



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Buckingham County

2013

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Introduction

The Buckingham Extension Leadership Council conducted a comprehensive situation analysis in the fall of 2013 with minor revisions in winter 2015. Completion of this effort involved members of the Extension Leadership Council (ELC), Extension staff, staff from other agencies serving the public, community organizations, and Buckingham County residents. The ELC and Extension Staff analyzed the information collected, determined what issues fit in with the goals and mission of Virginia Cooperative Extension, and prioritized these issues.

Unit Profile

Demographics

Buckingham County is a large, sparsely populated rural piedmont county in the geographic center of Virginia. Its population is 17,021 (including the 2,163 institutionalized populations) dispersed over 582 square miles. The population has steadily been growing since 1990. There is considerable growth due to older citizens (retirees) moving into the county. However, there has also been an increase in the birth rate in recent years. Sixteen percent of the County's residents are age 19 and under, while 28% are senior citizens ages 55 and older.

The population is approximately 61% white and 37% Black or African American, with other races making up the remaining 2% of the population.

Income

Median household income in Buckingham is \$36,378. This is approximately 42% less than the \$62,391 state median income. Twenty-one percent of Buckingham County residents live below the poverty level. The free and reduced lunch rate in the public school system is 70.3%.

Education

The Buckingham County Public School system currently has 2,121 students enrolled. There are 50 homeschool students in the county. There are also two private schools in the county with a total of 156 youth enrolled. A small number of youth attend school outside of the county. The school drop-out rate is 8.8%. Thirty-eight percent of the population age 25 or older has a high school diploma, and only 3.8% of this same population has a college degree.

Employment

The major employers in Buckingham are the public schools and the correctional facilities. Nearly 6,000 commuters live in Buckingham but work outside of the county. Those who both live in and work in Buckingham total 1,612 (as of 2011). The unemployment rate is 7.2% compared to 5.6% in the state of Virginia.

Agriculture

The sale of agricultural products is very important to the County because it provides a large inflow of money into the local economy. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the market value of agricultural products sold by Buckingham County farmers in 2007 was \$32,617,000. This value has been steadily increasing for a number of years. The majority of these sales come from livestock and poultry (\$31,199,000 in 2007). The number of farms in 2007 was 411 farms which is up slightly from 2002 data but still less than the number in 1997. The median size of the farms has continued to shrink since 1997. The total economic impact (direct and indirect) of agriculture in Buckingham in 2011 was 11.8 million.

Forestry

Forestry is also an important segment of the economy in Buckingham County. Timberland in the county encompasses 317,151 acres with 294,179 being in private ownership and the rest held by the state. There were approximately 200 employees involved in wood related activities in the county in 2008. Updated figures are not available. In 2012, the value of timber harvested in Buckingham was \$12,403,375. The total economic impact (direct and indirect) of forestry in Buckingham in 2011 was 26 million.

Health

There are two medical facilities and two dental offices in the county. In order to receive care from a specialist, residents must travel outside of Buckingham. The adult obesity rate is 33%.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The 2013 situation analysis followed similar efforts in 2004 and 2008. Data gathering consisted of key informant interviews, community profiles, inter-agency information sharing, and written and electronic surveys to county residents. An effort was made to include all segments of the community so as to gain a complete picture of our needs and the services available to meet those needs.

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Agriculture and Forestry

- **Sustainability:** Agriculture and forestry make up a large part of the county's economic base. It is vital to provide farmers with the knowledge and skills they need to be competitive. Farmers and landowners are seeking other avenues of agricultural production to sustain their livelihood. Producers are exploring and starting new enterprises in areas such as small ruminants, specialty crops, organic vegetables, and an area farmers' market.

- **Education:** It is important to make sure that other land owners are aware of the importance of our agricultural community. The community as a whole, both adult and youth, needs a basic understanding of the importance of agriculture in supporting their community and their very existence.
- **Natural Resource/Environmental Preservation:** Land use planning, forest management, maintaining open spaces and agricultural land are important issues to residents of Buckingham County who appreciate the rural character of the county. Farmland is slowly being sold for development and the character of the county is changing. This issue has been a hot topic for many years. VCE has facilitated discussions on land use taxation in the past with help from our district community viability specialist and will continue to do so as needed. No further action is required.

Issue 2: Youth Programs

Youth programming is a pressing need in Buckingham County. Specific areas identified were the continued need for after-school and out-of-school activities in a safe, supervised environment, life skills and decision making, programs addressing youth risky behavior, and the need for more leadership education. Virginia Cooperative Extension is currently addressing these needs. The recommendation is that VCE continue its existing programming in these areas and expand that programming where possible.

Issue 3: Adult Education

- **Young Adult (post high-school) Education:** Young adults facing life on their own need skills to make them self-sufficient. These skills include financial management, home maintenance, menu planning, community involvement, and related life skills.
- **Basic Parenting Skills:** Parents need education in basic skills such as family bonding, disciplining, homework support, character education, and general parenting.
 - **Healthy Living:** Parents need education in order to better provide and model a lifestyle including healthy meals, physical activity, and bedtime routine.
 - **Supporting Youth Education:** Youth in the school system are learning important concepts about childhood obesity, finances, drug/alcohol/tobacco use, violence prevention, etc. Parenting education is needed so that these messages are reinforced at home.

These parts of the issue are ones that VCE can easily address through research based materials and programs provided through Extension. However, at this time the Buckingham Unit Office does not have personnel in place to address this need. Given additional resources and manpower, VCE can address this need.

- **Community Resource Awareness:** Numerous agencies/organizations operate in Buckingham County, providing services such as help with heating oil, food distributions,

medical care, transportation, domestic violence resources, septic system assistance, etc. Often, people in the community are unaware of these local resources.

This part of the issue is greater than the scope of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Issue 4: Food Practices

- **Smart Choices:** Whether purchasing food at the local grocery store, roadside produce stand, or fast-food establishment, or planting and harvesting a garden, individuals need information on making good choices, employing good practices, and making good financial decisions.
- **Nutrition:** Eating habits in Buckingham mirror those seen around the country. Vegetable are not regularly included in meals (unless as the popular french fry). Fast food or food from the convenience store deli is a popular dinner staple. Casual observation shows that rates of overweight are on the rise. Programs on healthy lifestyles including nutrition education and the benefits of physical activity are clearly needed. Four-H programs and Family Nutrition programs reach some of the youth audience. Family Nutrition Programs also reach a segment of the low income adult population. Programs held in nearby Prince Edward are open to Buckingham County residents and a few take advantage of these. VCE is currently addressing the need with a small segment of the population. Additional personnel would enable a larger segment to be reached.
- **Preparation:** Basic cooking skills and food safety skills remain a much requested and needed part of providing nutritious and desirable meals.
- **Preservation:** Home food preservation has been a growing trend both as a necessity (due to the present economic situation) and as a current “hobby” practice. Education in food preservation methods and techniques are in high demand. With a district Food Safety Agent, VCE personnel is in place and programs are available; however, one person cannot adequately meet the needs of so many counties.

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Issue 5: Water Quality

County residents are increasingly concerned about the quality of their drinking water from private wells. They want to know if it is safe to drink, what minerals are present and other similar questions. VCE has in the past had water quality programs available. The Buckingham Unit Office has conducted four such programs in the past fourteen years, which were highly valued and appreciated. Because of the past programs, residents know to turn to Extension with water quality questions and concerns. VCE is currently meeting this need; however, increased frequency of these programs would better address the issue.

Issue 6: Financial Management

Buckingham County has a high poverty level. Many residents making good incomes are in debt. We are lingering through a major recession where prices have increased and jobs are scarce. These facts coupled with high fuel prices (both for gasoline averaging over \$3.00 per gallon, as well home heating gas and oil), a downturn in the economy, and a rise in personal debt show an increased need for basic money management skills. This issue is also one where VCE has the research based information and programs available to share with stakeholders. The school system has a financial education curriculum in place as required by the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE). The efficacy of this program is in question, however, because strong financial management skills are not modeled at home in many cases. VCE has no nearby FCS Agent with a specialty in financial education to conduct these programs. Given additional resources and manpower, VCE can address this need.

Issue 7: Economic Viability

- **Ageing Population:** The average age of residents of Buckingham County is increasing as the population ages in place and the county attracts retirees due to the rural location combined with low land prices. With a growing senior population, topics such as estate planning, farm transition, and long term care are much needed. VCE currently addresses these issues.
- **Small Business Development:** Often people have an interest in starting their own business, but lack the knowledge of how to go about doing so. Needs assessment, state and local regulations, permits, business design and planning, etc. are all topics needing to be addressed. VCE has some resources on the subject and most of them are oriented to the agricultural community. VCE is beginning to address these topics through Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) and establishing farmers' market programs.

Issue 8: Emergency Communication

With the droughts, hurricanes, ice storms, and extended power outages that we have experienced over the past few years, citizens of Buckingham County feel that having communication plans to alert them of emergencies and emergency procedures is very important. Buckingham County has the most watershed dams (18) of any county in the state, and people living below them need to feel secure about emergency communication plans. Currently Buckingham County Administration, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District are working collaboratively to address these issues. VCE provides support with research based information and by helping where needed when emergencies occur. Buckingham County Public Schools have adopted an instant alert system that sends messages to home, work, and cell phones for issues that arise within the school system. Buckingham County, itself, also has a similar CODE RED instant alert system. This need is being met collaboratively by VCE and other agencies, with the other agencies taking the lead role and VCE providing support.