



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

# Situation Analysis Report



## Northampton County

# 2013

### Northampton Extension Staff

Christina Ruszczyk-Murray, 4-H Youth Extension Agent

Ursula Deitch, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent

### Northampton Extension Leadership Council

Rick Hubbard

Jim Jenrret

Subrina Parker

Bonnie Mahl

Ricardo Poulson, Sr.

Jenny Templeton

## Introduction

Northampton County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the calendar year 2013. The situation analysis process was led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and involved the development of a Northampton County Unit Profile as well as gathering community and resident perspectives on issues and problems in the county. Data and information from these two activities were analyzed by the ELC and priority issues were identified.

The first task was to develop a unit profile. Using online data resources provided from the VCE intranet and Extension personnel. Northampton staff compiled the statistics into a profile of the county.

These statistics were used to create a survey for the ELC to approve.

The ELC met one time during the situation analysis process. At this meeting, an overview of the situation analysis process was covered, and the attendees were asked to look over the previously created survey. They identified issues that needed to be on the survey and were not, and clarified some of the issues on the survey.

## Unit Profile

The County of Northampton, Virginia, is one of two Virginia counties on the Delmarva Peninsula, commonly referred to as the “Eastern Shore”. The county comprises a total of 207 square miles, and is bordered to the north by Accomack County, Virginia; to the east by the Atlantic Ocean; to the west by the Chesapeake Bay; and to the south by the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel. It consists of many rural villages surrounded by large agricultural tracts, as well as five incorporated towns: Exmore, Nassawadox, Eastville, Cheriton, and Cape Charles.

Topography in Northampton County is generally level, and soils are mainly 8 to 10 inches of sandy loam above 30 inches of sandy clay and shell strata. Groundwater is the source of potable water. The county enjoys a mild climate, with four distinct seasons.

The eastern shore, or “seaside”, of Northampton County is protected from erosion by barrier islands. These barrier islands are part of the Virginia Coast Reserve, but are open to the public for low-impact day use. The western shore, or “bayside”, is made up of several small peninsulas, or “necks”.

Conservation is a central element to Northampton County. Not only is the county part of the longest expanse of coastal wilderness remaining on the eastern seaboard of the United States, but it is an important avian migration funnels in North America. Preservation has been a central concern to economic development officials as well as county zoning officials. Both have structured efforts in a way that will preserve natural resources while promoting growth, including eco-tourism and small business entrepreneurship.

According to data gathered from the US Census Bureau, 2011, Northampton County has experienced a 7% decrease in since 2007 in the population. At trend that is projected to continue.

Northampton County has significant poverty and problems that are reflected in the somewhat polarized wealth distribution across the population, with a diminished “middle class”. This has not changed since the last unit profile was created in 2007. The mean household income in Northampton County is approximately \$30,000 lower than the mean household income of the rest of the state. The poverty rate for Northampton County in 2007 was 20.8%; the 2011 rate is 23% which is a 2.2% increase.

The Voices of Virginia Children reports that local **unemployment rates** have risen from 4.1% in 2007 to 8.0% in 2011. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting have historically played a large part in the economic and social lives of Northampton County residents. However, Health Care, Social Assistance and Local Government industries employ the majority of county residents.

Although they do not employ the most people, **agriculture and aquaculture are the largest industries in Northampton**. The county has lost **a number of farms**. In 2002 there were 187 farms and in 2007 Northampton had 151 farms. While there is less farms, the **land in farms has increased** by more than 11,000 acres in the same time frame. This not the only positive increase that occurred in the agricultural community. According to the USDA the net operating income per farm has increased by 219% over those 5 years. The net operating income per farm average for the state of Virginia is \$8,863, in Northampton County it is \$218,464. Thus farming practices are yielding higher volume and prices. The yields of corn and wheat more than doubled in this time frame. Northampton is one of the top ranking producing counties of soybeans, potatoes, tomatoes and string beans. The market value of agricultural products sold in Northampton went up \$152% from 2002 to 2007. Which is much high than that of the national or the state average.

Northampton is home to the largest clam producing operation in the United States. Clams feed by pumping large amounts of water through their gills and filtering out their microscopic-sized food particles. Along with these small particles, they also filter out bacteria and viruses from the overlying water. Since these shellfish may be eaten raw, care has to be taken to ensure that shellfish harvested for direct marketing are taken from very clean water. Waters approved for the direct harvest of shellfish therefore must be much cleaner than waters approved for swimming, fishing, etc. **Water quality** was identified as an issue in the county.

Northampton County public school students have been attending one of two elementary schools and one high school. The current school year has seen the addition of a middle school wing on the current high school. The two elementary schools are now Pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The middle school is 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the high school is now 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. According to enrollment figures, the total number of students has decreased in the past 4 years. However the percentage of students eligible for the free and/or reduced lunch program has increased from 1270 in 2008 to 1269 in 2013. In 2008, 68.9% of the students were receiving free or reduced lunch in 2013 the percentage rose to 74.6% although the number of

students has dropped. Two private schools consist of approximately 600 students, some of whom live in the Accomack County.

The data from [countyhealthrankings.org](http://countyhealthrankings.org) indicated that **24% of our school children are not graduating on time or dropping out of school.** Although almost a quarter of our high school students are dropping out this is a positive increase in 2010 over 40% were not finishing high school.

According to a study done by the Eastern Virginia Medical School the rate of overweight and obese school age children in Northampton is 48.1%. The Virginia average is 31% and the National average is 34.7%. **Obesity** issues can lead to other illnesses from chronic to acute, some very severe and deadly, such as Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, Coronary Artery Disease, Coronary Vascular Disease, Heart attack, stroke, and even cancer. This would stand to reason as our morbidity rate is 5% higher than the state average and 9% higher than the national average.

Northampton residents also have more poor physical and mental **health** days.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

Based on issue areas identified in the unit profile, a Qualtrics survey was distributed by the ELC members. The ELC members are representative of the population of the county. The ELC members include a board of supervisor member, a high school student, elementary school principal, a sheriff's deputy, a social services worker, pastor, a farmer, and two members work for agriculture related partner agencies. The members of the ELC are diverse in many ways. The membership ranges in age from 16 to almost 70 years of age. Both man and woman serve on the ELC. The council is made up of African American, Caucasian, and Latino members.

Both the ELC members and the staff and faculty of the Northampton Extension office distributed to the survey on personal social media sites, such as Facebook and through e-mail.

The surveys were returned through Qualtrics and were done anonymously. The survey did ask the respondents if they had ever participated in an Extension Program 58% answered yes. It is unknown if the rest of the respondents were aware of the scope of Extension programming. The demographic that were collected were the sex and race of those surveyed. Of the 53 respondents, 39 were female.

The respondents were asked to identify themselves as Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Black, white or other. Two respondents did not identify themselves by race. The breakdown of those that identified is as follows:

American Indian/Alaskan Native	1 respondent equaling 2%
Other	2 respondents equaling 4%
Black/African American	9 respondents equaling 18%
White	39 respondents equaling 76%
Total	51 respondents total equaling 100%

## Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Northampton County.

### Issue 1: Health

Health was identified as the top issue facing Northampton County. This includes nutrition education as well as addressing obesity and obesity prevention. Respondents voiced a need for education and public awareness. Although health is important to all age groups, some interviews said that young families needed nutrition and disease prevention education. The result of early intervention would be a healthier population in the future. The survey revealed that many inactivity or lack of physical activity was also a problem. There were also comments about the need for access to healthier fresher food.

This issue is currently being addressed with current unit VCE resources, as well as, other agencies. The Family Nutrition Program is working with several agencies to provide nutrition education to low income families. The 4-H agent is currently doing in-school enrichment at the elementary schools and has been administering health and nutrition curriculum with the Summer Parks and Recreation and the Migrant Program. The 4-H agent also works a youth community garden project which focus is on eating healthfully and physical activity. The issue will be addressed by all of the unit agents and program assistant as out unit project for 2014.

### Issue 2: Water Quality / Quantity

Water Quality / Quantity was identified as the second most pressing issue in Northampton County. The majority of the residents in the county receive have wells as a source for drinking water. This is a key issue to the economy in the county. All of the respondents that commented on this issue felt the water quality and quantity were crucial to the agriculture and aquaculture industries as well as the tourism of Northampton County. Many of the respondents felt that there needed to be education about water conservation and preservation.

This issue is currently being addressed with current VCE unit resources efforts to collaborate with producers, Soil and Water District personnel and Federal Agencies to identify programs which conserve groundwater resources, address drainage and storm water retention issues and provide educational information in the areas of irrigation management, efficiency, crop water requirements and potential cost share sources need to be explored to better address these issues.

### Issue 3: Life Skills for Youth

Life Skills for Youth was identified as the fourth most pressing issue in Northampton County. This includes ensuring a positive education experience, job skills training and youth development and teen leadership opportunities. Many of those surveyed called for youth activities and more involvement of youth in the community. Youth as future citizens of the county was commented a number of times. The concerns were raised that youth not

developing basic life skills, positive self-worth, future thinking, good citizenship, or positive direction.

The issue is currently being addressed with unit resources. Agents will increase efforts to provide supplemental “hands-on” learning experiences, partner with other youth serving agencies and community groups to provide life skills development. This issue is addressed by all unit agents and staff during annual Reality Store.

#### **Issue 4: School Dropout Rate**

School Dropout Rate was identified as the fourth most pressing issue in Northampton County. More specifically, respondents noted that the school system was not meeting state benchmarks, there is a lack of family involvement in the public schools, the teachers were underpaid, and these were contributing factors to the high school dropout rate.

This issue is outside the scope of VCE but the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University has been working with faculty at land-grant universities to conduct the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development is a longitudinal study that began in 2002, and continues today, surveying more than 7,000 adolescents from diverse backgrounds. Young people in 4-H report better grades, higher levels of academic competence, and an elevated level of engagement at school, are nearly two times more likely to plan to go to college, are more likely to pursue future courses or a career in science, engineering, or computer technology. This would suggest that the agents need to continue their efforts for in-school and out of school programming.