



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report

Highland County

2013

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Introduction

The Highland Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a nine month study of the current situation of Highland County. The process started in February of 2013 with the Unit's Extension Leadership Council (ELC) collecting and analyzing county data in order to develop a Unit Profile.

After reviewing the data, the ELC decided that additional information was needed to help determine the top issues facing Highland County. A survey instrument was developed to acquire input from a wide range of key informants from the county. The results of the survey were used to rank the top 8 issues facing Highland County citizens.

The ELC evaluated these top issues and determined the most important issues/needs that Extension should focus on or be able to make the most impact on.

These needs are reported in this document and will be used to prioritize Extension programming in the future.

Unit Profile

The Highland Extension Leadership Council reviewed the Unit Profile data and made the following observations.

- Highland County population continued to decline over the past twenty years and 1% in the last 3 years. This decline has a direct impact on the school system, jobs, businesses, civic organizations and volunteerism.
- Diversity of the population has changed very little.
- The median age of Highland residents increased significantly in the last 30 years. In 1980, the age stood at 34, in 1990 at 40, in 2000 at 46, and in 2012 it stands at 52. Virginia's median age for 2012 is 37.
- Household incomes declined slightly in the last four years and continue to be significantly below Virginia and National incomes.
- The number of children in poverty jumped 5% from 2010 to 2013 and is 7% higher than Virginia's 2013 rates.
- Unemployment rate of 7% is not significantly higher than the state and national average. ELC noted that there are a very limited number of jobs available that provide adequate income and benefits to support a family unit. This contributes to the migration of young adults out of the county for employment opportunities.
- The number of housing units available has reduced by 7% and the number of vacant homes declined by 11%. However, occupied housing units declined 3% in the last five years indicating a slight increase in number of occupants per household.
- ELC noted that the number of school-aged children attending local public schools continues to be significantly less than the total number of school-aged children in the population.

- The ELC considered Highland at a higher than average rate of cancer. Data showed mammography screening at 60% which is well below state and national statistics for early detection screening in 2013.
- The adult obesity rate in Highland increased 2% from 2010 to 2013 and follows the state and national trends at 27%.
- Limited access to healthy foods rate of 30% was significantly higher than Virginia's 2013 rate of 4%. ELC questioned this data in terms of locally produced and processed foods. ELC acknowledged the distance to grocery chain stores could be a factor, particularly in winter months.
- The number of uninsured residents changed very little over the last three years, but continued to be 10% higher than Virginia and 14% more uninsured than the 2013 national average.
- Primary care physician's rate of 1156:1 was identified as low to ELC members considering that there are no physicians currently practicing within the county.
- Agriculture statistics can be found on the chart (next page).

Agricultural Statistics

Highland County	Total Farms	Acres of Farmland	Average Size in Acres	Average Farm Gross Receipts
1997	283	91,342	323	43,308
2002	293	96,036	328	43,476
2007	239	76,764	321	54,920
Last 10 yrs.	Down 15%	Down 16%	Down < 1%	Up < 27%

Beef Cattle	Highland	Rank in VA
1997	12,719	
2002	11,202	Ranks 45 th
2006	14,000	Ranks 40 th
2007	11,900	Ranks 53 rd
Last 10 yrs.	Down 6%	

Sheep	Highland	Rank in VA
1997	6,903	
2002	5,054	Ranks 3 rd
2006	5,000	Ranks 3 rd
2007	4,500	Ranks 5 th
Last 10 yrs	Down 35%	

Data from the 2012 Agricultural Census is not yet available.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The ELC gathered data, analyzed data, and developed a list of issues of importance. A survey of key informants which included community group leaders, department heads, school personnel, and government leaders responded and commented on each of the issues. From the results of the survey, the ELC prioritized the following issues for Highland County.

1. Growth and Employment Issues
2. Youth Development Concerns
3. Agriculture Profitability and Resource Management
4. Health Concerns
5. Aging Population
6. Decline in Volunteer Base
7. Environmental Quality and Land Issues
8. Livestock Predation Issues

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Growth and Employment Issues

Population continued to decline in Highland County over the last decade. Young adults leave the county for employment opportunities. There is a lack of industrial employment in the county and/or other employment opportunities with wages and benefits to sustain young families. This employment and population decline results in lower school population and the ability for schools to perform with some essence of efficiency which results in an elevated school budget. Other strains from population decline have affected our volunteer service base and the ability to attract/sustain business and services for the local population.

VCE has many resources to provide programming on starting a small business, agri-tourism, horticulture, as well as building self-esteem in the youth so that they will be more confident, willing workers in society.

Issue 2: Youth Development Concerns

Highland County residents see our youth and young adults as a critical part of the county's future. They recognize that they must offer educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and opportunities and activities that provide enrichment and life skills beyond formal education.

VCE can best address these concerns with an internal team approach, combining the efforts of our 4-H, FCS, and ANR staff. It will also be important to us to partner with other local agencies or stakeholders.

Extension is well-suited to provide skills training to youth. Four-H educational programs should continue to be a large component of this. Through project work and activities, 4-H can offer vocational skills, life skills, character training, career exploration, teaching communication skills

through county contest day with a school partnership to include forensics, high school financial planning and Reality Store, leadership development, and the ability to launch into small business ventures.

Pledging our “health to better living” can be more than just a slogan. Extension can help tackle the drug and alcohol problem in our communities. 4-H will offer a new Health Rocks! curriculum to the middle school. Both 4-H and FCS staff can make youth aware that drugs and alcohol are not the right choice. This is another opportunity to partner with other organizations (law enforcement, Social Services, Health Department) fighting the same problem.

Our counties once relied heavily on neighbors helping neighbors. Today, with members of our community service clubs, volunteer rescue squads, and volunteer fire departments aging, they see the need for the younger generation to fill their shoes. Again, the Highland 4-H program speaks to this need through service learning opportunities for both members and adults.

Issue 3: Agriculture Profitability and Resource Management

Agriculture is the number one industry in Highland County. Highland has over \$15 million gross farm receipts. Increased land values and related real estate values have put a squeeze on agriculture and the ability to expand. Land ownership switched to non-resident landowners. Lack of management abilities and the increased cost of resources to farm have put a limit on potential profits.

VCE will continue to assist with marketing programs, farm business and livestock management education, forage and crop production, and problem solving. Flexibility and responsiveness to ever changing agriculture needs and issues is a role that VCE will continue to strive to achieve.

Issue 4: Health Concerns

Lack of local specialized services for health care of the population is somewhat related to issue number one—low population. Heart disease, cancer, and obesity issues are three of the main issues facing citizens. Uninsured residents for health insurance are significantly higher than state and national averages.

Family and Consumer Science programs can address nutritional needs, caregiving, family issues, and provide information on obtaining health care options. 4-H youth programs will encourage healthy lifestyle choices.

Issue 5: Aging Population

The median age of Highland residents stands at 52 years, which is 15 years older than the Virginia median. Needs of our aging population continue to grow and include health concerns, transportation, limited services, lack of caregivers and extended family care, and transition. Many of the elderly continue to be key players in volunteer organizations, but are rapidly declining.

Provide education on farm transition, nutrition, estate and retirement planning, and health care.

Issue 6: Decline in Volunteer Base

Highland County has always been known for its volunteer base and community involvement. Contributing factors to the decline include: lower population, decline in religious activities, and young people moving away or lack of interest in volunteering. Current volunteers are aging and requirements for volunteering are more stringent. In some instances, civic clubs and organizations are questioning their survival.

4-H can provide character training, continue to promote citizenship, and provide opportunities for youth to volunteer to participate in community service. VCE can offer leadership education and promote involvement among the citizens and recognition of volunteers.

Issue 7: Environment Quality and Land Issues

Highland County's pristine environment is considered by many to be Highland's major asset. Water, land, and air pollution are continuously monitored and evaluated for quality of life purposes. Awareness and effort to improve the environment is important to the well-being of the citizens.

ANR and 4-H agents continue to provide education to both youth and adults. Providing insight on ever changing government regulations, property rights, and land use options, Extension will partner with Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District and other government and non-government conservation and environmental groups to ensure a well-informed public.

Issue 8: Livestock Predation Issues

Predation continues to be a major concern of livestock producers in the county. Annual losses are excessive and reduce the profit to local farmers.

The ANR agent will provide education on prevention and livestock protection and will partner with USDA Animal Damage Control and local livestock associations for solutions to minimize predation problems.