



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report

Richmond County

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Introduction

The Richmond County staff used primarily an electronic method of gathering information from constituents by gathering inputs with a Qualtrics survey instrument with access granted using a link posted on the facebook pages for the Richmond County Fair (2050 likes), Richmond County Government (G50 likes), and the Va. Employment Commission-Northern Neck office. It was also publicized with an article in the local newspaper and electronic email lists for the unit. Staff, including ELC Chair Chris Jett, attended the Richmond County Resource Council (RCRC) meeting to promote the constituent survey and also to gather input on designing a key informant survey for distribution to the RCRC members (23 agencies). The instrument was sent electronically and information returned. The Richmond county ELC met to review the data and discuss the issues for consideration. Returns on the constituent survey were 35 and RCRC was 7.

Unit Profile

The Richmond County Census data can be slightly misleading as it contains 3 correction institutions and 2 nursing homes. Ordinarily, this may not be such a concern but with such a small population anyway, these factors can skew the data. To help Richmond County correctly apply the voting rights act and implement the plan ordered by the US Supreme Court, the Board of Supervisors traditionally applies the population data of the prison to the census data to at least remove that bias since those residents don't vote and seldom have the need for our services.

Total census population for Richmond County is 9254 with an African American population of 2804 or 30.3%. Excluding the Haynesville Correction Unit population of 1154 reduces the total population to 8090. Reducing the total African American population of 2804 by 777 which is the number of African Americans in residence at the correctional facility, we can extrapolate that the number of African American county residents is more accurately 2027 which represents 25.06%. The correctional facility did not allocate adjustments for other ethnic groups since the voting rights order issued by the Department of Justice only protects the African American qualifying population for protection. Latinos are not included in the order.

Farm acreage regressed at a significant rate during the time frame of 2002 and 2007 with an overall farmland reduction of 16.5 %. Loosing 7412 acres in 5 years. The impact on tillable crop land was more significant with a 20% reduction by losing nearly 7000 acres in the same period! This is significant but not a harbinger of rapid development. But instead it reflects the action of the US Government in acquiring arable farm land and converting it to woods and natural areas as part of a wildlife refuge.

Other significant agricultural trends of note but certainly not unique is the increase in prices received and paid. It's staggering how much money local farm enterprises handle, perhaps not profit, but the cash flow and investment required in the industry today makes other local businesses pale in comparison.

The number of livestock operations as well as cows and calves declined. I suspect the trend will continue to decline as favorable prices, deteriorating facilities and fences, age of operator and perceived requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Act all start to be more than the producer can justify. These forces will be exacerbated by the loss of critical infrastructure in professional assistance by veterinarians interested, equipped and able to provide food animal care, access to feed and supply vendors and markets offering competitive prices. The region has taken severe hits in all of these areas this past year and the animal industry is showing it.

Human health and related disease rates have been suspect for quite some time. Some fluctuations happen between census periods over time but generally have evened out but at a high level in relation to state and national averages.

One of the most significant increases is the rate of sexually transmitted infections (sti's) and the increase they represent. This is not unique to the state but in rural America we were taken aback by this figure of 508/100k up from 317/100k in 2004 and compared to the state being currently at 385 and the nation at 92 all rates stated as per 100K population. Again, in doing the math' the actual number of cases gets a heavier weight when expressed over the small population. It is still in the neighborhood of .8% of the population has had a reportable disease occurrence.

Teen pregnancy rates are above the state norm as are the low birth weight babies. Both of these matrixes have stayed fairly steady in the past with the exception of the low birth weight births. In the past, educational efforts have helped improve that issue significantly.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The community indicated in a consistent manner that youth are a major concern and that they would rank that the most important issue for us to consider. Eleven topics out of a total of 35 that were listed on the survey were chosen by constituents as being very important by at least 19 responders. Of those 11 highly selected topics 5 refer to issues concerning youth, 2 are Family and consumer science related, 2 are agriculturally related and 2 are community viability related.

Of those topics identified by clientele, ELC members and staff concur that working to be a part of the solution for solving these issues is well within the scope of our work and these topics actually were identified in the previous situation analysis.

Key informants from other agencies concur and feel as though the youth are being shortchanged or at least overlooked by decision makers regarding the amount of money invested in programs. The challenge is in getting decision makers and clientele to connect the dots and realize we either spend it up front to make sure babies come into the world ready to thrive and prosper or we'll spend money later either enhancing opportunities to learn via special education or in room and board in a penal institution. The old phrrr" comes to mind "you can pay me now or pay me later". In written comments on the survey you can touch and see the pent up frustration and concern about the future of youth as they grow up but there is concern for consistency and 'the realization that times they are a changing".

Concerns about the environment and agricultural sustainability came to the top as well. Concern about the environment and agricultural sustainability come to the top like cream on the list for most clientele. While ag census data shows farmers are exceeding ag. receipt projection but now they must contend with expenses rising like a full moon tide. Farm business management assistance is scarce in this unit.

Parenting and chronic health conditions fall under the purview of the Family and Consumer sciences agent which we'll need to consider adding to the staff mix in order to address these issues sufficiently. The "pay me now" figures in as an investment in staff rather than the "pay me later" investment in staff down at the Correctional Center.

Leadership and local government come in last but not least and it is no surprise. The public discourse that has been closer to discord over the past 2 + years in this county has the citizenry looking for answers. It isn't just in Richmond County it is all over the country people feel obligated not simply obliged to stick their nose in every other persons business and become very emotionally charged over single issues. The not in my back yard nelly nay sayers respond to different stimuli and the art of gracious debate followed by considerate and fair compromise has been lost on many of the ruling generation. What examples have we set? The "I want it all my way or nothing" tortured discussions make public exchange of ideas and the very foundations of democracy next to impossible to implement.

One of the strengths of this program is we get to see across the entire gambit of community issues and try to make real progress in improving the lives of the citizens we serve. Long term staff can enjoy the building blocks of success while making use of fresh eyes and legs in the staff mix to keep it fresh and help keep the instruction pertinent.

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Protecting and Preserving Agriculture and Natural Resources

The mix of natural resources in Richmond County is unique in the delicate balance between land and water resources and those that inhabit it. These same resources have historically been the source of economic prosperity in the past with heavy emphasis on farming, fishing, and timber. Land and water offer sources of wealth once more, but from real estate development. Agricultural employment has declined and the long-term outlook is certainly in question as services fall to a few venders and grain markets are presently controlled predominantly by one company. The watermen have been forced to inland jobs as water quality, regulations and catch limits have all but eliminated this vocation. A unique local force on this resource base has become the Federal Government. They have initiated a wildlife refuge system that has taken control of over 20% of the tillable land base in the county. This land been placed in wildlife habitat. These secure havens for wildlife and the lack of traditional foods to support them have caused significant increases in wildlife damage on tilled acres outside the refuge. Farmland preservation has become a topic of discussion, but without a viable agricultural economy to support it; those efforts may be for naught.

This issue is currently being addressed with current unit VCE resources. Based on the situation analysis, no further action is required.

Issue 2: Investing in Youth

Area youth continue to be a source of pride and Offer hope for future community success. Youth services have improved in recent years with the starting of a YMCA branch in the county. Their after school programs and summer day camp have filled a vital need for child services' as well as for activities and additional education. Reports of continued levels of high teen birth rates and reports of youth requiring court services indicates that we still have youth in need of positive influences in their lives. At-risk behaviors, such as minor substance abuse, making unwise food choices, sexual activity, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, all add up to youth that lack guidance and supervision, have little or no positive role models, and that suffer from low self-esteem. Effective parenting skills may be lacking in the homes of troubled youth.

Parts of this issue are currently being addressed with current unit VCE resources. Richmond County buys into a 4-H Extension agent position at 50%. Based on the situation analysis, further action is required and additional resources maybe required.

Issue 3: Health indicators of the general population of the county are well in excess of the state averages

The statistics for the state vs. the county indicate that there are significant differences in the rates of sexually transmitted infections and other health conditions such as heart disease and cancer rates in the area. Low birthweight babies and teen pregnancy are issues that continue to run well above state averages.

Further work needs to be done with the population to achieve the community's goals for reducing these limitations on healthy living. Some area agencies are addressing these issues as well as some current VCE staff initiatives with selected populations but more resources are needed to provide more comprehensive coverage of services to at-risk and affected populations.

Issue 4: Leadership Development / Community Process

All too often in communities it is seldom a case of the best qualified to lead but rather who is willing to lead; who's turn is it in the barrel. People are reluctant to lead because they lack experience that is necessary to acquire proficiency. The general public needs to understand the boundaries of community engagement, fruitful discussion and balanced compromise.

Current VCE programs have attempted to fill the need but additional resources and opportunities may be necessary to fully engage the community in lessons of civility.