

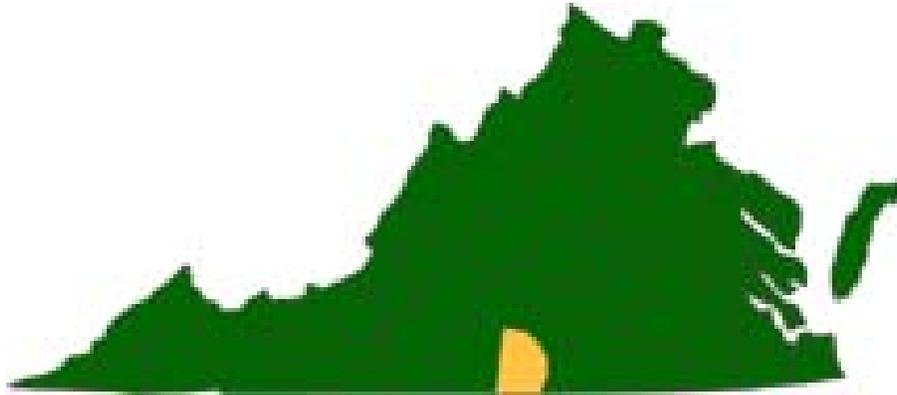


Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

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Situation Analysis Report



Halifax County

2013

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Introduction

Halifax County gathers data and initiates input for situation analysis annually. The situation analysis process was led by the Extension Agents in our locality. The Halifax County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) has been invaluable in gathering community and resident perspectives on issues within the county. The ELC meets quarterly with the last quarter of the year being the input session. The data collected is used to direct our individual and unit programming. In the most recent ELC meeting, unit profile data was analyzed and priority issues were identified.

Unit Profile

Halifax County is located in South Central Virginia, approximately 50 miles South of Lynchburg and bordering North Carolina. It is the third largest county geographically in the commonwealth covering 830 square miles with a population of more than 36,000.

The data indicates that the population age 60 and older has increased more than other age groups from 2007 to 2011. Meanwhile, the population age 25 to 40 shows the largest decrease. This led to the conclusions that college graduates are settling outside the county, the existing population is aging, and possibly there is an influx of retirees from outside the county.

Reports indicated that one in five households in Halifax County have an income of less than \$15,000 a year and 26% of children live in poverty. In addition, 26% of the population has less than a high school diploma. There is a 2% decrease in the number of youth dropping out of school before the 9th grade. However, that 2% is reversed between the 9th and 12th grades showing an increase from 15% to 17%. What is important to remember is that these numbers represent the current population, not the trends for today's youth. Data from the Virginia Department of Education shows that 91% of our youth graduate on time and only 4% completely drop out of school.

Data indicates that adult obesity has remained constant at 33% from 2010 to 2013 in Halifax County. Seventeen percent of citizens live with poor to fair health compared to the national average of 10%.

The unemployment rate is over 4% higher than that of the commonwealth. A look at industries indicates that manufacturing is the top occupation above construction and transportation. Leading employers however are educational institutions and health services. Average annual household income is around \$49,000.

Farms numbers in the county have remained constant. While there is less land in farms, there are more farms 10-49 acres in size. This data indicates that there are more farms with off-farm income. Farms reporting all income from farm sales are becoming larger in acreage with tobacco being the largest commodity in cash receipts.

Halifax County has a thriving agricultural heritage, historically based on tobacco production. While tobacco remains the number one commodity in cash receipts, former tobacco farmers have transitioned to animal agriculture, grain crops, and timber. These trends show the need for investigation of new enterprises and markets, along with education in intensive livestock management and grain production. Timber has proven to provide income over a long period of rotation (15 years), but does not necessarily meet the immediate annual income needs for the farm.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Based on issue areas identified in the unit profile, input was gathered from the Halifax County Extension Leadership Council. The council is made up of 11 members from the community equally representing each program area, ethnicity, age group, and gender.

The agriculture agent surveyed and interviewed various producers requesting information on future ANR programming. The district forester contacted key industry stakeholders, professionals, central district agents, and landowners on input regarding forestry and wildlife issues.

The 4-H agent interviewed various parents, teachers, principals, and central office personnel.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Halifax County.

Issue 1: 4-H Youth Development

Increase Leadership Development - The top issue identified in Halifax County is the need for increase leadership development among our youth.

Leadership development is being addressed in several ways. First, the 4th grade in-school clubs are utilizing parliamentary procedures and officers complete with an officer training. Additionally, older youth are giving multiple opportunities to become role models for peers as well as younger children particularly through residential and day camps.

Character Development - Positive character development was identified as needed in Halifax County.

Positive character development is being addressed with the youth of Halifax County by first training the adults working with the youth in Character Counts! Youth participating in 4-H activities and their parents must sign an agreement to demonstrate positive character traits. Additionally, *Character Counts!* pillars are explicitly taught during 4-H club meeting and camps.

Underserved youth - Reaching underserved youth populations was the third area of need for our county. This refers to the out of school times for the youth.

Underserved populations are currently being served through in-school 4-H Clubs. Recently new clubs in various areas of the county are beginning to meet. One in the northern end of the county has been meeting for a year. Additionally, new volunteers are being recruited for the southern end of the county, and the new club is expected to begin to meet by February 2014. The SNAP-Ed Program Assistant meets with youth in the community centers of low income housing areas.

Jobs/Careers/Sense of Community - In various areas of data collection the need to retain our youth and train them for promising careers is essential.

One way to train and retain our youth is to encourage them to get an education beyond high school. Halifax 4-H is partnering with other agencies through a federal grant to hold a career fair to encourage youth to continue their education to at least obtain a technical certification if not a college degree. An Additional way to retain our youth is through partnering with community organizations on projects which teach life skills.

Issue 2: Agriculture

Farm Profitability and Sustainability - the top issue facing agriculture in Halifax County. Full time farm operations are comprised of mostly tobacco, grain or large scale livestock production. There are also a number of part-time farmers who depend on off-farm income. With the conclusion of the Tobacco Transition Payment Program, and increasing average age of farmers, tobacco producers are in a position to diversify operations. Alternative farm enterprises need to be investigated, along with exploring new markets and intentional marketing strategies.

Alternative enterprises are being investigated in collaboration with both Virginia Tech and VSU including edamame, chickpea, berry, grapes, hops and small ruminant production. Agritourism workshops and events will be held regionally to provide education and facilitate networking and regional marketing efforts among agritourism and local foods enterprises. Programs have been conducted to support direct marketing of value added agricultural products. Grant funding has been obtained in an effort to increase shopping at Farmers Markets, especially for SNAP clients, thus expanding local customer base for small producers. Programs are being offered to help agribusinesses learn and utilize web-based technology to access broader markets. Examples include workshops on website building and social media marketing strategies, along with video-based marketing of livestock.

Educating Producers – was found to be the second most important issue in agriculture. Farmers need to become more efficient, thus more profitable, with existing grain and cattle enterprises. Following tobacco production, cattle and grain are the second and third largest agricultural enterprises by cash receipts, according to the 2012 USDA County Agriculture Census.

A hay quality clinic was held to address hay costs, efficiency, and animal nutrition. Additionally, a cattleman's short-course was held, followed by a regional Master Cattleman's Course to educate on herd health, nutrition, marketing, reproduction, forages and genetics. Production meetings will continue to be held regionally on grain crops discussing agronomy, integrated pest management, and best management practices.

Community Awareness - the third most important issue within the field of agriculture, includes increasing knowledge and understanding of agriculture, and its economic impact for the citizens of Halifax County and surrounding areas. Studies show that 85% of Americans are 2 generations removed from the farm (Dr. David M. Kohl, Professor Emeritus, Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech). As a rural county with evolving demographics, extension will play a key role in educating both youth and adults on the local agricultural industry and how it impacts the community.

Farm Bureau hosts an Agriculture Field Day for elementary students annually, with the help of Extension. Extension also represents the agricultural community at Halifax County Middle School's Career Day, and serves as a resource for County Agricultural Development in a new Farm to School initiative. Extension is integral part of the planning and implementation of the annual Halifax County Junior Livestock Show.

Issue 3: Forestry and Natural Resources

The Central District region of Virginia Cooperative Extension encompasses over 10,000 miles covering 6,000,000 acres of land. On average Central District counties are 70% forested. Timber has become a large economic driver for this part of the state. In 2013 approximately \$81.4 million dollars was paid on the stump to landowners in Virginia. In 2004 there were reported \$3,818,086 and then \$8,135,600 in 2012 in Halifax County alone. This represents an increase of in less than 10 years (Source (VA Department of Forestry - <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/harvest/data/2012-locality-ind-value-volume.htm>)

Virginia has an estimated 470,000 landowners, with an estimated 120,000 of these in Central District (25%). In the next 5 years, Virginia will experience the largest intergenerational transfer of landownership in its history. Combined results from the following sources were used to determine program delivery for the Central District Forestry and Natural Resources Program: a) questionnaire received from 16 professional foresters; b) Input gained from local Extension Leadership Councils; c) answers on landowner and logger exit evaluations asking "what should Extension offer based on your needs?"; d) needs identified in Virginia Department of Forestry's *State of the Forest* report (http://www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/sof/SOF-2014_pub.pdf). The results gleaned from the 2013 situational analysis indicated the top five issues facing Central District forest landowners are: **1)** Intergenerational land transfer and land ownership change, **2)** land fragmentation with more ownership numbers inquiring on timber and land ownership objectives to include non-timber forest products and invasive species management, **3)** feasibility studies for available woody biomass (with Virginia presently demanding three million more tons with new facilities online), **4)** water quality impacts as it relates to timber harvesting, and **5)** logging safety training with increased need for more loggers due to market demand.

Issue 4: Family and Consumer Sciences/Food and Nutrition Program

Obesity - As mentioned in statistics, obesity rates have been steady over the past 3 years at 33% according to countyhealthrankings.org. In addition, nutrition education is limited by funding and limited access to healthy food is more than that of the state and national levels.

The Master Gardener Coordinator/ANR program assistant, who is largely involved with the farmer's markets, helps address community health by overseeing market participation in the Agency on Aging's Senior Nutrition Program. This program allocates coupons to seniors for buying fresh produce from farmer's markets and various roadside stands. The unit and Master Gardeners are in the planning process of establishing a community garden for summer 2014. This project will involve local churches and individuals in the community in overseeing a garden to provide food for those in need.

Issue 5: Need for FCS Agent or Adult FNEP/CNEP Program Assistant

Need for an FCS Agent – (or an Adult FNEP/CNEP) was identified as the second most pressing issue in Halifax County. Citizens are in strong need of education in the area of budgeting, food safety, and nutrition.

This issue is currently being addressed with the help of neighboring FCS agents. In the past Halifax had the assistance of an adult FNEP program assistant. The need is still there.

Childhood Nutrition - Childhood health and nutrition was identified as the third most pressing issue in Halifax County.

This issue is currently being addressed by the SNAP-Ed Program Assistant. The partnership with the school system is imperative.