



# Situation Analysis Report

## Grayson County

# 2013

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## Introduction

The greatest Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) impacts occur when areas of critical need are addressed through Extension programs. The first step in the process is to identify and prioritize the major needs locally. The Situation Analysis provides the foundation and rationale for deciding which problems should receive the time, energy, and resources of VCE. Local input is gathered regarding local issues by engaging key stakeholders and citizens who form the Extension Leadership Council (ELC). The ELC volunteers and VCE staff may also gather input from cooperating agencies, focus groups, individuals, and partners to build a more comprehensive picture of the county's concerns, and possible strategies to address those concerns.

## Unit Profile

The Unit Profile provided by state-level VCE administration gave key demographic, education, health, agricultural and economic data for Grayson County summarized from various federal and state sources. The Unit Profile was shared and discussed with ELC members. Following are key aspects from that discussion:

### Demographics

- 478 less people in Grayson from 2007 to 2013 (down 3%)
- 28.8% of population over 60 years of age compared to 17.9% and 18.6% in VA and US, respectively. This percentage continues to grow.
- 50% population in the wage earning years between ages 20-60 compared to 56.1% and 54.5% for VA and the US, respectively. That percentage in Grayson is declining.
- 96.4% of population is white, with 2.5% Hispanic. Similar to US, Hispanics are the second most prevalent race/ethnicity.

### Agriculture

- Lost 4,830 (4%) farmed acres from 2007 to 2012; the pace of loss slowed compared to previous 5 year period
- Lost 88 farms (10%) from 2007 to 2012
- Largest farm losses from 2007 to 2012 were smaller farms <10 acres in size with losses also occurring in farms less than 180 acres. Only farms 180 to 999 acres remained constant in that period. Six farms over 1,000 acres were also lost in that 5 year span.
- Seasonal/part-time labor is hard to find
- Greater emphasis for supporting smaller farm operations
- Few changes expected short-term relative to agriculture sectors with cattle and Christmas trees dominating Grayson agriculture landscape with small ruminants and horses also significant.
- Greater interest and need for processing (value-add) with meat and vegetables.

One ELC member shared a testimonial of the impact of career and technical classes, particularly Agriculture Shop classes in teaching job skills that are appreciated by local businesses/manufacturers such as Utility Trailer and Core Fitness. How can VCE collaborate with schools and adult learners to accomplish similar impacts?

## Health

- Limited access to healthy food - 6% compared to state (4%) and US (1%)
- Less knowledge of food preparation, cooking, proper dietary habits, etc.
- Great demand and need for education in food preservation
- Above state (28%) and national (25%) obesity levels in Grayson's adult population (29%)
- Anecdotal high childhood obesity, but statistics are limited
- High teen birth rate – 47 per 1,000 females ages 15-19 compared to 32 in VA and 21 nationally
- Need to instill confidence in young people

## Education

- Improved administrative leadership, staff, and graduation rates (graduation rates currently above state averages).
- Public schools are not equipped to turn at risk youth around
- Research states that 10 positives to overcome 1 negative comment to youth
- Research also states that it is possible to identify by 1<sup>st</sup> grade who will go to college and who will not. There is also a stigma that NOT going to college is bad, and is a confidence killer for young people. At the same time, youth who develop employable skills while in high school can get well-paying jobs right out of high school with no college debt.
- Opportunity for 4-H to instill excitement for achievement using success in 4-H projects and activities to spur interest in youth.

## Business

- Agriculture, construction and manufacturing are still the top industry segments.
- Lack of adequate jobs within the county is major barrier. Out-commuting for employment is common and presents a significant social strain on the family as well as limits civic engagement.
- How are local institutions (education, Extension, local government) preparing youth for these types of jobs?
- Mentally disabled can be very good employees, particularly growing things or that require hands-on activities.
- Interest in 4-H internships from Youth Survey of recent Grayson County Comprehensive Plan re-write, but how to motivate youth to participate?
- What impact does prison start-up have?
  - Support services

- Employment (all those opportunities that are not guard positions)
- Visitors

Situation Analysis reports from 2004 and 2009 indicated the following issues were important for Extension to tackle. They include:

- Water quality
- Land use/land conservation
- Sustainable agriculture including strong agriculture/forestry economy
- Strong families
- Entrepreneur development
- Proper pesticide use
- Youth development
- Commodity marketing
- Family nutrition
- Senior citizen programs
- Financial security at home
- Human capital development

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

Grayson Extension staff collects information constantly regarding citizen needs. While these are not formalized key informant interviews, daily contacts with clients reveal major issues of concern locally. It is appropriate to take these issues and vet them with the ELC and other community stakeholders.

Grayson faced a unique situation in 2013 with the Grayson County Planning Commission undergoing a process to completely revamp the county's Comprehensive Plan. A key aspect of the revitalized plan was a community input section. Phase I was a leadership survey sent to 173 community leaders as identified by local government and the Planning Commission. Of those, 72 respondents provided input, including staff from Grayson Extension serving both youth and adult populations. The leadership survey sought to identify Grayson's major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Phase II used the data from Phase I to develop a comprehensive citizen survey, which was completed by 693 residents regarding issues around youth, land use, agriculture, health, county facilities, education, and the local economy.

With youth-related issues one of the major areas emphasized in the citizen survey, Grayson Extension staff proposed that youth be asked about their thoughts regarding county issues, and have that data be incorporated along with the citizen survey into the Comprehensive Plan. Thirty nine high school seniors and juniors enrolled in Government class participated in the survey facilitated by the 4-H Agent.

The citizen and youth surveys provided justification for 110 strategies included in the Comprehensive Plan. Of the strategies, 9 areas dealt with issues either currently addressed by, or have the potential to be addressed by 4-H regarding youth development, career

readiness, diverse extracurricular opportunities for youth, youth internships or mentoring, volunteer development with seniors, lifelong learning, and youth leadership. Extension is also positioned to address 16 more strategies related to agriculture and small business development, career and technical education support, improving farm profitability, retaining land in working farms and forests, local food initiatives, agricultural marketing, community development, land stewardship, value-added processing, agriculture policy support, agritourism, and others. An additional 5 strategies include work where Extension may provide resources or support to local government in achieving those strategies. The ELC reviewed those strategies and set 6 major priorities for the Grayson Unit to support. Those priorities are described in the following section.

## **Priority Issues**

### **Keeping Land Productive and Profitable Now and into the Future**

“Sustainability” is a buzz word with many implications. The ELC decided that sustainability as it relates to Extension efforts means not only stewardship for future generations, but also productive and profitable farms and forests for current owners and operators. Focus areas include: water quality, land stewardship/conservation, business management education for working farms and forests of all types, and favorable policies and tax structures to support a vibrant natural resources-based economy. Secondly, pesticide safety education for licensed and non-licensed users fits this priority.

### **Youth, Family and Community Development**

Traditional 4-H programs such as camp and in-school curriculum enrichment should continue and expand. Emphasis should be placed on youth civic engagement, group projects and learning, and comprehensive programs for extracurricular opportunities, particularly for those not involved with school athletics. VCE should explore collaborations to enhance after-school program offerings. Others areas to explore include coordinating internships, mentorships, and demonstration-style learning and engagement for youth. Engaging families in supporting youth-centered activities should provide opportunities to improve family cohesiveness.

Leadership, conflict resolution and facilitation skills are needed among individuals whether they be in the home, in youth and adult peer groups, in civic clubs, or in business environments. The ELC supports continued effort in these Extension program areas.

### **Entrepreneurship and Business Development**

Job creation and stable employment continue to be at the forefront of local government efforts. ELC members suggested more emphasis in instilling an entrepreneur spirit in the area’s youth through internships, mentoring and projects. The ELC also encouraged VCE to engage other local assets such as Matthews State Forest and New River Hill Farm, both of which were estates generously donated specifically for education in agriculture, forestry and their associated businesses. Other opportunities already occurring, but could be incorporated into

this priority area include mentoring opportunities through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program and the USDA Farm Service Agency Rural Youth Loan Program.

VCE is strategically positioned to address small business development related to Grayson's local agricultural and forestry assets. Some of these include non-traditional or value-add opportunities such as local and regional foods, agritourism, and value-added processing of fruits and vegetables. In addition, VCE should be involved in raising awareness regarding the obstacles to developing these types of businesses, and offer up solutions to overcome such barriers.

### **Marketing of Traditional and Non-Traditional Agriculture and Forestry Products**

A great deal of effort in current VCE programming is focused on supporting increased marketing support to specific industry segments such as beef cattle. The ELC thinks this should continue, but that clients should not rely upon VCE to do this on their behalf. The ELC suggested a recommitment to education, particularly with those audiences that may have been underserved in the past. Key roles that VCE may fulfill include facilitating greater cooperation and networking among traditional and non-traditional industry segments in an effort to capture brand identity, and collectively explore more marketing options.

### **Access to Healthy Foods with Improved Diet and Lifestyle Changes**

Local and regional food efforts should be supported by VCE to ensure that locals have access to high quality, fresh foods. Just as importantly, VCE should assist with education on how to best use those foods. Strategies include proper and safe food handling, cooking, and preservation. VCE should also assist with education that focuses on how lifestyle changes such as exercise, avoiding unhealthy habits, along with proper diet work together to strengthen the whole person.

### **Supporting the Growing Senior Population**

Grayson's senior population continues to be an important and growing part of the community. Just like the county's youth, its seniors have special needs and priorities. Health and nutrition education are areas that VCE has resources already deployed. The ELC suggested facilitating senior-youth mentorship that draws on experiences and knowledge of those seniors, gives them purpose, and provides a way to pass along that knowledge to the younger generations. Also mentioned were programs to assist seniors with life transitions. Estate and transition planning are examples of effective programs already in place.