



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Gloucester County

2013

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Introduction

Gloucester County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis in 2013. Led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC), the situation analysis process involved the creation of a unit profile as well as gathering community perspectives on issues and problems facing the citizens of Gloucester County. Data from these two activities were analyzed by the ELC and priority issues were identified and evaluated for future Extension programming.

The ELC met formally twice during the situation analysis. Informal communication was facilitated through e-mail and phone. At the initial meeting, unit profile information was reviewed and a survey was developed to assess community needs. The survey was made available to Gloucester residents by the department of Community Education, Gloucester County. An email was sent to “all county users,” containing the survey link, and targeted emails were sent out to the Gloucester Resource Council and to the mailing list for local churches maintained by Community Education. There were 99 responses to the survey.

With survey data distributed to ELC members, the council met to analyze results and to discuss priority issues for Gloucester County. These included both issues that could be addressed with current VCE resources and issues that are presently outside the scope of VCE resources or Extension work.

Unit Profile

Gloucester County is located in the southeastern portion of Virginia’s Middle Peninsula, within planning district 18. The county has significant waterfront and is bounded on the south by the York River, on the north by the Piankatank River and on the east by Mobjack Bay. Mathews, Middlesex, and King and Queen Counties provide the land borders.

According to 2010 U.S. census data, the population of Gloucester is approximately 37,000, making it the most populated of the counties on the Middle Peninsula. Census data indicates that the population identifies itself as 87.46% white, 8.88% black or African American, 2.54% Hispanic, 0.83% Asian, and 0.76% American Indian. Those who identify with two or more races make up 1.5% of the population, and 0.56% belong to some other race.

The median age in Gloucester County is 42 (2010 census data) which points a younger population in comparison with neighboring counties. Still, Gloucester is five years above the state median. There are 10,449 family households in Gloucester, with 28.7% having children under the age of 18.

According to US census data, median household income in Gloucester is \$62,067 which is significantly below that of the greater Hampton Roads area. The median income for York County, an easy drive over the Coleman Bridge, is \$83,747 (approximately 30 % higher). The five largest employers in Gloucester County include the public school system, Riverside Regional Medical Center-Walter Reed, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Rappahannock Community College and Walmart.

Census data also indicates that in Gloucester 9.9% of the population lived at or below poverty. FY2011 is the most recent update for Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) stats which report that in Gloucester County:

- There were 6,079 persons in FY2011 that received SNAP benefits; 2327 of these were under 18.
- There were 5, 019 persons in FY 2011 that received Medicaid benefits; 3137 of these were under 18.
- There were 593 persons in FY2011 that received TANF benefits; 374 of these were under 18.

DSS-Gloucester County reports that although they do not have official figures, these numbers have increased in the 2-3 years since the data was reported.

Where once, Gloucester's industries were associated with the abundant natural resources found locally, the county has experienced increased diversification in both manufacturing and retail activities. Development has resulted in a loss of farm land. According to Farm census data (2007 as info from 2012 Agricultural census is not yet available), there are 159 farms in Gloucester with approximately 16,000 acres in production. Gloucester County agriculture is primarily row crop related. Major crops include corn, soybeans, and small grains. There are sporadic hay fields primarily for the production of horse hay for sale and some vegetable production. There are also small horse farms and some animal production in the form of cattle and goats.

Virginia Department of Education data indicates that Gloucester County public schools enrolled 5,362 youth PK-12 in 2012. The county is served by five elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school which also houses the temporary campus for eighth grade. Construction has begun for a new middle school to replace the one destroyed by tornado in the spring of 2011. Citing declining enrollment and budget constraints, the school board closed a sixth elementary school, T.C. Walker at the end of the school year 2012. The facility currently houses school board personnel and Head Start, and is expected to eventually house other human services agencies.

Annually, approximately 55 Gloucester children begin their education at Head Start. Two of Gloucester's five elementary schools are Full Service Schools (FSS), which meet students' mental health and physical health needs while also providing quality out-of-school time programs, family engagement and support, and connections to other community institutions and agencies.

According to the Virginia Department of Education (DOE), Gloucester's on-time graduation rate for the school year ending in 2013 was 87.9 %, with a drop-out rate of 7.2%. These figures place Gloucester slightly below the state average for on-time graduation, and with a drop-out rate slightly higher than the state's. The numbers do mark a positive trend as they represent a significant improvement from 2008 when the drop-out rate was significantly higher (11.3%).

Data collected from school safety reports for offense categories defined in the Safe Schools Information Resource (SSIR) also indicate a positive trend, with student offenses declining annually over the past few reporting cycles.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Based on issues identified in the unit profile and in the previous situation analysis of 2004, a survey was developed to obtain information from residents regarding issues that impact their lives. Additional feedback was garnered from Extension participation in various community organizations, including the local resource council and through discussion with county government and members of the school community. The survey was distributed by the department of Community Education by email, and a link was posted to the county website. There were 99 responses. Specific issues identified include the following:

Youth:

Citizens' concerns include both leadership and life skills development. School focus on instruction related to the Standards of Learning combined with an economy that necessitates both parents working leaves little time to give attention to these skills at school or in the home. Surveys indicated that the community was especially concerned with teen leadership and citizenship skills. They support the creation of a community center for teens and additional positive youth activities as a means to keep teens involved and out of trouble. Despite the fact that all schools have character education programs in place through guidance departments, surveys also indicate that additional character education is desired. A need for positive youth activities at all age levels is expressed, with focus development of life skills.

Families:

One of the biggest issue facing families in Gloucester County is food insecurity. Data indicates that more Gloucester families are utilizing food pantries than ever before, and stocks are regularly depleted. According to Map the Meals Gap (MMG data), the number of Gloucester residents who are food insecure is 2900. Of these 1,170 are children, making the child food insecurity rate (14.2%) slightly higher than the state average. Over 300 youth in grades K-7 participate in the weekend backpack program, a partnership between the food bank and local churches. Youth take home a small backpack filled with food to sustain them over the weekend because there is not enough food at home.

Additional concerns for families include the lack of local jobs paying a living wage, and the need for education related to management of personal finances in order to avoid bankruptcy or foreclosure. The number of bankruptcy filings and foreclosure rates are still well above pre-recession highs. Although the median household income for Gloucester might appear at first glance sufficient, it was noted that there are large numbers of residents who live at or near poverty levels. One indication of economic hardship is that the Gloucester Resource Council and local churches are coming together this year to address homelessness and provide shelter because there are so many individuals and families in need.

The lack of affordable housing in Gloucester is also present in discussion of community and family life. While jobs in PD 18 tend to pay well below nearby Hampton Roads, affordable housing is in short supply. In 2006 a housing needs assessment was conducted in Gloucester County. Results indicated that at that time, 41% of all home sales were in the \$250,000 and higher range, and only 17% of all sales involved properties priced at \$160,000 or less. The rental market in Gloucester is even tighter than sales. In 2006, there were only 188 units of affordable rental housing in the county where over 1,200 renter households are cost burdened.

Eighty-eight percent of those surveyed also indicate the importance of caring for the aging population. They express concern on services available to seniors as well as the impact of Gloucester's low-cost housing dilemma.

Other concerns for families fall in the realm of quality of life issues. Residents are concerned that development be matched with concern for preservation of green spaces. They request additional venues for recreation, community centers and bike trails.

Environment, Agriculture, and Natural Resources:

Eighty-six percent of survey takers indicated the importance of environmental concerns. Residents express the need for education related to conservation of the Chesapeake Bay, concern over development of retail space, and education for homeowners on excessive fertilizer use. Citizens are concerned about both the quality and quantity of water available for consumption both from private wells and public utilities and are worried about the impact of rapid growth and development on water supply.

Residents indicate an interest in community gardening and sustainability. Development of community gardens is seen as a way to provide food for needy families and a means of educating the public on the health benefits of growing your own food.

Some of the current issues facing agriculture include water quality, the use of pesticides and fertilizers near major bodies of water, and the public's perception of agriculture within this matrix. Producers desire the help and understanding of new techniques and technology which might help them increase yields while continuing to protect natural resources.

Gloucester County farmers express concerns on profitability which seems to be declining over the long term. Ag stakeholders also express concern related to farm transition as today's farmers continue to age without a younger generation ready to step up.

Priority Issues

Based on the Unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following priority issues were identified by the Gloucester County Extension Leadership Council:

Issue 1: Youth Leadership and Community Involvement / Youth Volunteers

Data indicates that Gloucester citizens perceive that youth, especially teens, need additional opportunities to develop leadership skills, to become involved in their communities and give back and connect through volunteerism. Research has shown that youth volunteerism is often connected to other forms of engagement, and that it plays a valuable role in shaping how youth learn to interact with their community and develop the skills, values, and empowerment necessary to become fully engaged citizens. Youth who volunteer feel more connected to their communities, are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and perform better in school. This issue is currently addressed through VCE resources within 4-H youth development. 4-H offers leadership training for teens and opportunities for leadership development through volunteerism during camp and in partnership with the 4-H Peer Teacher program. Additional opportunities are made available through the 4-H club program.

Issue 2: Positive Youth Development

US Census data indicate that approximately one in four children in Gloucester County lives in a single parent household. Studies show that youth in single parent households spend more time unsupervised and surveys indicate a need for positive youth activities, with emphasis on the development of decision-making and life skills. Continued efforts to expand camping, club, and school opportunities for youth are needed. School club and enrichment programs should continue to incorporate life skills into STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) offerings.

Issue 3: Financial Education for Youth and Adults

According to the most recent US census data, the per capita and household median income in Gloucester County is below the state's median income levels. In addition, the lack of affordable housing for low income families in Gloucester is creating an economic burden for many of these families. With prices of goods continuing to rise, income below pre-recession levels, and unemployment and poverty above pre-recession levels both locally and in the state of Virginia, financial education remains a vital need.

Through program that helps families better manage their income; Extension can be an educational resource to those in the locality that are struggling with economic hardship and a lack of financial resources. Reaching the youth before financial irresponsibility potentially ensues during adulthood is key to sustainable progress in the financial wellbeing of the community looking forward. Few, if any, organizations provide regular affordable financial education opportunities to youth and adults in Gloucester other than Virginia Cooperative Extension. Continued efforts to provide and expand upon financial education programming are needed.

Issue 4: Water Quality for Consumption

Census of Housing data indicates that over 75% of Gloucester residents rely on private well water as their source of potable water. Significant concerns exist as recent well water clinics, headed by the Virginia Household Water Quality Program, in Virginia have shown some alarming statistics: 44% of well water samples taken were positive for total coliform, 11% of samples were positive for E. coli, and approximately 20% of samples had lead present in first draw. Furthermore, over 80% of clinic participants had never tested their well water before, despite an average well age of 25 years.

Through the Virginia Master Well Owner Network, and partnerships with local organizations, Extension will need to provide meaningful education in the area of well water management and water safety, and provide a well water clinic to inform residents of potential water quality concerns.

Issue 5: Food Security

Nationally, statewide, and locally, food banks are seeing dwindling food inventories as the demand continues to increase, while food supplies received by many of these food banks have declined in recent years. Combine this with increasing prices, and we have food security concerns in Gloucester County, especially for low-income families. Extension resources within Family and Consumer Sciences and the Family Nutrition Program are available and have been utilized to help Gloucester residents tackle this issue. It will be important for Extension to continue to provide programming to address food security concerns, and educate families and individuals on healthy eating and menu planning on a budget.

Issue 6: Health and Nutrition

According to County Health Rankings, adult obesity is at 29% in Gloucester, while the level of physical inactivity is at 25%. The percentage of both of these health concerns are above both the Virginia average, and the national benchmarks.

Low-income families are often excluded from professional expertise because of a lack of financial resources, creating a need for Extension programming in health and nutrition. Providing education in the areas of healthy eating and active living is essential to addressing the aforementioned concerns.

Issue 7: Agriculture

Data shows that grain crop yields have been above average and prices have been good over the past 2-3 years, but the current grain price outlook has prices forecast to be about 50% to 75% of what they were just 18 months ago. Producers will need educational programs to help them with efficiency in their production and marketing.

Farm transition and intergenerational farming are additional issues for agriculture. The average age of Virginia producers is 59-60 years. Many farms do not have the next generation to pass it down to. Educational information is needed to show the parties involved how to transition to the next generation of farmers. The cost involved in a new/young farmer getting into the farming business is high. Extension's role in encouraging and promoting intergenerational farming in the area could be promising.

Issue 8: Environment

Gloucester's geography and location within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed makes environment a major concern. Citizens need education that enables them to live outside productively and at the same time avoid negatively impacting bay health through activities such as over-fertilizing. VCE resources made available through the Master Gardener program are especially well suited for tackling issues related to environment. This program should continue its educational outreach to the public on matters related to landscape, living shorelines, and pesticide and fertilizer use.

Issue 9: Home and Community Gardening Home and Community Gardening

There is a limited amount of available land for community gardens. Home and community gardens provide an opportunity for citizens to develop a better understanding of nutrition, the advantages of fresh produce, food preservation, as well as life skills like team work and self-sufficiency. Since a large number of families depend on local food pantries the excess produce grown could help to support these charitable organizations. This activity is currently being addressed with VCE resources through the Master Gardener program working in conjunction with other county organizations to develop community garden plots and expand the current training for garden development and maintenance.

Issue 10: Aging Population

As Gloucester's population continues to age, there will be an increased need for both affordable housing for the elderly and expanded medical services. Although these services are outside the scope of current VCE resources, Extension should continue to offer programs which impact the quality of life for seniors, including those related to horticulture therapy, as well as the educational nutrition and financial management offerings.