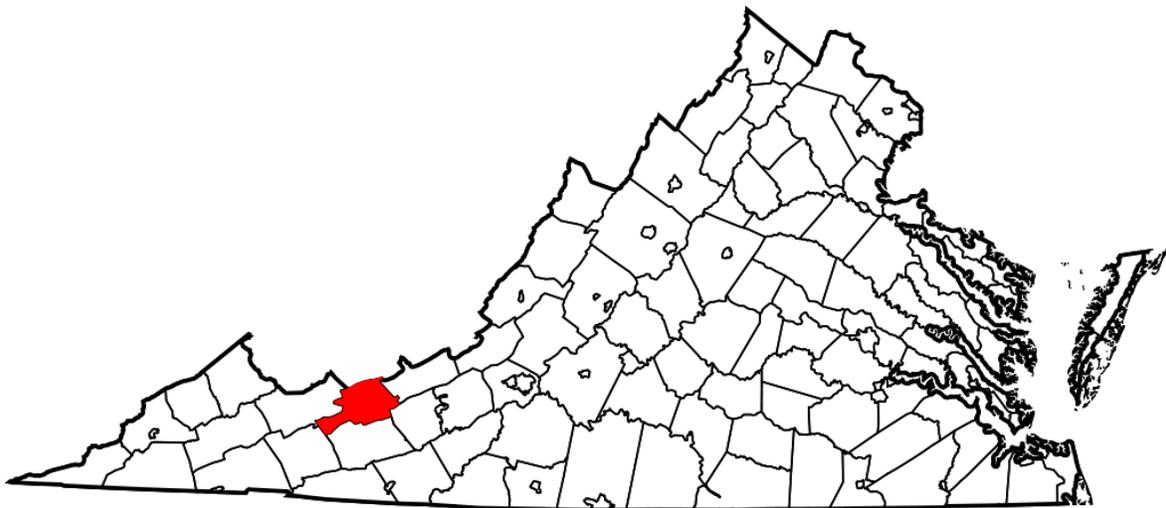




Situation Analysis Report



Bland County

2013

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Introduction

Bland County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the fall of 2013. The situation analysis process was led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and involved the development of a unit profile and resources to help identify county issues. A community survey was developed to gather perspectives from residents, community leaders, and key informants. ELC members distributed surveys and conducted interviews in order to collect information. Key informants included county and school administration, county agencies, social services, youth, and residents from each district in Bland County.

Data was compiled into categories as it related to agriculture, family/consumer science, natural resources, and youth development. Issues were prioritized and addressed to how VCE could implement programs.

Unit Profile

Bland County is located in the southwestern part of Virginia on the border of West Virginia, approximately 70 miles from Blacksburg and approximately 90 miles from Roanoke. Fifty-six mile portion of the Appalachian Trail runs through Bland County.

Bland County is a small rural area in Southwest Virginia covering 369 square miles. It is comprised of small communities and does not have an incorporated town. Nearly 78 percent of the county's total area is wooded with approximately 32 percent of the mountainous portions in the Jefferson National Forest. Of the 6,767 population, approximately 653 of that number are housed in the Bland Correctional Center. Interstate 77 runs through the central part of Bland County.

Bland County is an excellent location for business. Bland County is a rural area whose people continue to practice a traditional work ethic not found in many other areas. The county is known for its two tunnels on Interstate 77 that are located at each end of the county and offer a memorable experience.

The county is strategically positioned on Interstate 77 with the intersection of I-77 and I-81, 13 miles to the south of the county.

In Bland County, 29% of residents were between 35 and 54 years of age in 2011. Also 17% of Bland population was ages 65 years and older compared to Virginia's 12%. The racial composition of Bland County is 95% White, 2% Black or African American, and .13% Hispanic compared to 71% White, 20% Black or African American and 8% Hispanic in Virginia.

In Bland County, the population age 25+ that have completed a bachelor's degree or higher is 11% compared to 34% in Virginia.

The medium household income in 2011 was \$42,864 in Bland County compared to \$62,391 in Virginia. The percentage of population from Bland County living below poverty level between 2007-2011 was 15% compared to 11% in Virginia.

The unemployment rate in Bland County has risen from 5% in 2010 to 6% in 2013. This rate is higher than the state rate at 6.2% and the National Benchmark at 5%.

The number of uninsured people in Bland County has risen from 16% in 2010 to 17% in 2013, surpassing the state percentage at 15%.

Data indicates that the percentage of children living in poverty has risen from 18% in 2010 to 19% in 2013, and now sits above the state and national percentages at 16% and 14% respectively.

Pre-mature death was significantly higher with 8,874 deaths in Bland, as opposed to 6,362 in Virginia and 5,317 deaths nationally per 100k people.

The data indicates that in Bland County adult obesity has increased from 29% in 2010 and 30% in 2013 surpassing the national percentage of 25%.

Physical inactivity in Bland County was 26% compared to 21% nationally.

Data on teen birth rate indicated Bland County had 28 individuals per 1000 in comparison with 32 in Virginia and 21 nationally.

The market value of farms has increased from \$319,409 to \$614,260 between 2002 and 2007.

The value of agricultural products sold has also increased from \$20,536 to \$22,186 between 2002 and 2007.

Sadly, the number of total farms has decreased from 417 to 387 from 2002 to 2007. In addition, the amount of land being farmed has decreased from 94,343 to 80,786 acres.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The Bland County ELC members and VCE Extension staff reviewed issues of the Unit Profile and discussed the needs of the county. A survey was compiled and distributed to personnel in county agencies and key leaders of the community. Surveys were also given to ELC members to gather data in each of the four voting districts. Youth and volunteers were also asked to complete surveys. Key informant interview were conducted by ELC members and Extension staff. Key informants were from the following agencies and organizations: Social Services, Treasurer's office, Sheriff's Department, Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Clerk of Court's Office, and County Supervisor, and County Administration's Office. Community issues were identified and listed to importance and capability of Extension to address.

Priority Issues

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

Issue 1: Economic Development

Economic Development continues to be a major issue in Bland County according to the survey conducted. Residents of the county expressed the need for more jobs, both full and part-time for adults and youth. There is a need to create more attractive employment opportunities so that younger generations will remain in Bland instead of seeking gainful employment elsewhere.

A significant obstacle that prevents economic development is the lack of water/sewage system availability. County officials have obtained grant money to proceed with the development of a waste system to key areas of the county that would be enticing to major businesses. The county government continues to strive toward a solution to this ongoing issue.

Extension can play a role in designing programs to address needs that arise from economic growth.

Issue 2: Drug & Alcohol Abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse is a priority issue for citizens of Bland County. Bland County 4-H offers in-school and after school programming to help improve self-esteem among youth. Character Counts! is taught and reinforced through 4-H and school personnel at all age levels. 4-H also partners with Bland County's Commonwealth Attorney to conduct a mock trial for all seventh grade students. 4-H'ers play roles in a "driving while intoxicated" case brought forth in the courtroom with adult guidance from attorneys and law enforcement. Currently, the DARE program is offered at each school with full-time resource officers in place. County agencies have also conducted a "Choices You Can Live With, Consequences You Have to Deal With Seminar" to inform youth of the dangers of drinking and drugs. VCE will continue to work together in a collaborative effort with school personnel, youth agencies, and law enforcement to help provide enriched educational programs for youth.

Issue 3: Positive Youth Activities

Youth activities and leadership skills were identified as issues facing Bland County youth. Additional positive youth development programs are needed for youth to build self-esteem and develop life skills. Bland County 4-H currently provides several youth activities and adult volunteer opportunities to help foster youth development. Summer Day Camp has been added to 4-H programming to give youth additional educational opportunities during the summer schedule. Unfortunately, Bland County does not have a community recreational facility and must rely on the availability of school facilities for extra-curricular activities. Various sports have been added in the past couple of years for youth to become involved with through school and county recreational avenues. While VCE can be a key player in addressing this issue, the

school system, community groups, and youth agencies must also work together to form programs to enhance and strengthen programs already in place

Issue 4: Agriculture Production/Profitability

Agriculture Production/Profitability continues to rise to the top of the list for issues in Bland County. According to the Ag Census for Bland County, farm expenses per farm have increased from \$16,647 to \$20,049 between 2002 and 2007. Inputs like feed, fertilizer, and fuel tend to be what drives this increase in farm expenses. Although producers have very little control over these costs, they are able to control how they manage their operations to minimize the amount of inputs needed. Through extension programming we offer multiple educational opportunities like the Farm Management Series, Master Cattlemen's, the Multi-flora Rose Control Program, BQA Training/ Certification, Summer Beef Field Day, Private Pesticide Applicator testing and recertification, forage and soil sampling, weed identification and control, on-site farm visits.

Issue 5: Farmland Preservation/Transition/Youth involvement

A second topic that arose from our surveys was the need to protect and pass on farmland to future generations. There has been a slow yet still concerning decline in the number of farms in Bland County. There has been a -7% change from 417 in 2002 to 387 in 2007. This issue correlates directly to the profitability issue outlined above. Rising input costs which effect a farmer's bottom-line can be attributed to this issue (addressed above). Another cause is the lack of planning when it comes to transitioning farms to future generations. Lastly, there is great concern for the disconnect that we see between younger generations and their involvement/knowledge or lack thereof with agriculture. Our Extension Unit is addressing this issue through programming such as the Farm Management Series where we have offered an estate planning workshop. We are also working to encourage our county youth to be more involved through the development of a youth livestock/horse 4-H club, Youth Ag Field Days, and our Summer Ag Day Camp, all of which have been a combined effort between agents and staff.