



Situation Analysis Report

LEE COUNTY

2013

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Introduction

Lee County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the fall of 2013. Using the 2004 Situation Analysis as a starting point, the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met twice to discuss past issues and identify present ones. A community survey was created using QUALTRICS. Emails containing the survey link were distributed by all unit staff to their work/personal contacts, including ELC members, with a request that the survey be completed before December 1, 2013. A public service announcement was also run in the local newspaper, giving the reason for the situation analysis and the link for the survey. Several hard copies of the survey were also returned to the Extension Office and added to the on-line results. Approximately 75 surveys were submitted.

Unit Profile

Lee County is a rural county located in extreme Southwest Virginia. It borders Bell and Harlan Counties in Kentucky, Hancock and Claiborne Counties in Tennessee and Wise and Scott Counties in Virginia. The county contains 438 square miles and has abundances of natural resources that include timber, coal, limestone, crude oil, and natural gas. Lee County is located 396 miles from Richmond, the state capitol. The 2010 census data indicated a total population of 25,587. The population actually increased 8.47% between 2000 and 2010 but projections forecast a decline of approximately 4% in total population in the next 20-30 years. These projections forecast a slight drop (1.4%) of youth ages 0-19 years old and an increase of about 5% in the number of residents aged 65 years and older, making this age group almost 25% of the total population. There are three incorporated towns located with the county: Jonesville (the county seat), Pennington Gap, and St. Charles.

Population

The 2010 US Census reported the total population of Lee County at 25,587 which was an increase of about 2,000 people. However, this amount maybe a reflection of the population of a federal prison located within the county. Although this population should not be in the total, local sources have said that it was added in error.

Fifty-six percent (14,316) of the total population is between the ages of 25-65 years of age with almost 66% of that group being in the highly employable age group of 25-55 years old. The population of the county has consistently declined and future projections predict the same trend for the next 20-30 years with a 5% increase in the number of residents over the age of 65 years old.

Education

72.5% of the population (25+ years) have a high school diploma/GED with nearly 12% having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Although fewer females than males

graduated high school or earned a GED more females attended college and/or earned higher educational degrees.

Employment

Employment data shows that over 8,300 residents commute out of the county for work, while about 2,500 people commute into the county. This leaves a negative (-) 5,800 number of people traveling out of the county for employment. The unemployment rate in Lee County (8.3%) is higher than the Virginia rate of 5.9% and only slightly above the national average of 8.1%. The unemployment rate has increased in the past 12 months to 9.4%, reflecting the loss of jobs in the mining industries. This data does not reflect the recent loss of over 100 jobs when the only hospital in the county closed October 1, 2013. Information from the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) shows that small businesses (with <50 employees) provide almost 47% of the 4,919 jobs in the county. Government jobs including those in the federal prison, school system, and local government account for another 33% of the total. 36% of children in Lee County live below the poverty level (a 3% increase since 2010). The median household income was \$32,588 which is only 52% of the state per capita of \$ 62,391.

Health

The rate of obesity continues to increase and is above both the state and national rates according to the Virginia Department of Health. A high rate of physical inactivity (34%) is well above the state and national rates (24% and 21% respectively). Although the rate of excessive drinking (10%) is less than the state average of 16% it is still significantly higher than the national average of 7%.

Agricultural Data

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of Lee County. Lee County's dominate agriculture product is cattle and calves with receipts according to the 2007 Agriculture Census equaling \$9,316,000 and 26,751 head of cattle and calves in the county. Lee County's crop receipts from the 2007 Agriculture Census equaled \$4,219,000 making it a valued part of the economy for the county. Traditionally, Lee County has been dominated by tobacco production with many producers still in the county. Due to high prices of corn, soybeans, and vegetable crops in recent years, many producers are interested into diversifying into these commodities. There have been some decreases in number of farms and acreage in farms from 2002 to 2007 Agriculture Census for Lee County, but due to the downturn in the economy local interest in agriculture has increased.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Approximately 75 community surveys were submitted online or returned to the Extension Office. A list of 26 issues were given and participants were asked to rate their importance a scale from "Very Unimportant" to "Very Important." The survey then asked that the top 5 issues be ranked with suggestions about how these issues could be addressed. There

were many surveys that only completed the rating section and did not list the top 5 issues/suggestions. Some surveys were contradictory in that they marked issues as “very unimportant” but went on to identify those issues in the top 5 priorities. With these inconsistencies the rating section was really not considered in determining the top 5 issues. Instead, the **ranking** of the top issues was used to identify the following 10 issues. They are listed in the order of most responses to fewer responses.

Priority Issues

Agriculture Production/Profitability

Many family farms are disappearing due to low profitability. The average age of a farmer is 58 years old and the younger generation is leaving the area for careers with higher incomes. Tobacco has been replaced by cattle as the most dominate agricultural product. With the loss of jobs in the coal industry the ANR agent has seen an increase in “hobby” farmers becoming more interested in how to make their farms more profitable. The Beginning Farmer and Master Cattlemen programs along with work to establish/maintain a livestock association have become major areas of work for VCE Agricultural programming in Lee County.

Career Development

Small businesses (0-4 employees) provide almost half the jobs in Lee County. Federal/state/local government supports another 33%. The only hospital in the county closed October 1 resulting in a loss of over 100 jobs. Young people have historically moved from the county after high school/college graduation to live and work. Increased local business development and/or training for more jobs/careers that would allow young adults to stay in the local area were identified as priority needs. Although the school system shoulders the load for educating/training the youth, the 4-H program continues to work with youth to help them develop positive attributes such as good character, responsibility, and leadership skills which are all critical in any chosen career or job opportunity. Reality Store simulations provide youth with a snapshot of what life may look like in certain career and personal paths-- the goal being to encourage them to finish their education before starting families and to plan for the future.

Aging Population

With predictions for the number of residents aged 65 and over to increase in the next 20-30 years the issues associated with an aging population are of concern. Long distances for travel to hospitals in both emergency/non-emergency situations, high rates of chronic diseases, decreased funding in services related to elder care such as home delivered meals and homemaker services, and transition of family farms to the next generation were some of the issues mentioned. VCE can provide educational programs that address health/wellness/physical activity, chronic disease prevention, financial management/estate planning, emergency preparedness and the transfer of real and personal property.

Water Quality

Numerous residents rely on private wells and springs for drinking water. The towns of Jonesville and Pennington Gap as well as many other areas served by the Public Service Authority (PSA) treat water from the Powell River to supply customers. With a long history of pesticide use in agriculture production, coal mining in the eastern end of the county and a large population of cattle, horses, and deer, there is great concern about the water quality in Lee County. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has worked with coal operators/owners to manage most of those issues. The local soil and water conservation district works with many farmers in regard to fencing animals out of rivers and streams. VCE can provide information/programs about proper use/disposal of pesticides, drinking water clinics (when funding is available to offset costs), and programs about recycling, repurposing and reusing materials that might otherwise be dumped or placed in landfills.

Obesity/Nutrition/Exercise

Lee County has very high rates of diabetes, heart disease, obesity and other chronic health problems. Traditional "home cooked" foods are often high in fat, cholesterol and salt content. Fast food restaurants, convenience stores and pre-packaged convenience foods in grocery stores have made cooking at home an uncommon occurrence in a growing number of households in Lee County. Many low-resource families will not try new fruits/vegetables and risk their families not liking/eating them, thus wasting some of their food dollars. Hi-tech devices such as computers, games, and music devices have allowed both youth and adults to become more sedentary in their lifestyles. VCE has a number of programs available to educate and encourage people of all ages to make healthier choices in purchasing/preparing foods and how to become more physically active. Home gardening and food preservation programs are also offered.

Youth Activities

Many youth participate in sports teams and other after school activities but with many families children miss out on these opportunities for a number of reasons. Reliable transportation is often an issue in determining if youth participate in extra-curricular activities. The cost of uniforms and other supplies also hinders many low-resource youth from taking part. The 4-H program (including the SNAP-Ed youth program) works with youth ages 5-19 in the primary, middle and high schools through classroom clubs, afterschool programs and summer camps. Teens are encouraged to participate in 4-H Congress, visits to the State Capitol and Share-the-Fun competitions to broaden their exposure to activities and events outside of the county. The ANR agent has started a young stockman's club and works closely with the FFA teacher to offer those students more opportunities to learn about livestock and farming.

Child Development and Parenting

Thirty-six percent (36%) of youth under 18 years old in Lee County are living in poverty. There are high rates of drug abuse and arrests of both young and old(er) adults. Many

children live in single parent households; many are being raised by grandparents. Parents lack the proper skills to help their children achieve and be successful. Families often have received public assistance for generations and youth find it hard to break this cycle. FCS programs offer parenting classes in budgeting, nutrition, food safety and home food preservation, grocery shopping and basic cooking skills.