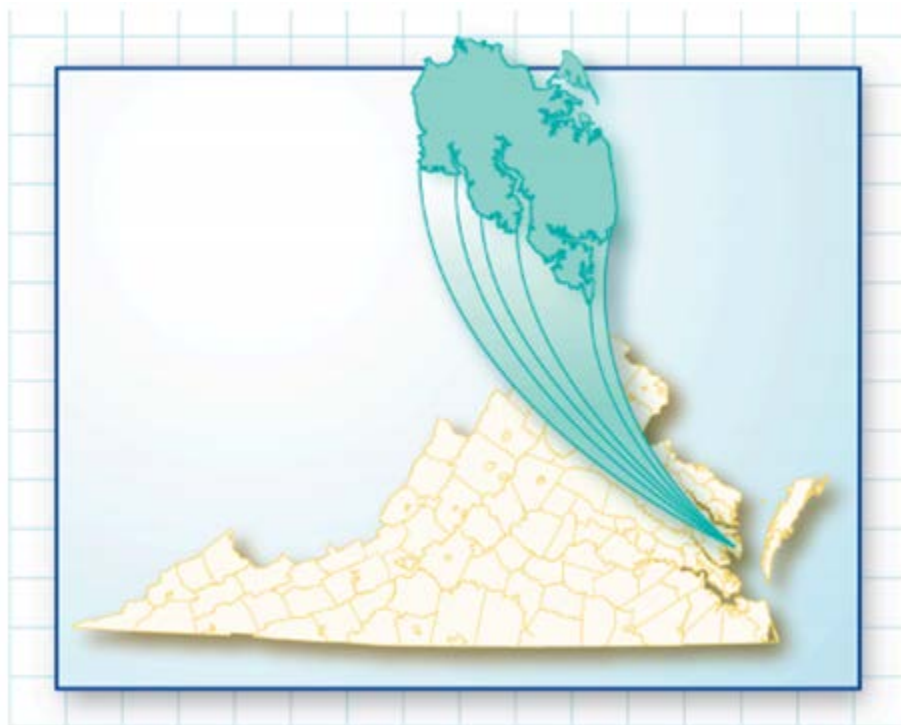


Matthews County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Improving Water Quality	Implement education programs on soil health, water stewardship, and sustainable agricultural practices. Encourage the use of native plants for shoreline protection and the development of rain gardens to address drainage issues. Collaborate with local environmental organizations, agricultural services, and schools. Seek support from state and federal environmental agencies. Allocate funding for educational materials, workshops, and outreach programs. Seek grants for water quality improvement projects.
Youth Empowerment and Education	Establish mentorship programs, vocational training, and extracurricular activities for youth. Promote financial education and job readiness programs. Partner with local schools, businesses, community organizations, and youth-focused non-profits. Allocate funding for youth programs, seek grants for educational initiatives, and involve local businesses in providing internship opportunities.
Environmental Education and Preservation	Prioritizing environmental education, protection from water pollution and land erosion, promoting self-sufficiency in food production, and exploring water agriculture. Partner with school division to create continual in-school programming that aligns with these initiatives. Grow local Master Gardener program to address these needs in the community.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify issues important to residents of Mathews County. Mathews County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the calendar year 2004. This information was re-examined and updated every 4 years in 2008, 2013, 2018 and again in 2023. The situation analysis process was led by the Unit Extension Staff and involved the use of the Mathews County Unit Profile, Mathews County Comprehensive plan, Mathews County School division strategic plan, as well as gathering community perspectives on issues and problems in the county. Data and information from these sources were analyzed by the Unit Extension Staff and priority issues were identified. Using the provided report from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website and state survey VCE staff analyzed pieces of the data sets to tailor the survey to the community (based on the template from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website).

For the survey, the theoretical population was identified as community representatives. These representatives were accessible, as most were a part of local organizations. Community members were given access to a link to the online version of the survey and the option of a paper version so that those community members without access to the Internet would have the same opportunity to provide input. The findings of the community surveys were reviewed and the top priority issues for Mathews County identified, including those that could be addressed with current VCE resources and those that were outside the scope of current VCE resources.

Unit Profile

Mathews County is located on the eastern tip of Virginia's Middle Peninsula, bordered by the Chesapeake Bay to the east and the Piankatank River to the south. It is known for its rural character, scenic landscapes, and a rich maritime heritage. Based on the last census completed in 2020 Mathews County population is 8,631 which is a -5% decrease from 2010. Of the total county population 15.5% are under the age of 18 and the largest group is 65 and older with 32.7% of the population. Due to this higher-than-average number, it is important to look at community issues focused on this older population. The largest Mathews County racial groups are White (84.6%) followed by Black/African American (9.3%) and Two or More (3.1%). While a small county with large amounts of marsh land there is a small agricultural presence in Mathews County. According to the last Ag Census data report there are 66 producers in the county and of those 93% are family farms. New or beginning farmers make up 1/3 of that number and 32% of farmers have military experience. Due to the higher percentage of older, mostly retired individuals in our population there is a large gap between our census data median income of \$ 79,054 and the per capita income of \$48,173 and 8.8% poverty rate in the same 12-month period in 2022 (Census 2022).

Community and Resident Perspectives (H2)

This summary reflects a diverse set of concerns within the community, ranging from environmental issues to youth empowerment, housing, and economic development. Addressing these challenges will require a collaborative and comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders in Mathews County.

Teaching Soil Health and Water Stewardship: Concerns about soil health and water stewardship, emphasizing horticultural activities for school-age children and using native plants for shoreline integrity and runoff prevention.

Youth Education in Nature and Science: A strong desire for education initiatives focusing on nature and science experiences for youth.

Affordable Housing: Significant concerns about the lack of affordable housing, impacting the community's ability to attract and retain residents.

Declining Youth Population: Recognizing a decline in the youth population, there is a call to empower and provide more opportunities for young people.

Drug Problem and School Infrastructure: Urgent calls to address the drug problem and improve school infrastructure to empower and protect the youth.

Financial Education and Employment Opportunities for Youth: Emphasis on financial education, acquiring work skills, and providing opportunities for youth to develop skills through programs and community service.

Homelessness and Food Insecurity: Concerns about homelessness and food insecurity, with suggestions for addressing these issues through community-based support and education.

Access to Fresh Food and Public Health: Calls for improving access to fresh food, promoting public health, and addressing healthcare challenges, especially among the elderly population.

Trade School and Apprentice Programs: A desire for more trade school and apprentice programs in high schools to enhance opportunities for skill development.

Environmental Education and Preservation: Prioritizing environmental education, protection from water pollution and land erosion, promoting self-sufficiency in food production, and exploring water agriculture.

Strengthening Food Supply and Supporting Agriculture: Calls to strengthen the food supply, empower youth, and support agriculture to enhance self-dependency.

Infrastructure Development and Recreational Resources: Recognizing the impact of shoaling waters on watermen's livelihoods, the need for water agriculture, and advocating for outdoor recreational resources for public health benefits.

Population Retention and Attraction: Concerns about losing the population of school-aged children and the need to attract younger families and businesses to the area.

Youth Activities and Empowerment: Consistent emphasis on empowering youth, providing activities, and creating opportunities for skill development and engagement in the community.

Community Issues

The survey responses encapsulate an array of concerns within the community of Mathews County. Ranging from environmental preservation to youth empowerment, affordable housing, and economic development, the insights paint a comprehensive portrait of the community's priorities. Residents expressed a keen interest in initiatives such as teaching soil health and water stewardship, emphasizing horticultural activities for children, and advocating for affordable housing solutions. Criticisms regarding community engagement and communication underscore the importance of fostering a sense of belonging among residents. The recognition of a declining youth population has spurred calls for empowering young people and addressing associated challenges, including the drug problem and school infrastructure.

Additionally, there is a clear emphasis on financial education, employment opportunities for youth, and initiatives to combat homelessness and food insecurity. Residents are also keen on environmental education, preservation efforts, and the exploration of water agriculture. Strengthening the food supply, supporting agriculture, and advocating for infrastructure development and recreational resources demonstrate a holistic approach to community well-being. The overarching concern of population retention and attraction highlights the need for concerted efforts to retain school-aged children and attract younger families and businesses. Throughout, a consistent theme emerges – the imperative to empower and engage the youth, emphasizing skill development and fostering a sense of community involvement. Addressing these challenges necessitates a collaborative and comprehensive approach, bringing together diverse stakeholders within Mathews County.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Addressing Priority Issues in Mathews County

1. Improving Water Quality:

To address concerns about water quality in Mathews County, our unit will implement a multi-faceted strategy focused on education, collaboration, and sustainable practices. Educational programs will be developed to inform residents about soil health, water stewardship, and the use of native plants for shoreline integrity. Collaborations with local environmental organizations, agricultural extension services, and schools will be established to promote best practices and disseminate information. Additionally, we will seek funding through grants and allocate resources for water quality improvement projects, emphasizing the importance of preserving the county's natural resources for current and future generations.

2. Youth Empowerment and Education:

Empowering and educating the youth in Mathews County is a top priority for our unit. We plan to establish mentorship programs, vocational training initiatives, and extracurricular activities to provide diverse opportunities for skill development. Collaborations with local schools, businesses, and youth-focused non-profits will be forged to create a supportive ecosystem for the young population. Financial education programs, community service opportunities, and internship connections will be developed to equip the youth with the necessary tools for future success. By implementing these strategies, we aim to not only address the immediate concerns raised by residents but also cultivate a strong, skilled, and engaged younger generation that contributes positively to the community.

3. Environmental Education and Preservation:

Preserving the environment and fostering environmental education will be at the forefront of our initiatives in Mathews County. Collaborating with local environmental organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies, we will develop programs that prioritize environmental education and protection. Efforts will include promoting sustainable practices, exploring water agriculture, and advocating for the preservation of natural resources. Educational campaigns on the impact of human activities on the environment will be designed to encourage residents to adopt eco-friendly practices. By fostering a sense of responsibility towards the environment and providing the knowledge to enact positive change, our unit aims to create a community that is not only environmentally conscious but also actively engaged in preserving the natural beauty of Mathews County.

In conclusion, our unit is committed to implementing targeted interventions, building strategic partnerships, and allocating resources to address these priority issues. By focusing on water quality improvement, youth empowerment, and environmental education, we aim to create a sustainable and resilient community in Mathews County that values its natural resources and invests in the future success of its residents.

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