



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report

Middlesex County

2013



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Introduction

The Middlesex County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) participated in the development and implementation for community input collection for the Situation Analysis for calendar year 2013. The members of the ELC met to discuss the process of obtaining community input for the report. During this meeting, VCE personnel from Virginia Tech provided training to ensure members were familiar with the history, purpose, and process for the completion of the Situation Analysis. Also during this meeting, the 2009 Situation Analysis was reviewed and members discussed the priority topics/issues for Middlesex County. The review of the 2009 report provided the background knowledge necessary for the development of Qualtrics survey that was to be used for obtaining current community input. ELC members reviewed a sample Qualtrics survey and made necessary additions, deletions, and format changes. A final Qualtrics survey, incorporating the changes, was then developed. ELC members approved the changes and the survey was then distributed. The survey was distributed to the Middlesex County Public School System, 4-H families, county businesses, the public library, as well as advertised in the local newspaper and on the Middlesex County Cooperative Extension website and Facebook page. The results of the survey were reviewed to help identify the priority issues that are included in the final report.

Unit Profile

Basic Demographics

Middlesex County is located on what Virginia calls the “Middle Peninsula”. Middlesex County is bordered by Essex County in the north, King and Queen and Gloucester in the west, and Mathews County in the south. The entire eastern side of the county is bordered by the Rappahannock River.

Census data indicate that the population for Middlesex County was 10,855 in 2011. This represents a 2% population increase from 2010. Also in 2010, there were approximately 84.1 people per square mile. Age distribution data for Middlesex County show the greatest population increases in the senior citizen group (65-74), followed by a similar increase in the adult group (45-54) and the older adult group (60-64). This indicates the high number of retirees coming into the county.

According to the 2011 gender data, the percentage of males (49.49%) to females (50.51%) was very balanced. The racial makeup of the county based on the 2011 data was as follows: 79.9% White, 19.59% African American, .02% American Indian, 1.23% Hispanic, and .35% some other race. The biggest percentage increase for a specific race was in the Black or African American population, which was about 14 percent.

In regards to education, 47% of the population has some college, and 25.3% of the population over the age of 25 has obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

Housing

In 2011 there were 7,103 housing units in Middlesex County, which is a decrease of 52 since 2007. 61.1% of the housing units were occupied in 2011, while 38.9% of the units were vacant. The median value of owner-occupied housing units from 2007-2011 was \$254,700.

Economic Status

According to the 2011 census data, Middlesex County has a per capita income of \$30,654 and a median family income of \$53,615. Also listed are the poverty levels. Middlesex County's 2011 figures show 7.5% of the population lives below the poverty level. This is lower than the Virginia percentage of 10.7.

Unemployment

The Middlesex County unemployment rate for 2013 was 6.4%. This percentage is about equal to Virginia's unemployment rate of 6.2%, but higher than the national rate of 5.0%.

Crime

The numbers for Middlesex County shows a 139 violent crime rate per 100K. This number is lower than the Virginia rate of 233 per 100K, but higher than the national rate of 66 per 100K.

Health

The adult obesity rate for Middlesex County is 28%, which is in line with the Virginia rate of 28% and the national rate of 25%. The physical inactivity rate is 31%. This may be due to the low number of access to recreational facilities. Middlesex County has a rate of 9 per 100K. This is much lower than the national rate of 16 per 100K. Also, the percentage of fast food restaurants is 32%. 18% of the population is uninsured. There are 292 per 100K of sexually transmitted infections, which is much higher than the national rate of 92 per 100K, but lower than Virginia's rate of 385 per 100K.

Child/Family Well-Being

The 2011 census numbers show 24% of the children in the county live in poverty. This number has increased 4% since 2010. This number is 8% higher than the percentage for Virginia and 10% higher than the national average. 34% of children live in single-parent households in Middlesex County. This number is higher than both Virginia (30%) and national (20%).

Education

Data from the 2011 census indicate that 100% of children in Middlesex County are enrolled in school. The high school graduation rate is 86.2%. 5.5% of the population has an Associate's degree while 16.05% have obtained their Bachelor's. The percentage of the population that holds a Graduate or professional degree is 9.3%.

Agriculture Industry

There is 130 square miles of land area in Middlesex County. There is 80.5 square miles of water. The 2007 agriculture census data shows 17,709 acres of land are in farms. The average farm size is 233 acres and the median farm size is 60 acres. There are 24 farms that have the range of 50-179 acres and 26 farms that have the range of 10-49 acres. Although the total cropland is 13,716 acres, the total harvested cropland is 12,805 acres. The numbers for 2007 show there were 539,000 bushels of corn for grain sold, 177,600 bushels of wheat for grain sold and 3,000 bushels of barley for grain sold. Although the majority of farmland is for commodity crops, there was an inventory of 529 cattle, 270 beef cows in 2007.

The per farm average market value is \$1,172,720. This number is higher than the Virginia per farm average market value of \$720,538 and the national amount of \$791,138. The farm expenses per farm are stated as \$88,134, with a net operating income per farm of \$8,863.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Based on the data in the unit profile and the summarized data collected through the Qualtrics survey, an overview of responses is outlined. The Qualtrics survey asked questions of respondents in the areas of environment, agriculture, health, community, youth, education, economic development, and family and consumer education. A total of 15 responses were received. The specific issues identified based on the respondents ratings of importance and additional comments received are included in the summary below (not listed in priority order):

1. Protecting our wildlife and maintaining a clean environment should be kept high on our priority list.
2. Since Middlesex County is located along the Rappahannock River, environmental factors are very important, especially water quality. I think the efforts that are made to educate youth about water quality and keeping the rivers clean are very important.
3. Need help with nuisance animals.
4. Career and Technical Education is very important. It is just as, or more so, important for youth to learn a skill than it is to be techno-savvy and not necessarily important for them to excel in learning standards set by the state government representatives.
5. Need for hands on education and youth learning a skill like carpentry, masonry, plumbing, HVAC.
6. There is a lack of average income family housing opportunities in Middlesex. We have million dollar waterfront dwelling and dwelling without proper indoor facilities in the same areas of the county.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data collected, the following top priority issues were identified for Middlesex County. Some of these issues can be addressed through Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) resources, and a discussion of VCE's role in addressing the issues is presented. Others are outside the scope of VCE resources and should be referred to the appropriate agency. The issues are listed in priority order.

Issue 1: Youth Education

Middlesex VCE provides 4-H programming to the youth in the county. There is a lull in 4-H participation in the county right now, but VCE is working hard to rebuild 4-H's involvement in Middlesex. In-school, after school and club programming will ensure that the largest number of youth are reached for 4-H educational activities. Youth need other opportunities to expand their education, and 4-H provides non-formal, hands-on educational experiences that build life skills, as well as enforcing the formal education that they get from the school system in the form of SOLs. The youth in Middlesex also need positive role models and the opportunity to learn a trade and be involved in more hands on teaching. 100% of the youth in Middlesex County are enrolled in school, so the school system is where the largest number of youth can be reached.

Middlesex offers camp activities, residential and day camp, and in-school activities, club activities and after school activities to local youth. These programs provide hands on learning, can increase self-esteem, and can increase social skills that may be missing in school due to the more formal learning style based on the SOLs. 4-H is also involved with teens and providing leadership education. 4-H is in need of qualified volunteers to assist with 4-H programs. 4-H has many willing partners in their endeavor to provide these activities, including county government who is very supportive of 4-H programming. 4-H is also working on developing more activities for ages 5-8. This will ensure more longevity in the 4-H program and will instill the 4-H mission a lot sooner in youth, so that they get an early start at non-formal, hands-on education.

Issue 2: Family and Community Wellness

The issue of family and community wellness encompasses many different topics, including mental, social, physical, and financial factors. Communication is a growing issue in the family setting. With the world becoming more and more technologically advanced, communication skills between family members, and between community members, is becoming less face to face and more device to device. Financial planning has increasingly become an issue. The percentage of families living at the poverty line in Middlesex County has increased since 2010. Extension offers many programs across these topics, including financial planning, character education, preventive health care programs, and many more.

Extension continues to have opportunities to provide educational information as a result of this issue. Educating families and the community is the key to make improvements in this issue. Families need the tools to improve their communication between one another and to improve

their skills to better their community. Extension can address these issues with assistance from FCS Agents and Specialists. Providing programs more specific to individual family needs will help the wellness of the family unit. Some of these programs would include food safety, financial planning, and food and nutrition education. Extension should maintain quality programs that address family and community well-being issues and should look for opportunities to expand program offerings across healthy family and community dimensions.

Issue 3: Water Quality

Middlesex County is 75% surrounded by water and boasts 135 miles of shoreline. New housing starts in the past decade have been on or within sight of the water in what the County has designated as RMA (Resource Management Area). Middlesex County also borders the Chesapeake Bay and local government and its citizens must deal with the bureaucracy associated with that body of water. The County is very dependent on the water. It attracts residents and tourists to the county and is also available for many of its residents to use to make their living. Row crop agriculture is a major contributor to the local economy, as is, the commercial water industry, and both provide the aesthetics that also attracts the residents and tourists to the County.

Agricultural producers, as well as, homeowners and commercial horticultural producers must investigate and implement more ways to protect and improve water quality. (Note: Water Quality has been identified in 2004, 2008 and again in 2013 as an issue for Middlesex County). Extension programs always include segments on water quality, pesticide safety education and updates on cost-share conservation programs that assist commercial producers with implementing best management practices that can decrease water pollution. On-farm research done locally has dealt with issues such as cover crops, building soil quality, nitrogen use efficiency and no-till vegetable production. All of these practices are directly involved with improving water quality.

The Extension Agent sits on the Soil and Water Conservation District Board and is involved in all their outreach programs pertaining to water quality. Master Gardeners are trained by Extension to educate the public about water quality, judicious use of fertilizers and pesticides, and the use of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach.

VCE is constantly involved in providing educational programs regarding judicious use of pesticides, promoting continuous no-till, soil sampling and making fertilizer recommendations based on soil type. VCE currently addresses this issue with the help of other agencies including Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Farm Services Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Master Gardeners also promote water quality and sustainable landscape management. Youth programs also center on conservation and the need to protect water quality. Local government is also a substantial partner in educating the citizens about water quality and the use of good stewardship. More should be done with water testing for homeowners and landowners to get a better handle on the problems of this area. Virginia Institute of Marine Science offers opportunities to educate the public and recreation and commercial users of the water about improving water quality. They would be a formidable partner in an educational endeavor. Recently, Extension has partnered with the local

Community College to offer programs to local watermen industry about improving opportunities in marine tourism and showcasing the area as an attractant to tourists in order to improve the local water economy. Using this avenue to educate the public about the issue of water quality may also be effective.

Issue 4: Agricultural Production, Marketing and Sustainability

Middlesex County agriculture is very diverse. Numbers of medium size family farms continue to decrease as numbers of small farm operations and operations over 1000 acres continue to increase. The average age of Virginia farmers is over 58 years old. In the next few years, many farms and operations will change hands. This will also happen with the landlords of so some of the farm property. Much of the farmland that is being leased will also change hands and be left to or sold to a younger generation, a generation that may not understand farming as well. Lots of changes will take place and lots of educational opportunities pertaining to trans-generational farming and farm transition will become available. Small and family farms are looking for niche markets, value-added opportunities, and alternative agriculture opportunities to help them survive on limited or small acreage. On the other hand, larger operations must also survive and be able to compete in the world market arena. They must understand and utilize government programs, practice and promote fertilizer use efficiency, understand and implement ever-changing technologies, take advantage of marketing opportunities, and maybe even pool resources to “buy cheap and sell high”.

The margin of profit is getting thinner. For the past 2-3 years, we have enjoyed good yields and decent prices. Commodity prices are slipping back down again and the fear of drought is always in the back of a farmer’s mind. Farmers always need to know how to work more efficiently. Extension provides tremendous input into this concern and with continued resources, partnering opportunities with agribusiness, Virginia Tech Specialists, producer organizations, we can work together to keep agriculture profitable.

There is an increased interest in producing local food that can be sold at local markets. These individuals require the same information and technologies and want to learn about new products that can be used for a niche market. Organic and natural production of food remains a great interest. Consumers search out this type of production and senses that the food is more natural and more local.

Middlesex Extension provides informational programs, publications and newsletters and articles to producers and clientele to keep them informed. Numerous production and marketing meetings have been held. Marketing and risk management specialists have provided educational opportunities for local producers.

Extension partners with Virginia Department of Agriculture (VDACS) and Virginia Farm Bureau to offer risk management opportunities to help producers and their business survive. Although it has gotten better in the past 2-3 years, there are limited resources for farmers that want to find niche markets, experiment with value-added crops and products, and secure alternatives to their present farm enterprises. Extension has partners with Natural Resources Conservation Service to offer small farmer outreach programs that have covered topics such as high tunnel production, soil quality with cover crops, small scale vegetable production and

risk management opportunities for small farmers. The close relationship with VDACS also provides an exchange of information for new producers trying to begin a small or niche market farming enterprise. VCE agents provide general information and educational programs small and home-based businesses. These educational programs are a collaboration of ANR Agents, FCS Agents and Community Viability Specialists.

Grain marketing clubs have begun from a need from producers to learn more about marketing their products. Additional farm management agents could address some of these issues in greater detail, as could, the creation and filling of a specialist position that would address needs of local foods, food safety and niche marketing.

Issue 5: Nutrition

The unit profile indicates that the obesity rate for Middlesex County is 28%. The inactivity rate is 31%. Middlesex County has a low number of recreational facilities. The facility rate is 9 per 100K. Middlesex County has a YMCA which offers a full recreational facility and many programs promoting health and well-being, however a greater number of community members need to be reached. Access to local nutritious foods is low compared to larger towns. The town of Urbanna offers a farmers market the second Saturday of each month during the growing season. The town of Saluda has an outdoor farmer's market where farmers may set up at any time; however, this option is rarely used.

Virginia Cooperative Extension could partner with small farmers in the county who grow vegetables, fruits, meats, dairy, and eggs. Working together, the outdoor farmer's market could be revitalized to provide the community with greater access to whole foods that are grown locally. The outdoor market is located in a highly traveled area and has great potential to be successful. 4-H and Family and Consumer programming can also take a role in community health and nutrition by providing nutrition education programming in the schools. After school and special interest programs can be developed to have youth of all ages engaged in learning about the food pyramid, whole foods, importance of nutrition and exercise, and making healthy choices. VCE can be present in the community by participating in local events and fairs where programming opportunities can be advertised. Virginia Grown and VCE can promote local product availability at the local Food Lion. This option provides locally grown foods in a store that accepts Virginia food assistance program funds, making local foods more widely accessible. VCE can also work with local small farms to form partnerships with VDACS Virginia Grown Farm to School program where the local school system purchases local food items that are served in school lunches.