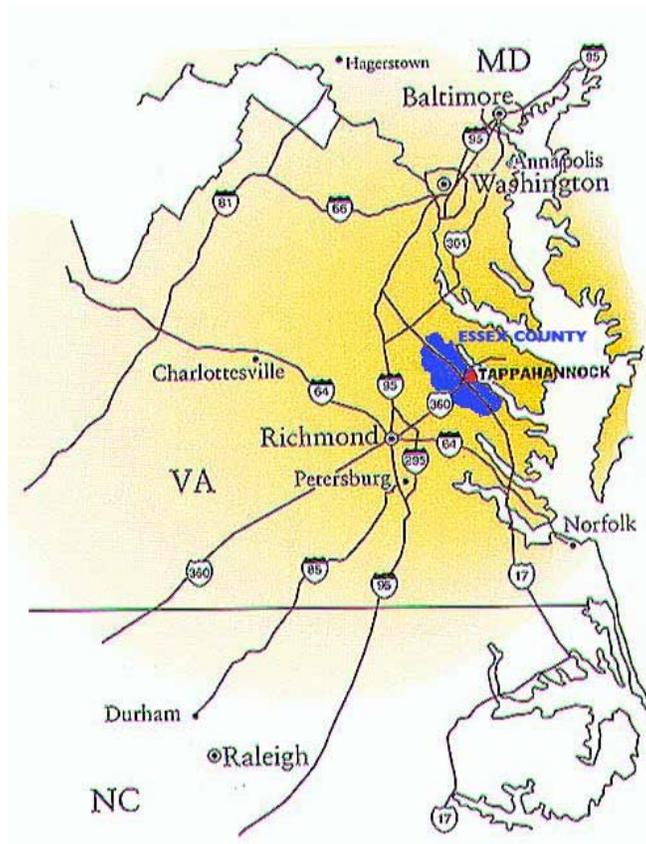




# Situation Analysis Report



## Essex County

# 2013

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## Introduction

During the fall of 2013, the Essex County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and extension staff conducted a situation analysis. The purpose of conducting the analysis was to help identify key issues in the county that extension staff might be able to address through its educational programs. The council met with extension staff in October. Using data sets from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website, a unit profile for the county and community survey were developed. Key points from the unit profile were also discussed. The community survey included 42 issues and asked respondents to rank the importance of each issue. After the issues were identified, it was decided the most cost effective and efficient method for obtaining information from residents was to utilize the Qualtrics survey tool. The link to the survey was sent directly to about 75 residents, including county administrators and members of the board of supervisors, public school principals and members of the school board, parents/guardians of 4-H club members, key agricultural/natural resource professionals, and pastors at local churches. The link to the survey was also made available on the Essex VCE public website, the Essex County website, and the local newspaper. As of November 22, 2013, twenty-eight residents responded to the survey. Key findings from the unit profile and the survey results were analyzed, and the top priority issues for Essex County identified, including those that could be addressed with current VCE resources and those that were outside the scope of current VCE resources.

## Unit Profile

Essex County is a rural county of just over 11,000 people and is located about 45 miles northeast of Richmond, Virginia. Centrally located in Essex County is the town of Tappahannock, which has a population of about 1,800 people. The town serves as a main shopping hub for about 50,000 people. Census data from 2007 and 2011 showed that the population of the county increased by about 2% for that time period.

From 2007 to 2011, the number of residents 60 years and older remained about 25%, while the total number of 4-H youth age individuals (5-19 years old) increased slightly.

The racial make-up of the county showed slight changes from 2007 to 2011. The white and the black populations remained about the same. As of 2011, these two racial groups make up just over 97% of the county's population (white=58.8% and black=38.6%). The biggest populations change was that the Hispanic population dropped from 2.8% to 1.2% from 2007 to 2011.

From 2007 to 2011, the median household income dropped from \$46,478 to \$44,581, while the mean household income dropped from 57,118 to 54,377. Children living in poverty increased from 19% to 25% while the statewide average was 16% in 2011. The number of children living in single parent homes was 39%. Financial planning classes through VCE might be able to assist with this problem area.

For 2013, adult obesity stood at 33% compared to 28% for the state, while sexually transmitted infections increased from 442 per 100,000 in 2010 to 771 per 100,000 in 2013. On a positive health care note, diabetic screening stood at 90% compared to 86% for the state, and mammography screening was 72% compared to 66% for the state.

In reviewing the unit profile, another concern is the high school dropout rate, which increased from 18% in 2007 to 20% in 2011, about 7% above the state average.

As of August 2013, the unemployment rate for the county was 6.9% compared to 5.6% statewide. Retail sales and the service industry provide over half of the jobs in the county.

A review of agricultural data from the 2007 Ag Census showed that there were 102 total farms with a total acreage of 53,346. Cash grains and soybeans account for most of the crop sales. The county generally ranks in the top 5 in the state for corn, soybean, barley, and wheat production. USDA NASS data from 2011 showed crop acreages as follows: barley—5,100 acres, corn—18,600 acres, soybeans 18,700 acres, and wheat 10,600 acres. There is also some nursery and grape production in the county, but they are on limited acreages. Beef cattle remain the largest livestock enterprise with about 1,200 head. Most operations are cow-calf operations.

The amount of land farmed has remained relatively constant, but development pressure probably will become more of an issue in the near future. Large farm equipment and continuous no-tillage cropping systems are allowing farmers to farm more acres. As a result, it is now estimated that less than 20 farm operations in the county now farm about 80% of the land.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

During the initial ELC meeting, council members noted the following after reviewing the Essex Unit profile.

- The number of 4-H age youth in county increased by about 7.5% from 2007 to 2011
- About 55% of the households in the county have incomes of \$50,000 or less
- From 2007 to 2011, median household income decreased by 4.5% and mean household income decreased by 4.8%
- Unemployment rate decreased from about 10% in 2010 to 6.9% in August 2013, and was still well above the state average
- 39% of children are currently living raised in single family homes, and the number of children living in poverty increased from 19% in 2010 to 25% in 2013.
- The high school drop-out rate currently stands at just over 20%

The qualtrics survey as described in the introduction was used to gather information.

Twenty-eight residents completed the survey. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of forty-two issues and also given the opportunity to add additional issues.

It is interesting to note that from the respondents' answers all of the issues overall ranked at least someone important with all issues receiving a mean ranking of over 4.0

The report summarizing the results of the qualtrics survey was generated and distributed to the ELC for input into prioritizing issues. Based on the unit profile and results of the survey, issues were prioritized as follows.

## **Priority Issues**

### **Issue 1: Water Quality/Quantity and other Environmental Quality/Issues**

Essex County's proximity to the Chesapeake Bay makes water quality an issue, and this issue received the highest overall mean ranking from survey respondents. Environment, natural resource production/profitability also ranked high. Many recent reports on the progress of cleaning up the bay indicate that efforts are falling short. These reports have cited a need for additional cost-share funding to install additional best management practices (BMP's) on farms. Grain producers do not currently face stiff environmental regulations, but there is concern that more regulations might be passed. As the population in the area increases, educational programs on the proper use of fertilizer in the home landscape will become more important.

In cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District, VCE has played a vital role in promoting BMP's, such as no-till crop production and split nitrogen application on wheat and corn to help with environmental protection. We have also worked with farmers to show them the most efficient fertilizer rates when using organic fertilizers, such as bio-solids and poultry litter. Over the past 2 years, the local extension office has been working on variable rate nitrogen applications on a corn as a method for more efficiently using nitrogen in corn production. Soil analysis is offered through Virginia Tech, and historically, Essex County farmers have made good use of this service.

The FCS agent serving the planning district is currently working with the Essex County Resource Council on environmental issues. He and the agricultural agent, working in cooperation with the Biological Systems Engineering Department at Virginia Tech and other government agencies, will be hold a drinking water clinic and testing program in the summer of 2014.

### **Issue 2: Activities for Youth**

In the survey, there were several issues related to youth. Under youth activities, six residents rated the issue as somewhat important, while 19 respondents rated it very important. Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth, Teen Community Involvement, and Teen Leadership also

ranked relatively high. Programs currently available to youth in the county include 4-H programs, youth athletic programs, such as Little League, and programs offered through the Essex County Parks and Recreation Department.

Also tied directly to some of the youth issues, parenting was ranked as a high priority with twenty respondents ranking it very important, and several respondents ranking it as a top five issue.

Currently, VCE is limited in its ability to expand youth programs. Our coordinator position is part-time and totally funded by the county, and we are very appreciative of the county's support. Expanding our current programs would rely greatly on volunteers. 4-H camp and the 4-H livestock club address life skills/decision making for youth, and we have about 50 participants in those programs annually. Camp also helps develop teen leadership as teen leaders must undergo 20 hours of training prior to attending camp, and they take on major responsibilities at camp. We take 6-10 teen leaders to camp each year.

### **Issue 3: Agricultural Marketing, Profitability, and Sustainability/Preservation**

The 2007 Ag Census for Essex County showed that over 53,000 acres in the county are in farms so agriculture remains an important part of the local economy. Moreover, agricultural profitability is also tied to population growth. As long as the agricultural economy is healthy, farmers and other landowners are less likely to sell land for development purposes. In the survey, Agriculture Marketing, Agriculture Production/Profitability, and Agriculture Sustainability/Preservation were separate issues. All three ranked very important overall, and all three are intertwined. Good marketing and production practices can increase overall profitability, which helps with preservation and economic sustainability. Landowners in Essex County are very interested in farmland preservation as currently there are over 20,000 acres in conservation easements. Essex County adopted land-use taxation a few years ago and this practice has also helped with farmland preservation, but not all citizens are in favor of this practice. Some citizens mentioned the importance of educating the public about the importance of farming and land use.

Local ANR agents spend much of their time trying to address this issue in general terms. All of the crops conferences, field days, and marketing meetings are provided in an effort to help with profitability. The local agent often refers to "double E" extension programming, economically and environmentally sustainable, that VCE conducts in this area. However, the ability to provide more one-on-one assistance would be very helpful in this area. In addition, now would be a good time for VCE to provide more personnel to explore ways to make our traditional crops become more "value-added" and to explore other crops/enterprises that could be profitable. If VCE is to continue providing effective assistance and educational programs to large soybean and grain producers, the agency must allow agents working with those producers to be specialized. VCE actively participates in "agricultural awareness" events in local schools and provides presentations on agriculture to civic and other organizations.

#### **Issue 4: Community Services**

Overall a lack of community services ranked high in the survey, receiving a mean score of 4.56 with 19 respondents rating the issue as very important. A few citizens mentioned the need for a park in Tappahannock. Some respondents noted the high level of poverty in the county and the fact that social services does not always have the resources to provide needed services, especially during the times of government cut-backs.

VCE probably cannot do a lot directly to address this issue. We can play a role, however, in offering some assistance in the area of financial management. The FCS agent currently works with the Department of Social Services to provide financial planning workshops to residents. All staff worked in cooperation with volunteers to host the first Essex County “Reality Store” for eighth grade students in 2013. This program was well received and will be held again in 2014.

#### **Issue 5: Nutrition and Obesity**

Nutrition and obesity both ranked as high priority issues and they are related. Poor food choices and lack of exercise lead to obesity, which is often a cause of chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and coronary heart disease. Adult obesity is on the increase in the county and physical inactivity stands at 29%. One respondent said “nutrition and obesity are a growing problem. Correct eating habits should start early and that will result in a longer and happier life, while another respondent stated “obesity leads to numerous health problems. Stress healthy living beginning in elementary school.”

VCE currently works on this issue through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). We currently have an EFNEP program assistant who works with over 200 students delivering nutrition education. With limited staff in family and consumer science program, we will probably be unable to provide programming to address adult obesity and nutrition issues.

#### **Issue 6: Aging Population and Long-Term Care**

Although aging population did not receive one of the highest overall rankings, some residents did rank it in the top five. One comment was “baby boomers have a fear of the future and the quality of life we will have to endure.” Another comment was “some innovative programs which allow safe and affordable care for the elderly will be needed in the near future.” An aging population will result in the need for more health care services and long-term care options.

VCE could offer programs such as nutrition and exercise classes and financial planning for the elderly. Currently, we have limited personnel in the planning district to conduct these educational programs