



Situation Analysis Report



Mecklenburg County

2013

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Introduction

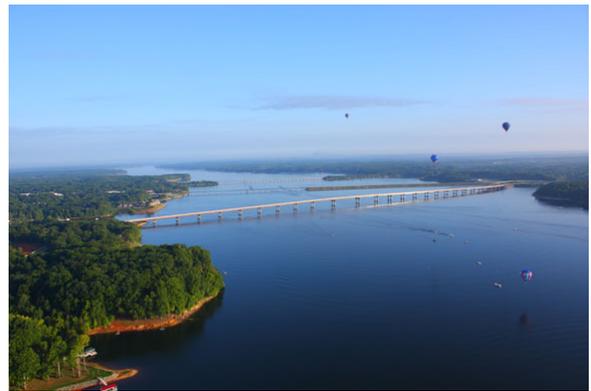
The Mecklenburg County Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted an update to the 2004 situation analysis during the 2008 calendar year. The purpose of the situation analysis was to gather information from the community to help identify the priority issues affecting the County's citizens.

The Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met for an overview and discussion for the 2013 situation analysis update. The ELC and unit staff worked together to determine several issues the county currently struggles with. A sub-committee comprised of ELC and unit staff met to determine the top needs to be addressed. The sub-committee took into account the present programs delivered by each county agent as well as the new FCS position with a Local Foods emphasis that started January 2012. They felt the best way to determine the county's top priority issues were by survey. The committee created a survey with the county's determined priority issues from previous situation analyses and asked for the surveyor to rank them of importance. Surveyors' were then asked to identify their top issues and explain why they felt that issue must be addressed. This included any NEW issues identified by respondents compared to the previous situation analyses.

The survey was presented to community members and residents. Results identified the county's top priority issues to be addressed, whether by the unit staff or outside resources.

Unit Profile

Mecklenburg County is a rural county located in Southside Virginia. Mecklenburg borders North Carolina to the south (Warren, Vance, and Granville Counties), Brunswick County to the east, Halifax County to the west, and Charlotte and Lunenburg Counties to the north. Mecklenburg has five incorporated towns within the county: South Hill, Chase City, Clarksville, La Crosse, and Boydton. Mecklenburg County also has portions of Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston within its borders which attract vacationers and retirees.



Year 2000 census data indicated a population of 32,380. The population has remained constant, with 32,778 in the 2010 census.

Mecklenburg County's population dynamics have remained relatively constant since 2006. The population is older than the state average, with declining numbers of school age children. As a consequence, the School Board has closed two elementary schools since 2000, and is considering plans to consolidate the two county high schools and two middle schools.

The County's racial make-up has undergone very little change in the last ten years. As of 2010, Mecklenburg County population is 59.25% white and 37.12% African American. The Hispanic and Asian populations remained constant at only 2% and .69% of the population, respectively, after seeing relatively large increases between 1990 and 2000.

Median household income has increased from 2004 to \$36,069 in 2011, which is less than 60% of the state average. Persons earning below the poverty level have increased to 19% (28.7% of children under age 17 live below the poverty line). Free and reduced lunch increased to 58.4%. Because of the high level of free and reduced lunch, Mecklenburg employs a SNAP-ED paraprofessional to work with elementary students on nutrition education.

The Mecklenburg County School System is comprised of four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools, with a total student population of 4,600. The schools have made improvements in recent years with SOL test scoring, and as of 2012, all schools are fully accredited with the State Board of Education. The graduation rate is improving, but still falls below the state average, and students receiving Bachelor's Degrees or higher is 12.7%, compared to 34.4% for the state of Virginia. The low numbers are discouraging because there are two community colleges within thirty miles of the county, which also offer satellite classes within three of the county's five towns.

Economic uncertainty is a reality for Mecklenburg County residents. The unemployment rate is 10.2%, compared to the state unemployment rate of 5.2%. Two major employers closed in 2013, leaving over 3,000 residents unemployed. The housing market is flat, with houses staying on the market for over a year, or selling at reduced prices.

Since Mecklenburg County is a rural county, agriculture continues to be very important to the local economy. The number of farms in the county has declined 9% (580 to 527) from the 2007 Agriculture Census data. Farm income increased slightly during the period with a 2% increase in the number of farms having sales greater than \$25,000. Farm size increased slightly to 276 from 271 acres, which is considerably larger than the state average. Since 2005, tobacco acreage has increased from 2100 to 4000 acres, and soybean acreage has increased from 7800 to 20,000 acres. The increase in soybean acres has taken place partly at the expense of pasture and hay land. The 2012 Ag Census shows a 25% decline in beef cattle numbers.

Community and Resident Perspectives

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them of importance. Surveyors were then asked to identify their top issues and explain why they felt that particular issue must be addressed. This included any NEW issues identified by respondents compared to the previous situation analyses.

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Priority Issues

In 2008, the ELC identified the following priority issues for the County: Chronic Disease/Health and Wellness; Diet, Health and Nutrition across the Lifespan; Profitable Agriculture and Natural Resource Production; Positive Youth Activities; Family/Business Money Management. For the current situation analysis, the ELC met on October 22, 2013 for a discussion on priority issues. The sub-committee met November 12, 2013 to compile a survey and results were tallied November 19, 2013. The survey results recommend focusing on the following issues and needs of the community.

Issue 1: Agriculture Awareness

Even in a rural county like Mecklenburg, many residents are not knowledgeable of agricultural practices or the diverse nature of the commodities produced. The non-farming public is becoming more interested and concerned with how and where their food is being produced. This can produce misunderstanding between the public and the agricultural producers. It has also stimulated interest to produce commodities for direct market.

VCE Agents will collaborate with other agencies such as USDA FSA, USDA NRCS, and the local Soil and Water District, producers, and interested civic groups to provide educational opportunities for residents on agricultural production practices and how these commodities are used in products that we use every day. Also programs will be offered to better educate residents on local food production, preservation, marketing and food safety.

Issue 2: Food, Safety, Health & Nutrition

Obesity has become a major issue throughout the lifespan, with one-third of children and two-thirds of adults overweight or obese (ref: USDA press release). The obesity epidemic has stemmed from lack of nutrition education and exercise. The convenience of fast food, processed snack foods and sugary drinks has further advanced the prevalence of obesity as well as chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

VCE delivers programs such as Food Safety and Preservation, local cooking demonstrations at the Farmers' Market and healthy eating for youth. The FCS agent can offer classes that offer recipes, healthy cooking demonstrations and techniques, and the updated USDA recommended dietary guidelines.

Family Nutrition Program Assistant will address childhood obesity by utilizing the Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids curriculum with either third or fourth grade students in all four of the elementary schools. She will also teach the Organwise Guys curriculum to all kindergarteners in all four elementary schools. She will conduct six lessons and measure nutrition behavior changes by using pre and post tests and surveys.

Issue 3: Cultivating Farm to Community

Eating locally sourced foods has multiple impacts on not just the customer but the community itself. The customer purchasing locally sourced foods is consuming fresher, more nutritious foods and is promoting a safer food supply. The locally sourced food purchases support the local economy and benefits the environment and population.

VCE delivers programs that pertain to backyard poultry, gardening and food safety to help incorporate local foods into the community. VCE helps aid the county's community gardens, from planting, harvesting, safe food handling and preservation. VCE also helps with organization, marketing and membership of the county's community gardens. The FCS agent also participates in cooking demonstrations at the South Hill Farmers' Market to help create more interest in the local foods that are available that present day.

Issue 4: Positive Youth Activities

The following list ranks important issues of youth as seen by youth who responded to the survey:

1. Child abuse
2. Drug abuse
3. Teen pregnancy
4. Violent behavior
5. Apathy

The following list ranks important issues of youth as seen by adults who responded to the survey:

1. Apathy
2. Poverty/the economy
3. Being a person of good character
4. Body image
5. Child abuse

Other issues identified were as follows:

1. Lack of youth employment programs
2. Lack of cultural enrichment for diverse populations
3. Lack of exposure to a variety of college/career development opportunities/programs
4. Texting while driving
5. Lack of parental support for extra activities

To address the youth issues identified by youth and adults in the survey, the 4-H program will utilize a variety of program delivery modes, including in-school clubs, school enrichment, after-school science clubs, field trips, summer day camps, and residential 4-H camp. Priority will be given to addressing the “becoming a person of good character” issue by incorporating the Character Counts curriculum into all phases of 4-H programming. Character education will also indirectly address attitudes of apathy and several other issues affecting youth.

Issue 5: Profitable Agriculture and Natural Resources

Agriculture is Mecklenburg County’s largest industry. Mecklenburg County ranks second in flue-cured tobacco production in the state, while also producing significant acreage of soybeans and small grains. The majority of producers also raise beef cattle. The recent dramatic increases in input costs have negatively impacted producer net returns.

VCE provides producers with the latest information on curing efficiency and managing other input costs. Grain producers are provided information on varieties and other production practices to increase yield while controlling costs. VCE assists beef producers in adding value to their feeder calves through local Virginia Quality Assured feeder cattle sales and reducing the costs through education to improve grazing practices. Private and Commercial Pesticide applicators are provided educational opportunities to maintain their certification and comply with government and environmental regulations.