

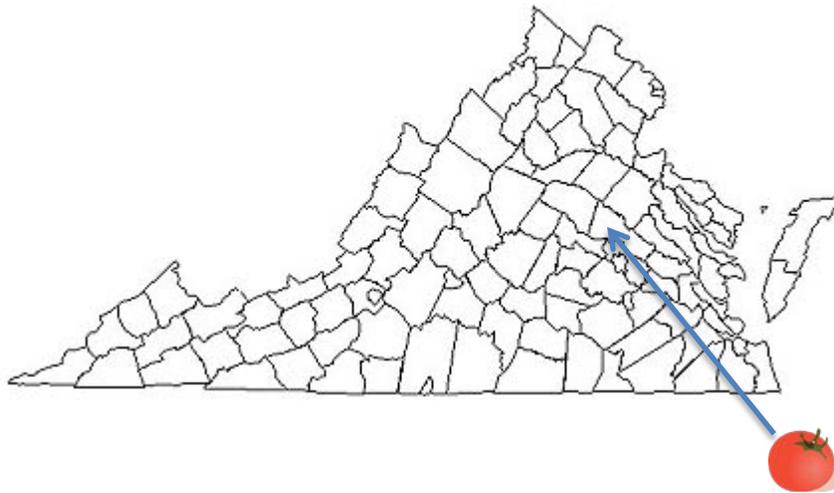


**Virginia Cooperative Extension**

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# Situation Analysis Report



## Hanover County

# 2013

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## Introduction

The Hanover County Situational Analysis is the product of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The issues are the distillation of information and inferences derived from each genre.

The Analysis was developed by compiling quantitative data from annual reports, county departmental records and local, state and national on-line databases. These included sources such as the comprehensive National Citizens Survey for Hanover County, the Human Resources Strategic Plan, Kids Count, Hanover County Public Schools, Hanover County Comprehensive Plan, Chickahominy Health District, and the US Census Bureau. Surveys, cross referenced with the Citizens Survey, were completed by Extension Leadership Council members and constituent groups.

Key informant and citizen interviews were conducted to collect qualitative input. These informants were asked to look at issues from a professional stand point and as residents of Hanover County.

Unit staff, ELC chair, community partners and agency representatives reviewed the data and noted trends, statistics, and anomalies that portend emerging issues for Hanover County.

The quantitative and qualitative results were then cross-referenced to produce the prominent issues currently confronting Hanover County and predicting those which will emerge in the near future. Issues were also reviewed for the role in which Extension can, should, or would participate with appropriate resources, personnel and support.

## Unit Profile

### Location

Hanover County is located in east-central Virginia, approximately 15 miles north of Richmond and 90 miles south of Washington, D.C. The County is situated between the Chickahominy, Pamunkey, and North Anna rivers. It is bordered by the counties of Caroline, King William, New Kent, Henrico, Goochland, and Louisa counties. When measured along its southeast to northwest axis, the County is nearly 40 miles in length and 471 square miles. In size it is the largest county in the Richmond-Petersburg metropolitan area.

### Land Use

Hanover County is located in the outer ring of the urbanized region surrounding Richmond. The County is bisected by Interstate 95, the major north-south interstate highway serving the east coast corridor from Maine to Florida. The topography is gently rolling hills and heavily wooded forests.

Historically Hanover County was predominantly agricultural and rural. In the past 20 years, Hanover County has seen a significant increase in the number of niche farms, sometimes referred to as mini-farms or farmettes. These farms are typically 5 – 25 acres in size and landowners want to raise and/or are interested in obtaining educational resources about a variety of products, including cattle, horses, goats, sheep, llamas, vegetables, bees and honey, fruit trees, cane fruits, grapes, strawberries and poultry.

With Interstate 295 running along its edge, the southern reaches of the county have a much more suburban and urban atmosphere. Hanover County lies both in the Coastal and Piedmont geologic areas reflected in the marked differences in soils found from east to west. The sandy soils of this eastern area lend themselves well to the operation of septic tanks. Encompassing the unincorporated but populous Mechanicsville area, it is the section closest to Richmond and is the site of most suburban and urban style development.

The northern and western areas are much more rural in nature and reflected in the sparse population and commercial development. The timber industry maintains a significant presence in this segment of the county.

The Town of Ashland sits astride Interstate 95, home to Randolph-Macon College, this town of 7,200 is the only incorporated community in Hanover County.

## **Governance**

The County is governed by a seven member elected Board of Supervisors with four year terms. Yearly a chair and vice chair are elected by the Board. Their responsibilities encompass decisions on zoning and land use, various board appointments, budget and tax rates and hiring of the county administrator.

Board of Supervisors underwent a significant change in the last election when six of the seven members were new and represent a very development oriented vision. One of their first actions was to eliminate proffers to stimulate growth. The negative impact to schools, utilities, road improvement and other beneficiaries of the proffer funds resulted in a reworking of the application of proffers so as not to totally delete them. But this adjustment does not fully restore funding levels. After very slow years, building requests increased 45% in the last year.

## **Economic Health**

A survey finding showed a significant number of residents say job growth is too slow. This is closely linked to the 97% polled who feel high speed internet is very important. Qualitative data reflected this same issue.

The citizens enjoy a fairly high level income reflecting one of the highest housing costs in the region. While Hanover County was not immune to the economic downturn, it fared better than many communities. The unemployment rate and foreclosures increased and business permits decreased, but all remained below state and national averages. In terms of family stress, demands for assistance from the Department of Social Services is the lowest in the

MetroRichmond region, but its rate of requests is rapidly increasing, the fastest in the area. It has still not recovered from the 33% increase in service requests when the economic crisis first impacted the county at a time when staffing levels were reduced.

As with other jurisdictions, the financial cuts have negatively impacted Hanover County's highly rated schools. Class sizes have increased and the alternative school no longer has a resident counselor and the administrative staff is split between it and the trade/vocational school.

## **Physical Health**

The population shift is distinctly to an aging citizenry. The school-age population has decreased over 4% in the last few years. The current population growth of all ages is only 1% in the county.

This aging group also contributes to the increase in lifestyle influenced health issues as reported by the health department. Rates of smoking are higher than average along with a lack of access to walking and hiking trails or safe bike routes as reflected in the Citizens Survey.

Most of Hanover County citizens are financially secure with resources to weather the economic downturn. The overall good demographics of the county dilute the needs of those in poverty. For low income residents, health care is a significant stressor. They find prescription costs a formidable hurdle for chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and COPD. Up until recently residents without health insurance relied on the hospital emergency room or going to free clinics out of county. The faith community has worked to support two free health clinics to serve adults in the county. Most uninsured youth are eligible for FAMIS, state supported health insurance.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

Key informant, citizen interviews, human services network meeting, and survey of the agriculture community were used to collect qualitative information on issues. Youth and minorities were included in this aspect. This data expanded on some issues reflected in the quantitative data but also revealed concerns that fall between the cracks.

Three issues arose repeatedly.

### **Land Use/development and environment**

As in previous years, land use/development and the environment continue to be a top level issue. Many people give the rural nature of Hanover as the reason for moving to the county. But development threatens their perceived view of country living while at the same time residents balk at higher taxes for services such as roads, convenience centers, schools, parks and other amenities. Agriculture remains an important economic engine in the county but the rural suburban interface continues to cause friction. The Chesapeake Bay Act and its

requirements are an added stressor for county staff and targeted industry especially agriculture.

### **High Speed Internet**

Along this same business development vein, affordable access to high speed internet has emerged as a new contentious issue that continues to plague the county. While providers have maps that show good coverage, it is not accurate. Many residents believe access to high speed internet is essential to the positive growth and business climate in Hanover County. Businesses, school assignments, and resident's ability to function in a technology driven society mandate this access. The rift is essentially who will pay the costs for the infrastructure. At \$40,000 per mile, providers will not build the infrastructure unless they can recoup their costs. Residents believe access is an essential service, but the county is not inclined to use tax money to give that access.

### **Socioeconomic Divide**

The third community perspective, the socioeconomic divide or income disparity, is complex and contains numerous interlocking issues. With entry level housing well over \$250,000, affordable homes versus business growth and development is a hot button topic. Apartment developments, even some condominium projects are considered a threat to the high quality of life in the county. Section 8 housing is very limited with multiple family and non-family residents sharing the apartments and motel rooms, and often not near employment. This problem feeds into another issue, the lack of public transportation. This is a chronic and serious issue resulting in low income individuals not accessing health care, job opportunities, youth activities and academic support, healthy food, job training, mental health services and leading to social isolation and disengagement. Additional funds are put into law enforcement while prevention services are considered a nice idea the county cannot afford. This situation is exasperated by state, local and federal funding cuts to the agencies that can ameliorate an already bad situation.

A final note is the perspective of low income minority youth asked about what is important to them. They do not feel safe in their neighborhood. The playground is overgrown, full of trash and has lots of "snakes"; outside youth take over the playground; everyone curses; fast cars speed through their part of town; and public drunkenness and drug deals a common occurrence. This does not happen in the more affluent neighborhoods.

## **Priority Issues**

### **Land Use/development and environment**

Hanover VCE is well placed to address this issue through multiple educational modes.

For 4-H the continuation of the gardening programs for youth both in and out of school is a portal for expansion of topics that address SOL's in environmental science, agriculture

education, watershed experiences and horticulture. In addition a high level of support provides the livestock clubs with resources to build on the agriculture knowledge, best practices, animal science knowledge and entrepreneurship as they build their flocks and herds. In addition assist in their outreach of agriculture education at schools, fairs and other venues and promotional sites.

4-H will continue to use media outlets, in-school programming, collaboration with partners, and 4-H events to emphasize environmental responsible behaviors including recycling, carpooling, and no littering campaigns.

As a member of the board of Hanover Caroline Soil & Water Conservation District, 4-H will continue to collaborate on environmental education projects such as Meaningful Watershed Experiences, in school programs, and 50-Mile Meal for the Board of Supervisors. And utilize grant funded projects at the alternative school such as Turf To Natives to not only enhance the environmental quality but as a teaching tool.

Attendant to this is continued use of the Character Counts! pillars; respect for their environment, responsibility for their actions, and most importantly the Citizenship pillar. This aspect emphasizes that even as youth, contributing to common good and community is essential. Being a good citizens means insuring your behavior does not negatively impact others or common ground. The Character Counts! initiative is not only within 4-H clubs and afterschool sites. 4-H will expand and enhance CC! through its partnership with County Parks and Recreation Department where every child in summer programs are instilled with the Pillars.

ANR works closely with our partner agencies such as the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Virginia Farm Bureau (VFB) and the Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to insure that agricultural, natural resources and conservation programs are provided to area farmers and landowners to help them improve production while improving water quality by reducing soil runoff, reducing the amount of pesticides used and increasing the number of landowners participating in cost share conservation programs:

ANR Extension Agent serves on the Board of Directors of the HA-CL SWCD:

- Assist SWCD staff in outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days and seminars;
- Support the work of the SWCD to expand program funding;

ANR extension Agent is a founding member and active participant in the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project (VABFRCP) to assist new and beginning farmers in their education needs:

- Provide classroom educational programs in partnership with the Virginia Association of Biological Farmers, HA-CL SWCD, FSA and NRCS;
- hold field days and seminars at working farms;

- assist Virginia State University (VSU) Specialists and Small Farm Agents in outreach efforts and provide meaning classroom and field seminars to historically underserved landowners;
- ANR Agent is a Certified 'train-the-trainer' and will assist with programs and mentoring opportunities for new/beginning farmers;

Provide classroom education and practical field seminars to commercial farmers, niche farmers and suburban landowners to increase productivity, reduce pesticide use, improve soil fertility and improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed:

- Promote the Virginia Ag Expo which highlights modern farming techniques, equipment and seed variety selections;
- Sponsor and promote the Richmond Area Vegetable Growers Conference, an annual conference for local fruit and vegetable producers;
- Hold a well water testing and educational clinic in Hanover County every 5 years for landowners not on the municipal water system;
- Promote and organize the annual Private Pesticide Applicators Recertification Class;
- Support and promote a Pesticide Recycling Program for commercial farmers;
- Provide Master Gardener Training to volunteers seeking education and volunteer opportunities;
- Support Master Gardeners to provide general gardening, turf and landscaping educational programs through a series of Spring and Fall seminars, known as the Hanover Gardening Series (HGS);

Economic Development to promote sustainable agricultural practices:

- assist the Hanover County Planning Department with objective resources when planning future developments or considering changes to agricultural zoning or to comprehensive land use planning;
- promote the use of the Hanover County Cannery to both private and commercial users;
- partner with VDACS Marketing Specialists to stay current on new agricultural trends, marketing resources and product development;
- partner with VDACS Agribusiness and Forestry Development staff to seek grant funding offered through the Commonwealth for agriculture and forestry projects;

## High Speed Internet

High speed internet access is one that VCE cannot have direct impact but be sensitive to the issue when communicating with our constituents. We will always offer hard copy publications, respond by mail or phone call requests for information, phone or in person registration for events. Within 4-H we ask youth "what is the best way to contact you". VCE will continue to be a "high touch" organization going to our community to insure equal access to knowledge, materials and programming. This approach is enhanced by the many volunteers utilized in programming. By continuing to expand and improve the volunteer outreach, we insure more residents receive what they need in a format that works for them.

By using current National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) data from 2013 Ag census, ANR Agent will provide meaningful and objective data to decision makers relating to needs of rural landowners.

## **Socioeconomic Disparity**

For 4-H the economic disparity is addressed in many different and adaptable formats to increase the prospect that youth will become self-sufficient adults. By enhancing, supporting, growing and targeting life skills, youth develop characteristics that increase their resiliency and ongoing success. 4-H pursues funding that targets low income, at risk youth including afterschool programming, a mentor initiative and scholarships for 4-H camps. Whenever possible, transportation is provided to maximize the number of youth who can participate.

The 4-H programs seek to provide the four essential elements Sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity in its programming. The social engagement of youth in 4-H activities give a sense of belonging and dispels isolation; academic/project support through mentors, leaders and other volunteers provides mastery and a sense of self confidence; exposure to new experiences and career exploration promotes independence and seeing themselves in the future. Visiting Virginia State University and Randolph-Macon Colleges are examples of expanding possibilities for youth. And finally the sense of generosity is engendered by the youth directed and initiated community service projects. Youth who volunteer, become adults who volunteer and benefit their community. By addressing the essential elements, 4-H reinforces the mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of youth. Clubs, communications arts scholarship program, project work, camp and Congress are mainstays to be continued and refined to be more accessible and effective.

Closely tied to youth well-being is their physical health. 4-H program delivery modes offer a diversity of vehicles to deliver nutrition, healthy eating, meal preparation, smart shopping and physical activity lessons. The Walk, Trot, Jog mini-grant at the afterschool sites encourages participation in a progressive running program that includes lessons on taking care of your body, self-confidence and a healthy body image.

4-H recognizes the broad diversity of youth and how they learn and seeks to incorporate a wide diversity of delivery modes beyond traditional clubs. The Maker Education Initiative at The Georgetown School (alternative school) has been very successful and expanded this year to include the afterschool sites. This somewhat unique concept of education resulted in disenfranchised youth who were on the verge of school failure becoming incredibly successful, passing summer school topics of math and science. They became outgoing, engaged learners, unafraid of trying new things and feeling self-confident. We will continue to seek funding that will allow the continuation of the Georgetown site and expand to other schools within the county particularly with WatchDOGS, the network of fathers volunteering in the schools.

For ANR agent to provide classroom education and field seminars targeted to historically underserved landowners (minority, N/B farmers, limited income) in partnership Virginia State University (Specialists and Small Farm Agents), the Virginia Association for Biological Farming

(VABF), HA-CL SWCD, FSA and NRCS. Targeted programs to include vegetable and fruit production, small ruminant production, livestock and forage management, and pond management and maintenance; serve as a train-the-trainer coordinator for the VABFRCP to assist VSU in their efforts to target N/B, minority and limited-resource farmers.

Promote the Hanover County Cannery as a certified facility where citizens can safely process their home-grown or locally purchased produce and become certified through VA Tech as a food specialist in order to answer questions and provide educational resources for home processing (canning and freezing) of fruits and vegetables.

Continue to promote and expand the Master Gardeners' free Home Gardening Series (HGS) of Spring and Fall gardening, turf and landscaping workshops to better promote safe, practical, cost-effective and sustainable gardening and landscaping practices for all landowners.