the future very well. 4-H is an amazing program that works with all ages.” Another respondent stressed the importance of life skills as “the basic information for the rest of these young people’s lives” and suggested “programs that get the youth involved and interested in becoming a productive contributing adult.” Another respondent stated, “A lot of kids are lacking basic social skills, morals, or respect.” A final respondent stated, “Leaders must be developed young with good decision making capabilities.” While many youth are over-extended and involved with many activities, most of these activities do not meet the criteria that equip youth with life and decision making skills. The skill development mentioned here is the type that would create the future leaders of our community, and give today’s youth the goals and ideals that help them to become self-directed, contributing members of society. This represents a need for meaningful activities for youth that put them in a position to make positive changes, making a difference in their own lives and the lives of community members.

This issue is currently being addressed with VCE 4-H resources. Action to be taken includes expanding already present youth development activities. Young people in the 4-H community learn leadership, citizenship, and a vast array of life skills that benefit them for the rest of their lives. Through school-based, after-school, and community clubs as well as camp settings, 4-H members pledge to build a better community, country, and world. 4-H uses Character Counts!® and the six pillars of character (Caring, Citizenship, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility, and Trustworthiness) to enhance character education in youth. 4-H also focuses a great deal on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education for youth. According to the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, young people in 4-H: report better grades, higher levels

of academic competence, and an elevated level of engagement at school; are nearly two times more likely to plan to go to college; are more likely to pursue future courses or a career in science, engineering, or computer technology; and girls in 4-H are more than twice as likely to participate in science, engineering, or computer technology than their peers.