



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Alleghany County (and Covington City)

2013

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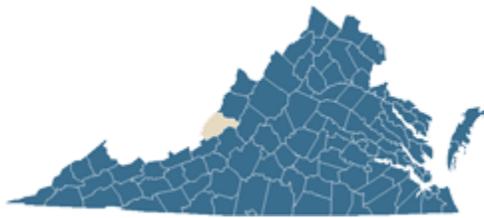
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Introduction

Alleghany County and Covington City conducted a comprehensive analysis of the issues facing its citizens during the fall of 2013. Using the 2008 VCE Situation Analysis as a baseline, the process for updating this report involved many potential stakeholders including Extension Leadership Council members; Master Gardeners; Master Naturalists; Alleghany School Board Members and Department Heads; Covington City School Board Members and Superintendent; Alleghany Board of Supervisors and County Administrator; Covington City Council Members, Mayor and City Manager; Alleghany and Covington School Teachers; 4-H Volunteers and Youth Members; Alleghany Foundation; Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce; Farm Bureau Representatives; YMCA; and Local Business Owners and non-profit organizations. An on-line survey and mail survey were completed and results were compiled.

Unit Profile

The Alleghany Highlands, including the county of Alleghany and city of Covington is located in the western portion of Virginia and has a land area of 445.66 square miles. Adjoining the state of West Virginia, the area is 60 miles north of Roanoke, 176 miles west of Richmond, and 227 miles southwest of Washington, DC. on the I-64 corridor. The Alleghany Highlands is called “Virginia’s Western Gateway” and named after the great chain of mountains on its western border. The area was first settled in 1746, and on January 5, 1822, Alleghany County was formed from parts of Bath, Botetourt, and Monroe Counties by an act of the Virginia Legislature.



In Alleghany County’s 2011 census population estimate, there was a slight decline in population after being compared to the 2007 census. 23% of residents are 19 years and younger, 13% of residents were between 20 and 34 years of age, 28% of residents were between 35 and 54 years of age, and 19% of the population were 65 years and older. The racial composition of Alleghany County is 93% White, 6% Black or African American, 1% two or more races. In Alleghany County, the population age 25+ that have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher is 16%, compared to 35% in Virginia in 2013. The median household income is \$44,329 in Alleghany County compared to \$62,391 in Virginia. The percentage of Alleghany County households (family of 4) living below the poverty level as defined by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the 2015 Poverty Guidelines of \$24, 250 was 27%.

The following data is being summarized from the 2012 Agricultural Census:

Year	Total Farms	Acres of Farmland	Average Size in Acres	Average Farm Gross Receipts
2007	209	\$28, 866	138	\$10,092
2012	207	\$36,963	179	\$53,285
Difference	1% decrease	28% increase	30% increase	427% increase

Cattle Inventory	Alleghany
2007	3162
2012	3065
Difference	3% decrease

Swine Inventory	Alleghany
2007	66
2012	28
Difference	58% decrease

Community and Resident Perspectives

A Qualtrics survey was created by Virginia Cooperative Extension to be used as a template for units to capture valuable data associated with their service areas. This survey was reformatted and distributed to citizens that well-represent the Alleghany County and Covington City by an on-line survey and mailing. Once the data was collected Extension Staff analyzed the key findings based on mean figures and rated issues by priority. Areas that need to be addressed include parenting education, life skills development for youth, drinking water quality, obesity/prevention, character education/bullying prevention, leadership skills development in youth, career development and readiness, farmers markets/local foods/ farm to school, animals/livestock, and aging population.

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Priority Issues

November 2013 a survey was conducted in Alleghany/Covington and the residents ranked the following as priority issues with the most important rankings listed below, in rank order:

1. Parenting Education
2. Life Skills and Leadership Development in youth
3. Drinking Water Quality
4. Obesity/Prevention
5. Character Education/Bullying Prevention
6. Career Development and Readiness
7. Farmers Market/Local Foods/Farm to School
8. Animals/Livestock
9. Aging Population

Issue 1: Parenting Education

This issue had the highest rating out of all questions that were asked on the survey. Many parents lack the skills needed for “good parenting” and families are driven by the children rather than the adults. There is a lack of structure at home, a greater need for schedules, and more focus on school work. We need to encourage parents to be parents and provide programs that support teaching parents how to be parents. There needs to be a greater emphasis at home for developing good qualities such as respect for others, honesty, and pride in yourself.

Currently the Alleghany Office does not have an FCS agent that serves the area. Alleghany will reach out to other FCS agents in neighboring counties in an attempt to address this issue. Extension would like to offer free classes and resources to parents by partnering with community organizations that work closely with parents in need.

Issue 2: Life Skills and Leadership Development in Youth

Survey participants recommend continuing the Junior 4-H Camping program and they would like to see 4-H offer programs in school and afterschool. A greater focus needs to be on developing more youth activities afterschool in a safe environment. Owning a project that is community service based would be beneficial to students by teaching them citizenship, life skills, and leadership.

Extension can respond to this issue by providing 4-H programs in school that correlate to the Standards of Learning and afterschool programs using 4-H volunteers and school personnel. A focus and commitment should remain on community and project clubs.

Issue 3: Drinking Water Quality

Many Alleghany County residents are on well systems and do not have the financial means to afford drinking water tests. There should be more efforts on educating homeowners on the potential risks of toxins in their water systems and provide information on where they can receive these services.

Extension can address this issue by partnering with the county Agriculture Extension Agents to provide a drinking water quality clinic to citizens. To promote and make the class more affordable Extension should partner with local businesses, such as The Farm Bureau.

Issue 4: Obesity/Prevention

Obesity remains prevalent in our area and holds the second highest rating based on importance. There needs to be more education for youth and adults on how to make smart choices and make healthier meals all at affordable prices.

Extension can address this need by partnering with community organizations and family consumer science agents to provide classes and workshops to youth and adults using various Extension Curriculum.

Issue 5: Character Education/Bullying Prevention

Both County and City school systems practice the mission of the Character Counts Program but there are still many problems dealing with bullying and good character. As technology advances so do the problems with cyber bullying through social media outlets. There needs to be more character and leadership programs offered in the schools that address traditional and modern ways of bullying.

Extension can respond to this issue by working with local businesses and organizations to provide programs and potentially clubs that help make students aware of why good character is important and the dangers associated with bullying. Extension can work with schools to promote National Character Counts Week each year.

Issue 6: Career Development and Readiness

With unemployment rates high in our area we need to continue working with career development programs for county and city high school students. Schools should provide educational options to students to accomplish college level classes in high school. There needs to be collaboration with professionals and businesses to share with students what is required to have a job and the definition of working and what businesses look for when hiring employees. Students need exposure to different career paths and what schooling may be required. There is also a lack of students entering into trade programs, so we must promote

and teach trade skills such as welding, electrician, and plumbing work. Instruction is needed on how to topics such as managing money, paying bills, saving for retirement, banking, and budgeting.

Extension will continue to serve on the Alleghany Highlands Career Council which provides Reality Store (a simulation of the real world and managing money) and Career Tweets (an event where students get face-to-face interaction with professionals from the different Virginia Career Clusters). Many of the issues above will be discussed and addressed in the Career Council.

Issue 7: Farmers Markets/Local Foods/Farm to School

The Covington Farmers Market became part of a local non-profit organization in 2008 and created new rules and policies for vendors to follow. There has been success with the new market but there is still opportunity to expand and serve more people of all ages. There is a great need to educate children into understanding the importance of agriculture, forestry, and water management and where their food comes from.

Extension can address these needs by continuing to serve on the Covington Farmers Market steering committee and provide workshops relevant to vendors. 4-H can work with local schools and organizations to provide agriculture enrichment programs and curriculum. 4-H can collaborate with the FFA advisor on providing agriculture, forestry, and water quality programs.

Issue 8: Animals/Livestock

Survey respondents indicate there is a need for agriculture programs which can address: how to make money with wool production, chickens, goats, sheep, and other livestock; how non typical farm products can be marketed to produce revenue, converting to organic farming and the benefits, pesticide and herbicide use, agricultural tourism, how to help beef farmers eliminate middle men in marketing and sales and marketing grass fed calves directly to retailer, educating youth on the importance of farming and where our food comes from. More face-to-face contacts with existing producers and programs offered through webinars and newsletters.

Extension will address some of these issues by providing workshops and potentially provide webinars and newsletters as a means of communication.

Issue 9: Aging Population

The aging population in Alleghany County and Covington City continues to increase. With only two long-term extended care facilities in the area there needs to be more housing and resources available. There is an increasing need for retirement housing and activities.

Extension can address this need by offering educational resources related to senior citizens, directing those in need to the appropriate organizations and businesses that provide services based on their need, and helping those individuals in need through community service projects.