

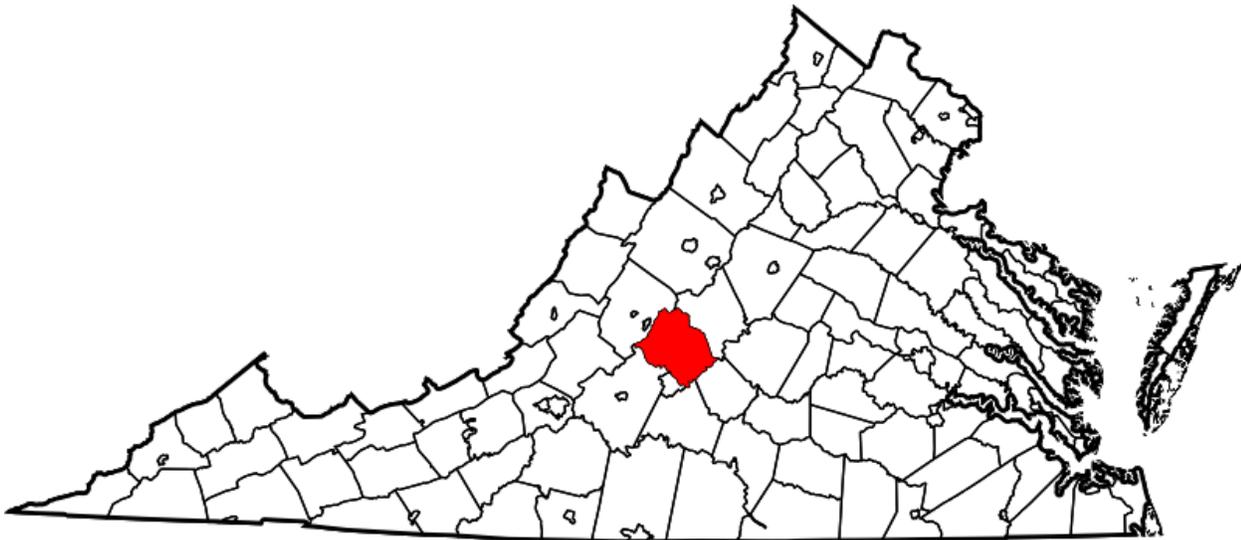


Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Amherst County

2013

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Introduction

The Amherst Extension Office was tasked with conducting a Situation Analysis for 2013. We began this process by creating a survey that was placed online, through Qualtrics, and could be accessed from our Local Office website. Before the survey was released however, we sent a copy to members of the Extension Leadership Council for their input. We made appropriate changes and additions/deletions from ELC input, and then added the survey link to our website. We also made hard copies of the same survey and distributed these as follows:

1. We brought copies to the Citizens Academy – a group of individuals who were involved in a 3-month workshop to learn more about county government. These individuals participated in the survey as well as helped to distribute the survey to other county government employees and among their friends and colleagues. We also discussed the survey as part of a Focus Group with these individuals, and took notes to share with the ELC later.
2. We left a number of surveys at the County government office for individuals to complete and return to a box for collection.
3. We took 20 surveys to the following area churches: one in the northern part, primarily attended by Blacks, one in the middle part, also attended by Blacks, one in the southern part, primarily attended by Whites, and one in the middle part, attended by Whites and some Hispanics.
4. We met with our ELC to hand 10 copies to each member (9 members attended this meeting). Members were asked to complete the survey and to help distribute them among their friends and neighbors. Our ELC contingent that night was as follows: three White males, two White females, one Hispanic male, two Black females, and one Bi-racial female (American Indian and Black).
5. A letter was sent out to 250 4-H Camper parents, as well as 150 4-H Club members/parents, with a link to the office website stating that an important evaluation was on the link and we ask that they participate.

From this effort, we felt we had made “all reasonable efforts” to put the evaluation into the hands of both a geographical and racial/ethnic representation of Amherst County.

Unit Profile

The Amherst County Unit Profile has not changed dramatically since last completed in 2004. The female population is at 52.6% and the male at 47.4%. The White population has dropped from 79% to 76.9%, but still makes up the majority. The Black population ranks second, at 19.5%, relatively unchanged in 9 years. There is a steady growth in the older population, beginning with the age group 45-54 and continuing through age 85+. The total number of

farms has decreased from 460 to 424, while smaller sized farms have increased in number. Farms of 50-179 acres have declined in number the greatest. The market value of farms has increased per farm and per acre. The overall health of the county remains fairly unchanged. Unemployment is up 7.2% from 4%, and children in poverty is up 20% from 16%. The educational summary is steady, with a slight increase in overall educational attainment, and a slight decrease in enrollment for youth aged 10-19 years.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Our survey was left on the office website for two months, until Oct. 31, 2013. We also collected hard copies of surveys until the Oct. 31 deadline as well. The Qualtrics program summarized all data online, and our office staff tabulated the hard copies. We then called a special meeting of the ELC to discuss the data, which was printed out as a report. The ELC was attended by 16 members, with six representing 4-H, and five in both ANR and FCS. As a total group, we briefly discussed how we distributed the surveys, as well as discussed notes from the Focus Group, and then we broke up into our three program areas and looked at specific data as it pertained to each program area. Finally, we came back together with THREE to FOUR Priority Issues as identified by each program area.

Priority Issues

Amherst County ANR Programs

Issue 1 - Agriculture Production/Profitability

The driving force of any economic endeavor is profitability. Therefore ANR Extension programs must continue to address ways to improve profitability as a key focal point. Introducing programs that evaluate and draw comparisons among current production practices while identifying superior practices should be a priority. In addition, extension should also be proactive in bringing research proven improved production alternatives to producers. This proactive aspect is a primary focus of extension programming; by bring new production methods to producers and residents.

There are several ways to achieve greater profitability. One by improving production, thereby reducing variable costs of production per unit; the other by reducing input costs and finding cost effective alternatives.

Many extension programs in the past have given much attention to production aspects that incur the greatest costs to producers. For example, extension has provided a great number of programs on ways to reduce winter feed costs for cattle producers. For horticultural producers

integrated pest management programs and workshops have reduced input costs by educating producers about safer more effective chemicals and better application times for control.

Issue 2 - Animals and Livestock

Improving best management production practices concerning animals and livestock is another issue that ANR extension can work to address. Livestock production education is important to improving the health, performance, genetics, and market value of livestock. Proper vaccination techniques and applications are important not just for animal health but also for improving end market value for livestock. Education about proper withdrawal times for drug applications for livestock is important to verifying a safe food supply, which is a concern for some consumers. Other production practices such as proper animal handling should be addressed as well. Farm infrastructure, such as handling facilities and fences, hay and commodity storage, farm equipment, and the use of partial budgets as a decision making tool to evaluate purchases of different inputs. Education about genetic evaluations are important as well. Education about best management practices for livestock, in particular cattle, is a priority as there are over 12,000 of cattle among the 424 farms in Amherst.

Issue 3 - Agriculture Sustainability/Preservation

Currently there are 88,430 acres of farmland in Amherst County. Cattle, orchard and vineyard production make up a majority of farm enterprises. It is an extension program priority to have the productive farmland of the county viewed as sustainable by its residents. ANR extension must work with both the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District and the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District to provide information on conservation practices designed to improve forage utilization and nutrient management while protecting water quality for beef operations. Extension led programs can assist with producer interaction with the Conservation Districts, National Resource Conservation Service while documenting positive impacts of conservation systems and methods implemented by producers. Examples include rotational grazing systems, no till establishment of forage and grain crops, and excluding cattle and livestock from streams to improve water quality.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Issue 1 - Child Development and Parent Education

Child Development and Parent Education was identified as the top issue facing Amherst County. Nearly five children die every day in America from abuse and neglect. According to the National Children's Advocacy Center, more than 78% of reported child fatalities as a result of abuse and neglect were caused by one or more of the child victim's parents. Approximately 1,500 teenagers will attempt suicide in the next twenty four hours and twenty percent of teens will experience depression before they reach adulthood. Research has shown that one of the greatest deterrents of child abuse is quality and practical parenting educational programs, and often simple, open and honest conversation between teenagers and parents can prevent a suicide attempt. This issue is currently being addressed with current unit VCE resources. Based on the situation analysis, no further action is required

Issue 2 - Youth and Adult Financial Education

Youth and Adult Financial Education was identified as the second most pressing issue in Amherst County. Research by the Federal Reserve indicates that household debt is at a record high relative to disposable income. As the recession recovery finally sets in for many Americans, Virginia residents rank sixth out of all fifty states for the highest in median revolving debt per borrower. Virginia also has the eleventh highest rate for Chapter 13 bankruptcy filings. Some analysts are concerned that this unprecedented level of debt might pose a risk to the financial health of American households. A high level of indebtedness among households could lead to increased household delinquencies and bankruptcies, which could threaten the health of lenders if loan losses are greater than anticipated. This issue is currently being addressed with current VCE unit resources. Based on the situation analysis, no further action is required.

Issue 3 - Aging Population

Aging Population was identified as the third most pressing issue in Amherst County. As the population continues to age someone must assist the elderly population with personal care. The over 65 year old group is increasing steadily and care decisions often become the responsibility of their children. Educational opportunities and resources are needed to cover financial, medical, and legal matters that arise when making choices for an elderly parent. The use of planning prior to the illness or death is needed by both parties. This issue is currently being addressed to some extent with VCE resources. Additional efforts need to be explored to better address this issue.

Issue 4 - Water Quality

Water Quality was identified as the fourth most pressing problem in Amherst County. In July 2009, fifty residents of Amherst County participated in a drinking water clinic sponsored by the local VCE office and the Virginia Household Water Quality Program. The most common household water-quality issues identified as a result of the analyses for the Amherst

participants were low pH, manganese, nitrate and the presence of total coliform bacteria. Based on the situation analysis, this issue is currently being addressed by VCE statewide, and still a concern of Amherst residents. Collaboration between the ANR and FCS agent need to be explored to better address this issue within Amherst County.

4-H Youth Development

Issue 1 - Life Skills and Decision Making for Youth

This was a common theme across most of the evaluations. Extension and 4-H does address this issue and will continue to address the issue as our programs are geared at positive youth development by targeting life skills in all our educational programs. Each 4-H Club, the 4-H In-School program, and 4-H Summer camp uses the Iowa State “Targeting Life Skills” wheel as a basis for education.

Issue 2 - Youth Activities

Again, a common issue was “not enough activities for youth to keep them out of trouble”. With limited resources and working with a volunteer base, 4-H is addressing this issue by providing clubs across a wide range of program areas. We will continue to recruit and train volunteers to work with clubs and youth to provide alternative activities for youth to participate in to develop positive life skills.

Issue 3 - Teen Community Involvement

Surveys indicated that there was some concern over the lack of community involvement and/or “giving back” to the community by the teen population. 4-H is addressing this issue with the Teen Leadership Club, which continues to grow in size and now has over 60 members. The goal of this club is to develop leadership and citizenship among teens, to prepare them to be positive role models in their community, as well as successful leaders at the 4-H Summer Camp, and beyond.