

Appomattox County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Love sign located at Courtland Festival Park in Appomattox, VA. Photo provided by Rebecca Bruce

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
<p>1. Strengthening the local food system</p>	<p>Develop a multi-session program on gardening and home fruit production. Offer food preservation classes and demonstrations, site visits to help identify production issues</p>
<p>2. Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability</p>	<p>On-farm research and demonstration trials, producer field meetings, area crop and cattle conferences, soil testing, computer workshops, pesticide safety education, farm visits to identify production issues</p>
<p>3. Protecting water quality</p>	<p>Offer the Virginia Household Water Quality program annually, Master Gardener programming, pesticide safety education, soil testing, lawn and home visits</p>
<p>4. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills</p>	<p>4-H camp, in-school activities, cooking and nutrition education</p>
<p>5. Promoting agricultural, natural resources and environmental literacy</p>	<p>Partner with the local FFA and the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District to offer youth agriculture days, Master Gardener educational programs, in-school agriculture themed book readings, Dairy days utilizing the no-kick cow</p>



Introduction

The Appomattox Extension Office employees and the Appomattox Extension Leadership Council conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during 2023. A major component of this process was an on-line anonymous survey prepared by Virginia Tech. This survey was advertised using word of mouth, social media, community posted fliers and at Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) programs held in Appomattox. Paper surveys were provided to individuals who did not want to use the on-line version or who had difficulty accessing the survey. The survey contained 53 identified issues for citizens to rank the effort that Virginia Cooperative Extension should spend addressing each concern. The ranking selection for each issue was no effort, low effort, moderate effort, high effort and very high effort. An additional input question was included in the survey asking citizens to identify the most pressing community issue for VCE to address in Appomattox and why.

The Extension office agent and staff reviewed the information collected and developed a ranked priority issue list using the high and very high effort summaries. The written issues identified were also compiled and the totality of information shared with the Appomattox Extension Leadership Council (ELC). The ELC reviewed the survey results and will help guide office programming to address the identified issues. The unit profile was developed using information supplied from the VCE Data Commons website and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Unit Profile

Appomattox County is located in the Central Piedmont region of Virginia. The county has an area of 334 square miles and is bordered by Amherst, Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte, Nelson and Prince Edward Counties. The nearest metropolitan area is the City of Lynchburg where many county citizens work and shop. The total population of the County slightly increased (3.8 percent) from 16,119 in 2021 to an estimated 16,748 in 2022. Approximately 21.8 percent of the population is under the age of 18 while 21.1 percent of the population is 65 or older. The remaining 57.1 percent of the population falls between the ages of 20 and 64. Females comprise 50.8 percent of the population while males comprise 49.2 percent. The racial makeup of Appomattox County includes 17.7 percent African American, 2.4 percent Hispanic, 0.4 percent Asian, 2.6 percent Two or More Races and 76.8 percent White. The median household income in Appomattox County was \$58,696 in 2019 compared to \$55,268 in 2021.

The largest share of households reports an income in the \$75,000 to \$99,999 range. Approximately 16 percent of children are in poverty compared with 13 percent for Virginia. The 2023 unemployment rate was 3.9 percent, the same as the average for Virginia. Of the population, 89.9 percent are high school graduates and 19.3 percent have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. There were 27 teenage pregnancies per 1000 female youth (15-19) in 2023 compared to a state average of 15. Low birth rate affects 9 percent of the live births for County citizens. The premature death rate (years lost before age 75 per 100,000 individuals) is 8,400 compared to a State average of 6,700. Obesity (37 percent of the adult population), adult smoking (20 percent), physical inactivity (24 percent), excessive drinking (18 percent) and sexually transmitted infections per 100,000 individuals (502.8) are concerns for County citizens. A major health issue is the lack of primary care physicians in the county. The 2023 Appomattox ratio is 16,040:1 whereas the Virginia average is 1,320:1. Eleven percent of the population is uninsured compared to the state average of 9 percent.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Appomattox County is home to 412 farms with an average farm size of 184 acres. There are 655 agricultural producers with 192 (29 percent) identifying as new and beginning farmers. Thirty five percent are age 65 and older while 9.9 percent are less than 35. There are 22 (3.4 percent) African American producers and 617 (94.1 percent) white producers. The market value of farm products sold in 2017 was \$9,978,000. Forage is produced on 14,177 acres, soybeans on 1,696 acres, wheat on 814 acres, and corn on 862 acres. Beef cattle are a major farm enterprise with 8,542 sold annually. In 2020 – 2021 the value of

timber harvested in Appomattox was \$4.7 – 5.2 million, with the majority coming from pine sawtimber and pine pulpwood value. Approximately 33 percent of the land in Appomattox County is forestland.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Top 10 Community Issues Identified as High or Very High for VCE effort allocation

1. Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth (87.5 percent)
2. Strengthening the local food system (85 percent)
3. Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability (82.5 percent)
4. Protecting water quality (80 percent)
5. Preserving farm and forest land (77.5 percent)
6. Building capacity for farm to school programming (77.5 percent)
7. Assist forest landowners with sustainable management practices (75 percent)
8. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills (75 percent)
9. Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects) (75 percent)
10. Promoting agricultural, natural resources and environmental literacy (75 percent)

The top ten issues were determined by calculating the percentage of high and very high survey responses. For issues that had the same percentage, the ranking was developed using the very high response number as the tie-breaking factor. The identified issues were somewhat similar to the statewide response for the top 10 issues for rural area respondents. Four of the top ten issues (strengthening the local food system, assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability, protecting water quality, and preserving farm and forest land) were identified. Only two issues (strengthening the local food system and protecting water quality) were similar to the top 10 of the statewide survey for all respondents. The citizen input question responses were varied with youth related input comprising 46 percent of the answers. Youth focused responses ranged from a need for more youth activities and activity locations, youth education on food production, youth empowerment and youth skill development. The second most identified issue was agriculture related (25 percent) with the majority of responses focused on food production and self-sufficiency. Another identified concern was citizen lack of knowledge regarding VCE programs available as well as the need for more volunteers to increase program offerings.

Community Issues

The top 5 priority issues for the Appomattox Extension office to address in upcoming years were developed by looking at the survey results, examining the previous 2018 situation analysis and the current office staffing situation.

2018 Situation Analysis Priority Issues for Appomattox County

1. Improving Farm Profitability and Sustainability
2. After School Activities

3. Local Foods, More Farmer's Market and Better Nutrition
4. Agriculture Awareness and Literacy
5. Career Education/Leadership Preparation

The top 2023 survey issue of getting more adults involved in mentoring youth was not selected as a priority issue for the Appomattox Extension office due to current staffing concerns. The 4-H agent position is currently vacant and the office is planning to hire a 4-H program technician. The Appomattox Extension Office has historically utilized many volunteers, especially 4-H and Master Gardeners, to extend outreach into the community. Covid-19 significantly impacted the Appomattox Master Gardeners and the program has been slow to rebuild. The absence of a 4-H agent will also significantly impact volunteer recruitment and retention.

The top priority issues identified for the Appomattox Extension Office are:

1. Strengthening the local food system
2. Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability
3. Protecting water quality
4. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
5. Promoting agricultural, natural resources and environmental literacy

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

The priority issue of strengthening the local food system will be addressed using an interdisciplinary approach. The ANR agent Bruce Jones will develop a multi-session program on gardening and basic food production. A primary focus of this activity will be on vegetable and fruit production which also aligns with the identified issue number 6 of building capacity for farm to school programming. Family and Consumer Science agents can additionally partner with the ANR agent to offer classes and demonstrations on food preservation which additionally aligns with the survey issue of ensuring safe, high quality foods which ranked 11th in the County survey. Additional activities include education on pest identification and proper control options which can be covered as a component of pesticide safety education. The 4-H program can also assist with strengthening the local food system using in-school club activities and a possible reimplementing of the Junior Master Gardener program.

The priority issue of assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability will be addressed by utilizing animal and crop production focused meetings throughout the year. ANR agent Bruce Jones will continue to offer on-farm grain demonstration trials to compare varieties of corn, soybeans and wheat. Field meetings will be held at these sites to offer producer viewing and discussion with the seed companies. These meetings also provide an avenue for Extension specialists to discuss timely production topics for improving yield and crop quality. The Central Virginia Crops Conference will be continued in the Central Virginia area as well as the Area Beef Conference. These meetings historically have attracted over 100 producers annually. The ANR agent plans to continue on-farm visits to help farmers and forest landowners identify production problems and make solution recommendations. The soil testing lab services offered by Virginia Cooperative Extension will continue to be highlighted and encouraged for helping farmers determine the amount of fertilizer and lime they need for growing their crops. Farm budgeting and enterprise profitability determination seem to be a limiting factor on some farms. The ANR agent would like to develop a class for computer recordkeeping and crop or livestock enterprise

budgeting to determine if farmers may be more profitable by “not doing things the same way each year”. The identified issue of protecting farm and forestland can additionally be addressed by inviting speakers on conservation easements to attend the various conferences and field days to better educate landowners on the options available. If interest warrants, programs on farm/timber taxation and farm recordkeeping can also be offered.

The priority issue of protecting water quality will be addressed by continuing to offer the Virginia Household Water Quality program to Appomattox county citizens. This program allows participants to get their well water tested for iron, manganese, nitrate, lead, arsenic, fluoride, sulfate, pH, total dissolved solids, hardness, sodium, copper, total coliform bacteria and E. Coli bacteria. Water quality protection is also a major focus of the pesticide safety educational programs offered to provide private pesticide applicator license recertification credit. The soil testing services offered by VCE also highlight this issue. Water quality is directly impacted when fertilizer use is directly based on the soil nutrient level and plant need. The ANR agent will also prioritize site visits to homeowners for lawn questions related to proper management and fertilizer use. The Master Gardeners will also be a partner in addressing water quality concerns with their educational programs on plants and soils.

The priority issue of helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills will be addressed by continuing the 4-H program in Appomattox County. During the absence of a 4-H agent, a 4-H program technician will be hired to continue activities. 4-H camp is a major component of the Appomattox program along with youth cooking and nutrition education. The Appomattox 4-H program historically has had a strong in-school presence and the technician will continue this relationship.

The priority issue of promoting agricultural, natural resources and environmental literacy will also be addressed using a multi-faceted approach. This is a topic that the ANR, 4-H and FCS program areas can all partner to lead timely educational programs. The Extension Office will partner with the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter and the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District to offer farm or agriculture days at the Appomattox Primary and Elementary Schools. The FFA already offers a Little Farmers Day which VCE could assist. The VCE office can also assist with the Primary School Fall Festival to talk about fall treats such as apples and pumpkins. The wooden no-kick cow can be utilized at the area pre-schools for milk educational programs as well as at the schools. VCE can additionally partner with the Appomattox County Farm Bureau for youth agriculture themed book readings and continued highlighting of the school “book barns”. The Master Gardeners also can be a major group for addressing this priority issue. They currently provide educational programs at the Appomattox Library and at the Senior activity center. The group is currently small due to Covid-19 impact, but the ANR agent would like to offer new member training opportunities so the group can grow and reach more citizens.

Although only 5 priority issues were identified, many of the response activities will address other priority issues that were in the survey and not discussed in this document. The Appomattox Extension Office is poised to address the priority issues identified by County citizens as well as new issues as they develop. A key aspect of Virginia Cooperative Extension is being able to quickly adapt to changing situations and develop educational programs that will improve the quality of life for Virginia citizens.

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