



## Cumberland Extension Office 2023 Situation Analysis Report

*Linda Eanes, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development; Amber Taylor, Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources,  
Unit Coordinator; Dana Plumley, Unit Administrative Assistant*



Summary of community issues and Extension office response

<b>Priority Issue</b>	<b>Planned Unit Response</b>
<p>Limited access to healthy food options due to proximity to a large grocery store, limited food production knowledge/capacity, lack of overall support for local food production, and lack of infrastructure/information for farm market options</p>	<p>Based on the results from this needs assessment, it is our plan to offer more home food preservation trainings for adults and youth in the area. We plan to continue the youth cooking programs offered in partnership with CuCPS. We will continue to share educational information through the pick-ups at the local food pantry. The response approach to this issue will be an interdisciplinary effort between 4-H, ANR, FCS from other units, and other partnering agencies.</p>
<p>Lack of resources/volunteers/funding/commitment to youth mental health, opioid misuse, proactive programs, and life skill development.</p>	<p>Cumberland 4-H will continue to address issues of Health and Wellness through our cooking and nutrition, gardening and farm to table programming recognizing that Cumberland is a food desert and that many of the statistics related to health are below the state and national averages. In Cumberland, 24% of our youth live in poverty compared to the 10.2% state average. .Financial Management, Budgeting, Career Building programming will give youth tools and skills to make a better life for themselves</p>
<p>Absence of agriculture, natural resources, and environmental education for youth, including farm-to-school programming.</p>	<p>Based on the results from this needs assessment, it is our plan to continue current programs related to this effort. Those include programs like Wildlife Detective Camp, Winter in the Woods Camp, Meaningful Watershed Experience events, and Youth Livestock Programs. It is our plan to also offer new programs such as field days for youth with a farm-to-school emphasis in partnership with our local soil and water conservation district. Including farm-to-table aspects into programs for adults is another way we plan to address this issue.</p>
<p>Increases in production costs and decrease in general public support &amp; education have caused a decrease in production capacity, profitability, and ability to pass farms on to the next generation.</p>	<p>After discussion with the Cumberland ELC, it was decided that Cumberland VCE should continue their current efforts towards this issue and also expand their reach through different programming avenues. Helping producers to find funding for new technologies, encouraging participation in value-added programs, working through succession planning materials, and being able to efficiently cut costs and increase profits will continue to be important aspects of agricultural programming going forward.</p>



## Introduction

The Cumberland Extension Office revised our unit's Situation Analysis in 2023. Several methods of collecting data and information were utilized. Since 2018, the previous Extension Leadership Council (ELC) was disbanded due to lack of activity at the state level. In 2023, the Cumberland ELC was revitalized with new members and the initial purpose of collecting data for this report. A digital survey was created at the state level and distributed to localities to use. The survey asked respondents to identify local issues that Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) should focus their programming efforts on. Issues listed in the survey were selected based on program area. In addition to the effort-based questions, they were asked for other generic demographic information.

The main avenue utilized to promote Extension programming is through email. There are 2 email distribution lists; 4-H and Youth Development and Agriculture and Natural Resources, which total 741 recipients. In addition to sending a link to the digital survey through our email distribution lists, the link was also shared by email with the Board of Supervisors, county employees, public school system, Cumberland Department of Social Services, Peter Francisco Soil and Water board members and program participants, Buckingham Cattlemen's Association members, and Cumberland Farm Bureau board members. The survey was posted on our Cumberland VCE website ([cumberland.ext.vt.edu](http://cumberland.ext.vt.edu)) and on the office social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram). Cumberland VCE partnered with the Cumberland Public Library to create a stationary display with paper surveys and a QR code option for access to the digital survey to share with library patrons. In addition, hard copies were also distributed Cumberland ELC members during a quarterly meeting, to patrons that visited the office, program participants (over 18), the monthly mobile food bank participants, and other individuals present at Extension sponsored events.

There were 58 total responses to the survey. While that is not an accurate representation of the total population, there was seemingly accurate distribution between the categories that was representative of the population of Cumberland County. Upon further data analysis and discussion with our ELC, we were able to confirm four (4) priority issues listed from the survey:

Limited access to healthy food options due to the lack of a grocery store within the county, limited food production knowledge/capacity, lack of overall support for local food production, and lack of infrastructure/information for farm market options.

Lack of resources/volunteers/funding/commitment/consistency to youth mental health, opioid misuse, proactive programs, and skill development.

Absence of agriculture, natural resources, and environmental education for youth, including farm-to-school programming.

Increases in production costs and decrease in public support & education have caused a decrease in production capacity, profitability, and ability to pass farms on to the next generation.

The 4 priority issues have been expanded to encompass additional issues mentioned throughout the survey results.

# Unit Profile

## Geography

The County of Cumberland is rural and covers an area of roughly 297 square miles, with sparsely developed residences, community businesses and churches, interspersed in a gently rolling, central piedmont landscape. The County has one (1) incorporated area, the Town of Farmville, which extends into southern Cumberland County. In approximate terms, Cumberland County measures 33 miles from the north to the south and 12 miles from the east to the west. The current boundaries defining Cumberland County include the Appomattox River on the south, separating Cumberland County from the counties of Amelia and Prince Edward. On the north, the James River separates Cumberland County from the counties of Fluvanna and Goochland. The west and east boundaries separating Cumberland County from the counties of Buckingham and Powhatan are straight surveyed lines not corresponding to physical features. These boundaries contain a land area of 298.5. This location is a strategic area accessible to metropolitan areas. To the east is Richmond, to the northwest is Charlottesville, and to the southwest is Lynchburg. Interstate systems to the north and east open the county up to markets in other areas.

Cumberland County is part of Planning District 14 which is comprised of Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway, and Prince Edward Counties. The Commonwealth Regional Council is one of 21 planning district commissions within the Commonwealth of Virginia that serves Planning District 14.

## Population Demographics

Cumberland is a sparsely populated area of 297.46 square miles with a population of 9,669 according to the 2020 U.S. Census. This equates to approximately 32.5 people per square mile, which is a decrease of 1.37% since 2010. The 2020 U.S. Census categorized the breakdown by individuals under the age of 18 (24.2%), individuals 65 and older (23.6%) and males making up the majority (50.45%) of the population. In 2020, race/ethnicity were broken down in the following categories: White (63.63%), Black/African American (30.48%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.9%), Asian (0.78%), other races (0.50%) those with 2 or more races (4.53%), and Hispanic/Latino (1.16%) for the population of Cumberland County.

## Employment & Education

Cumberland County School Board holds the largest number of employees within the county with Local Government coming in second making up 30.1% of the total employment population within the county. With that being said, the majority of Cumberland County residents venture outside of the county for work. As of 2020, the median household income was \$57,658.00 which is below the state median income of \$80,963. The current employment percentage is 62.4% and the unemployment rate has increased from 3.0% (2021) to 4.3% (2023) which is above the state average of 3.9%. The average household spends approximately 27% of their income on childcare costs. The percentage of high school graduates increased from 81% (2017) to 88.03% (2021). The percentage of individuals holding a bachelor's degree also increased from 14.88% (2019) to 17.35% (2021).

## Health

According to countyhealthrankings.org in 2023, 16% of Cumberland County residents are deemed in poor to fair health. Many of the health issues in the county can be related to the following health behaviors: adult obesity (39%), physical inactivity (25%), adult smoking (19%), and excessive drinking

(18%). All of the percentages for those parameters listed are above the state averages. 10% of individuals within the county do not have health insurance. There are a limited number of primary care physicians in the area with a ratio of 2480:1. Mental health providers are also limited to 1940:1. Both of these ratios are well above the state and national averages. 24% of the children within the county are considered impoverished which is above the state average of 13%. In Cumberland in 2020, 9% of the population did not have access to a reliable food source. Additionally, 19% of the population had low incomes and did not live close enough to a grocery store, thus limiting their access to healthy foods.

## Agriculture and Natural Resources

Data for this section was taken from the 2017 Census of Agriculture. There are a total of 264 farms in Cumberland County as of 2017. The average farm size is around 200 acres and 96% are family farms. Majority (90%) of agricultural sales in Cumberland come from livestock, poultry, and livestock products, with 10% of sales coming from crops. Majority (61%) of agriculture producers in the county are male with 85% of the producer population being over the age of 35. Cumberland County is home to the Cumberland State Forest which is Virginia’s second largest state forest encompassing over 16,000 acres (majority in Cumberland County). The forest is home to a mixture of pine and hardwood timber and 121 miles of waterways, including the Willis River. Timber is an additional agricultural commodity in Cumberland, that still is a major portion of agricultural sales.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

There were 58 total responses to the local needs assessment survey. Our unit level needs assessment survey determined a slightly different set issues that our unit should focus on. There is a lot of similarities in relation to food production issues across our locality and the state. However, our locality placed an emphasis on youth skill development and agriculture and natural resource education, preservation, and profitability.

The 2023 State Level Needs Assessment was conducted in March of 2023. VCE sampled a representative sample of Virginia residents. Respondents were given a list of issues and asked to rank them based on the amount of effort VCE should give each issue. The top 5 issues that ranked under the “high” or “very high” issue category can be seen in Figure 1. The results from the statewide needs assessment are similar in some respects but differ from the top “high” & “very high” effort issues determined by our survey respondents.

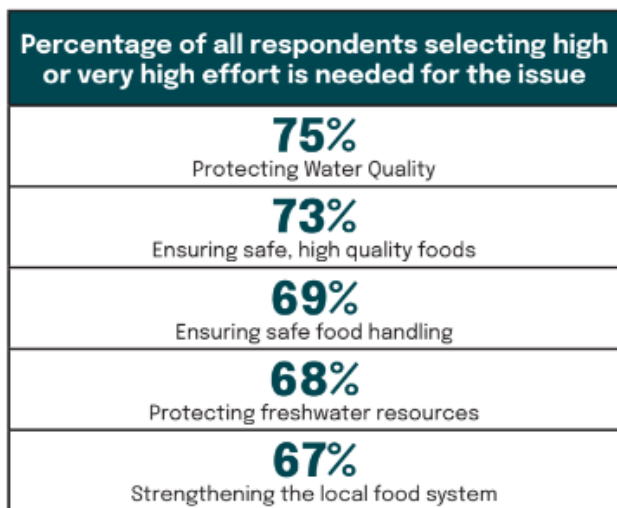


Figure 1: Top 5 issues in 2023 statewide needs assessment survey

# Community Issues

The results of the local needs assessment were analyzed by office staff and were discussed with ELC members. Unit staff used the top selections listed in every category breakdown to come up with a list of four combined/similar issues. In our 4th quarter ELC meeting, the top 4 priority issues were presented to the ELC members and discussed. As a result of the discussion, new program ideas and methods to reach all audiences were created. It was also discussed that many of the current programs already address the issues presented, and efforts to continue and maintain these programs should continue.

## **1. Limited access to healthy food options due to proximity to a large grocery store, limited food production knowledge/capacity, lack of overall support for local food production, and lack of infrastructure/information for farm market options.**

Cumberland County is considered a food desert. USDA defines a food desert as “a tract with at least 500 people or 33% of the population living within 10 miles (for rural area) from the nearest market, supercenter, or large grocery store”. A large majority of the county’s population travels outside of the county to surrounding areas (Buckingham, Cumberland, Prince Edward, & Amelia) to shop for groceries and other services. Many households have gardens that provide them food, as their families have done for generations. Newer generations and those migrating into the county do not have the knowledge base for food production. There is also a lack of infrastructure to start up a farmer’s market. Support for these efforts need to come from all agencies, local government, and local partners within the county.

The Cumberland Extension Office currently works to provide programs related to food production. Recently, our agriculture and natural resources extension agent was certified and received resources to teach home food preservation courses. Through this we are also able to test pressure canners for homeowners. Cumberland VCE offers gardening programs and informational workshops in partnership with local garden clubs and the Heart of Virginia Master Gardeners. Our office also supports the local food pantry that serves senior citizens and those with limited incomes. We share educational information and resources during their weekly and monthly food distribution days.

Based on the results from this needs assessment, it is our plan to offer more home food preservation trainings for adults and youth in the area. We plan to continue the youth cooking programs offered in partnership with CuCPS. We will continue to share educational information through the pick-ups at the local food pantry. The response approach to this issue will be an interdisciplinary effort between 4-H, ANR, FCS from other units, and other partnering agencies.

## **1. Lack of resources/volunteers/funding/commitment/consistency to youth mental health, opioid misuse, proactive programs, and skill development.**

During our last ELC meeting, other issues emerged that were not identified through the survey. Member of the ELC expressed concern over substance abuse and youth mental health. In order to address these emerging issues, Extension would need to secure partners that are specialized in this area. Curriculums have been written, such as Health Rocks and Your Thoughts Matter, and Mindfulness Resources that we could offer to supplement what partners are already doing within the community. There is a need to train our teen and adult volunteers in mental health first aid as more difficult situations have occurred during the last 2 years of 4-H programming. Another area affecting youth mental health is the increased pressure of social media and the increased use of technology. According to the Mayo Clinic Health System, “Too much screen time has been linked to obesity, insomnia, behavioral problems, loss of social skills, violence, less time for play, anxiety, depression and difficulty with work or school.” 4-H

can partner with other specialized professionals to address youth mental health needs, and offer educational opportunities utilizing available curriculum.

Cumberland 4-H will continue to address issues of Health and Wellness through our cooking and nutrition, gardening and farm to table programming recognizing that Cumberland is a food desert and that many of the statistics related to health are below the state and national averages. In Cumberland, 24% of our youth live in poverty, which is above the state average of 10.2%. Financial Management, Budgeting, Career Building programming will give youth tools and skills to make a better life for themselves.

## **2. Absence of agriculture, natural resources, and environmental education for youth, including farm-to-school programming.**

Results of the needs assessment survey indicated that there was an increased need for agriculture, natural resource, and environmental literacy among youth and adults. This education includes an emphasis on farm-to-school education. Youth and adults in society today experience a disconnect between the production and consumption of a food product. Many are unaware that Virginia Cooperative Extension exists as an educational resource to the public. In order for agriculture to remain relevant to civilization, it is important to continually educate each generation of the general public on the importance of production agriculture.

A discussion was had by our ELC and unit staff that indicated the resources, time, and man power needed to conduct a quality farm to school program were hard to come by. In order to put on a successful program for youth, there would need to be buy-in from school administration and teachers. The education curriculum offered would need to meet certain SOLs in order for it to be considered by most public schools.

Based on the results from this needs assessment, it is our plan to continue current programs related to this effort. Those include programs like Wildlife Detective Camp, Winter in the Woods Camp, Meaningful Watershed Experience events, and Youth Livestock Programs. It is our plan to also offer new programs such as field days for youth with a farm-to-school emphasis in partnership with our local soil and water conservation district. Including farm-to-table aspects into programs for adults is another way we plan to address this issue.

## **3. Increases in production costs and decrease in general public support & education have caused a decrease in production capacity, profitability, and ability to pass farms on to the next generation.**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation rates have soared and prices of nearly everything needed to operate a farm on a yearly basis have increased. This continual increase in input prices has limited the production capacity of producers in Cumberland County. Producers are not able to produce the quality or quantity of the products as before. If producers were able to maintain production capacity, then they likely experienced a decrease in profitability of their operation. Lack of overall knowledge and understanding of agricultural production practices has created an unwanted gap in public support and preservation of agricultural operations. More and more family farming operations are being sold off and subdivided instead of being passed on to the next generation. As prices and inflation continue to rise, farms will continue to be sold primarily because of affordability.

It is the job of Virginia Cooperative Extension agents to educate producers and consumers, alike, to make informed decisions about the world around them. VCE has worked hard over the years to develop farm transition programs which helps owners have the necessary conversations with their future farming generations about farm succession. Agents in Cumberland County and across the state work tirelessly to bring the research from the University to the hands of the producer and the consumer. Cumberland VCE currently works to address this issue through all programs that come through the office.

After discussion with the Cumberland ELC, it was decided that Cumberland VCE should continue their current efforts towards this issue and expand their reach through different programming avenues. Helping producers to find funding for new technologies, encouraging participation in value-added programs, working through succession planning materials, and being able to efficiently cut costs and increase profits will continue to be important aspects of agricultural programming going forward.

## **Future Programming to Address Community Issues**

There are many programs that the Cumberland Extension Office conducts that will continue in the future to address the issues presented through the local needs assessment survey. There are also a number of new programming topics and methods that will need to be utilized in order to address all aspects of the issues presented. Our current partners are our greatest program supporters, but we will need to expand our reach to other community partners that are currently not utilized by our office. The use of all available partners will one of the measures of success of our programming efforts.

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