



Situation Analysis Report

Brunswick County

2013

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Introduction

Brunswick County conducted a situation analysis in 2013. The situation analysis process was led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and involved an analysis of the Brunswick County Unit Profile as well as gathering resident perspectives on problems, issues and concerns in the county. Data and information from these two activities were analyzed by the ELC and priority issues were identified.

The ELC, including Extension Agents, met four times during the situation analysis process. At the first meeting in August, an overview of the situation analysis process was covered. An initial situation analysis plan was developed that included tasks and timelines for ELC members and Extension Agents. Using the Unit Profile developed by Virginia Cooperative Extension, ELC members and Extension Agents analyzed the data sets and identified areas in which additional information was needed to get an accurate snapshot of the county. A number of issues were identified from this initial look at the county. Based on these findings, the ELC determined that in the interest of time, the best way to gather perspectives from residents was to conduct a community survey.

At the October meeting of the ELC, new members were oriented to the situation analysis process and a community survey tool developed by Extension Agents was piloted. ELC members assigned to gather additional data for the unit profile shared their findings including additional crop data and health statistics specific to Brunswick County.

The community survey was conducted from mid-October through mid-November. A focus group was also conducted to get perspectives from Brunswick's younger residents. Extension Agents met prior to the final ELC meeting to compile results from the survey and focus group. At the November meeting of the ELC, results from 75 surveys and the focus group (7 participants) were presented and discussed. Using the survey results and input from the focus group, the top priority issues for Brunswick County were identified including those that could and should be addressed by Extension and those that were outside the scope of Extension's mission.

Unit Profile

Brunswick County, formed in 1720, lies in south-central Virginia on the North Carolina border. The county seat, Lawrenceville, is 64 miles southwest of Richmond and 75 miles northeast of Raleigh. The county has three incorporated towns – Lawrenceville, Alberta and Brodnax. Brunswick County consists of generally flat or gently rolling land. The Tobacco Heritage Trail, built on abandoned railroads through these gently rolling hills for walkers, runners, bicyclists and equestrians, is nearing completion.

The **population** of Brunswick County according to the 2010 census totaled 17,434. This shows a 5% decrease from the previous census. The racial breakdown is 40% white and 57% black or African American.

Agriculture remains prominent in the county's **economy** with tobacco being the number one cash crop. The number of acres of tobacco planted has surpassed the acreage planted prior to the buy-out in 2004 but the overall number of producers growing tobacco has decreased. With forests covering three-quarters of the county's total land area, the major **industry** in Brunswick is related to wood products.

The top 5 **employers** in Brunswick County include the public school system, a community college, 2 remaining prisons and county government. The negative impacts caused by the closure of Brunswick Correction Center in 2009 were compounded by the closure of neighboring Mecklenburg Correctional Center in 2012. The 10.6% unemployment rate in Brunswick is almost double the state unemployment rate.

Construction of the Brunswick County Power Station by Dominion Virginia Power – a 1,358 megawatt natural gas-fired plant – is under way. Approximately 800 – 1000 workers will be on site during the peak of the construction in the summer of 2014. Forty permanent jobs will be created once this facility is in operation which is projected for 2016. Estimated economic impacts on Brunswick are \$73 million per year during construction and \$30 million per year when the project is completed.

Twelve percent of Brunswick adults have an 8th grade or less **education** compared to the state average of 5%. In the public education system, there is 1 high school, 1 middle school and 3 elementary schools. Due to low test scores, a 4th elementary school, Sturgeon Elementary, was closed in July of 2006 and merged with Red Oak Elementary. There is also a private school, Brunswick Academy, located near Lawrenceville. Other Brunswick families send their children to public and private schools outside the county. State funding to Brunswick public schools declined due to a decrease in the student population. School budget deficits are currently being addressed.

A campus of Southside Virginia Community College is located in the northern part of Brunswick County. Saint Paul's College, founded in 1888 in Lawrenceville, recently lost its accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges. As a result, Saint Paul's College closed on June 30, 2013.

Data on Brunswick **households** indicates that a significant number of children (51%) live in single-parent households. The percentage of children living in poverty has increased from 26% to 31% just within the last 3 years. This is almost twice the state rate.

Health issues continue to plague residents of Brunswick County at rates higher than other parts of Virginia including heart disease, cancer and diabetes. From 2010 to 2013, the adult obesity rate in Brunswick County increased from 31% to 36%.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The following groups were targeted through a community survey to get resident and leaders' perspectives on problems, issues and concerns: the Brunswick Chamber of Commerce, Lawrenceville Rotary Club, Southside Senior Citizen Center, and Brunswick Extension Leadership Council. Individual ELC members also collected additional perspectives by getting residents outside the targeted groups to complete community surveys.

A focus group was conducted by the 4-H Extension Agent with the Brunswick 4-H Teen Club to explore and identify issues and problems perceived by younger residents. Seven teens attended the session and provided input. Issues centered on education, the local economy, and lack of activities and amenities. Comments regarding education included substandard elementary schools, bad teachers, loss of dual enrollment classes, teaching to SOL tests rather than teaching the subject, students aren't trained on a competitive level, bullying, drugs, little diversity, and not enough programs for outstanding students to showcase their talents. In terms of economics, teens expressed concerns that small businesses do not last, the jobs to people ratio is "off," and many of our families are low income and have poor housing. Teens shared that there is nothing to do, no exposure, not enough community things, and felt that people in Brunswick were closed minded. On a positive note, the teens felt their county was very family oriented and described Brunswick County as quiet, peaceful, serene and quaint. Their perceptions included a low crime rate, good sports programs for youth, senior citizens that supported Brunswick County, and not far from major towns/cities.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile, survey and focus group results, the following top priority issues were identified for Brunswick County.

Issue 1: Education

Issue 2: Small Business Development

Issue 3: Health

Issue 4: Family and Senior Citizens

Issue 5: Agriculture Awareness

Issue 6: Land Use

Issue 7: Sustainable Agriculture

Issue 8: Recreation

Issue 9: Transportation

After discussing the mission of Virginia Cooperative Extension, the ELC identified which issues Brunswick Extension can and should address and which issues Brunswick Extension cannot and/or should not address. The ELC concluded that Brunswick Extension should not devote resources to Recreation and Transportation but working with partners could address the top 7. Potential partners included Public and Private Schools, Virginia's Growth Alliance and Stronger Economies Together (SET), Local Government, Health Department, Senior Citizen Groups, Department of Social Service, the Faith Based Community, and the Farm Service Agency.

The ELC also concluded that issues 5, 6, and 7 (agriculture awareness, land use and sustainable agriculture) should be merged into one overall issue to better signify the importance and value of agriculture to the history and economy of Brunswick County thereby making it the highest priority issue. The group also suggested using the words "profitability" or "viability" rather than "sustainable" for issue 7.

Several "other" issues surfaced in the survey including governmental leadership, government waste, tourism, high speed internet and community organizations working together to improve county. ELC members agreed that extension resources should not be devoted to these issues.

ELC members felt strongly and compassionately that we need to highlight the good things about Brunswick County in addition to the problems, issues and concerns. There are examples of outstanding young people who decided to make Brunswick their home and are successful in their chosen jobs and careers. Some are even working in the field of agriculture. As summed up best by the teens during the focus group, Brunswick is a quiet, peaceful, serene and quaint place to raise a family.