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# Caroline County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Figure 1. Seal of Caroline County, Virginia

# Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Table 1. Top five issues identified in the 2023 Situational Analysis of Caroline County, Virginia. The percentage of all respondents selecting this issue as high or very high efforts is needed.

<b>Priority Issue</b>	<b>Planned Unit Response</b>
Building capacity for farm to school programming (92.3%)	Farm-to-School programming, Collaboration with ANR and 4-H, Working with local farmers
Building healthy families (92.3%)	4-H Clubs, 4-H Camp, Parenting courses
Promoting agricultural and environmental literacy among youth (84.6%)	4-H Clubs, 4-H Camp, In-School programming
Strengthening the local food system (84.6%)	ANR, Farm-to-School, Working with local farmers
Addressing hunger issues (77%)	ANR, Farm-to-School, Working with local organizations

## Introduction

A situational analysis was conducted to identify critical characteristics defining Caroline County and its community's main issues. Extension's educational programming efforts should address the community's high-priority needs; therefore, it is crucial first step to understand community needs. To aid local units in determining their communities' priority issues and needs, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) facilitates a locally driven, in-depth situational analysis every five years.

In 2023, the Caroline County Extension Office adopted a state-level survey to collect unit-level information and input. The office modified the survey to collect information regarding the unit where the respondent lived or worked. Our survey was intended to collect data from individuals who live and/or work in Caroline County. This survey was shared through social media, email listservs, flyers posted in community spaces, and direct emails to stakeholders, engaged community members, volunteers, and parents of youth participating in 4-H youth programs.

The Caroline County Extension Office will utilize the data collected through this survey, the unit profile, and the VCE Data Commons to plan, execute, and evaluate future Extension programming.

## Unit Profile

Caroline County is 527.4 square miles and is located north of Richmond and south of Fredericksburg. The county is bordered by the Rappahannock River, Stafford, Spotsylvania, Hanover, King William, King George, King & Queen, and Essex Counties. Interstate 95 runs through the county providing some urban areas in the rural county. Caroline County houses Fort Walker that is located on 301. The county is also home to Secretariat and the Meadow Event Park.

## Demographics

The estimated population as of July of 2023, was 32,640, an increase of 5.7% since the last census was taken in 2020. The current racial makeup of the count is 67.7% white, 26.4% black or African American, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 1.1% Asian, and 3.7% two or more races. (U.S. Census, 2023)

## Education

There are three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, two alternative learning center, and one private school. In the 2023-2024 school year, 4,564 students were enrolled throughout the five public schools (School Quality, 2023). Approximately, 50% of the county population has any postsecondary education (VCE Data Commons, 2023).

## Agriculture & Forestry

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 214 farms in Caroline, a 4% decrease from 2017. The average size of each farm was 281 acres, making 60,121 acres of Caroline in agricultural use. Agriculture (crops and livestock) brought in \$32,709,000 in the county. Top crop commodities by number of planted acres include soybeans, corn, wheat, forage (hay/haylage), and vegetables. The top livestock inventory includes cattle and calves, layers, sheep and lambs, horses and ponies, goats, and hogs and pigs. The top three crops by sales are grains, vegetables, and other crops and hay. The top three livestock products by sales are cattle and calves, other animals and animal products, and poultry and eggs.

The total number of recorded producers in Caroline County was 379, 66% males and 34% females. Of th3 379 producers, 31.9% were 65 or older, 58.3% fell in the 35-64 age category, and 9.8% were under

the age of 35. The producers in Caroline County are primarily white (89.4%), but there are also 4% black or African American and 6% more than one race. There were 160 new or beginning farmers (USDA, 2022).

### Health Summary

According to County Health Rankings, Caroline is ranked 63<sup>rd</sup> out of 133 ranked counties in Virginia. Caroline County is above the state of Virginia in the following categories; adult smoking (18%), adult obesity (39%), food environment index (9.1), physical inactivity (23%), excessive drinking (18%), and teen births (23) (County Health Rankings, 2023). As of 2021, 2,060 individuals in Caroline County struggled with food insecurity (Feeding America, 2021).

### Community and Resident Perspectives

Results of the data collected by the Caroline County survey was sorted by highest level effort. Table 2 lists all issues in the survey ranked in order from highest to lowest.

Table 2. Results of the 2023 Situational Analysis of Caroline County, Virginia, from highest level of effort to lowest. The percentage is a total of all respondents that selected that issue as high or very high efforts needed.

Issue	Moderate Effort	High Effort	Very High Effort	Percentage Total of High & Very High Effort
Building capacity for farm to school programming	1	7	5	92.3%
Building healthy families	1	10	2	92.3%
Promoting agricultural & environmental literacy among youth	0	7	4	84.6%
Strengthening the local food system	2	8	3	84.6%
Addressing hunger issues	1	5	5	77%
Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth	3	7	3	76.9%
Preserving foods for home use	4	6	3	69.3%
Reducing misuse & overuse of pesticides & fertilizers	5	3	5	61.6%
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, & other life skills	4	5	3	61.6%
Promoting alternative agriculture	5	6	2	61.6%
Teaching youth good money habits	0	6	2	61.6%
Teaching beginning farming practices to new landowners	5	7	1	61.5%
Strengthening parenting skills	1	7	1	61.5%
Teaching people to manage their money	0	8	0	61.5%
Promoting scientific literacy among youth	3	4	3	53.9%
Protecting water quality	6	6	1	53.9%
Assisting farmers & forest landowners in production & profitability	6	6	1	53.9%
Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects)	6	6	1	53.9%
Supporting residents' home horticulture practice through education	5	6	1	53.9%
Helping consumers make healthy food choices	4	6	1	53.9%

Addressing before & after school challenges	1	6	1	53.9%
Strengthening workforce readiness	4	2	3	38.5%
Helping Virginians become more energy efficient	5	4	1	38.5%
Reducing obesity	6	4	0	30.8%
Helping communities be better prepared for & respond to natural disasters	8	3	1	30.8%
Providing physical fitness education	6	1	1	15.4%

Some of the written responses that were received when asked “what they would like to see from the Caroline County’s VCE Office and how can we make a greater impact in the community” are quoted below:

- “Appropriate staffing needs to be put in place to address the issues impacting families”,
- “I’d like to see VCE be more vocal about the impacts on these natural resources and our farmland during discussions regarding the development of our county. It would also be great to see more resources for homeschoolers as we have a large community of homeschooling families in the county,” and
- “It would be great to see an increase in local 4-H activity to improve and expand business, agriculture production, and successful leadership learning opportunities for youth interested in agriculture.”

## Community Issues

Based on the responses gathered by the Caroline County office, the priority issues selected were building capacity for farm to school programming, building healthy families, promoting agricultural and environmental literacy among youth, strengthening the local food system, and addressing hunger issues.

## Future Programming to Address Community Issue

### Issue: Building capacity for farm to school programming

The 4-H program will work with schools to create school gardens and garden clubs. This can also be incorporated into future Agriculture in the Classroom lessons brought into schools. The Caroline County extension office, currently does not have an ANR agent, there should be one starting in the middle of 2024. Potential programming for this position could be to collaborate with the 4-H Agent to work with local farmers to create a farm-to-school program. This program could connect local farmers with schools for vendor purposes.

### Issue: Building healthy families

The Family Consumer Science (FCS) Agent works with teen moms by offering a “Teen Parenting Course” and a “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” program. This helps build healthy families. The 4-H Agent helps build healthy families by offering club programs and activities to give families things to do together. 4-H provides a space where families can come together and give each other support. The 4-H Agent attends grandparents’ night at the elementary schools to provide resources and activities to grandparents that are raising their grandchildren.

### Issue: Promoting agricultural and environmental literacy among youth

The Caroline County 4-H program collaborates with other local organizations and agencies to offer a 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Ag Day for all fourth-grade students enrolled in public schools. This gives the youth a wide

overview of agriculture. The 4-H agent does an embryology project each year that reaches all second-grade students enrolled in public school. The 4-H Youth Development Agent is working on incorporating Agriculture in Classroom curriculum to reach each grade level. The office has acquired the pacing guides used throughout the county to match curriculum with the SOLs being taught throughout the school year.

## **Issue: Strengthening the local food system**

The Caroline County extension office, currently does not have an ANR agent, there should be one starting in the middle of 2024. This Agent will be responsible for annual pesticide recertification and contributing to the Five County Agriculture Conference. A few potential ways the ANR agent can help strengthen the local food system is by offering classes to farmers to explore new revenue options, educational programs for farmers/producers, field days, and seminars on identified issues (i.e., pest management, food safety, new technology, etc.). The entire office can help with this issue by incorporating the “Buy Local” campaign in current and future programs.

## **Issue: Addressing hunger issues**

The Caroline County extension office, currently does not have an ANR agent, there should be one starting in the middle of 2024. Potential programs offered by the agent could be educational programs for homeowners to grow their own garden, collaborating with the farmer’s market, and working with schools and local farmers to offer a farm-to-school program. The 4-H Agent can work with youth involved in livestock projects to offer meat from their animals. The office can collaborate with other local organizations and agencies to help meet this need by being a pick-up site for the food bank.

## **References**

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<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/virginia/county/caroline>

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