



## Tazewell County 2023 Situation Analysis Report



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# **Key Issues**

## **Protecting Water Quality**

Tazewell County is located at the head of five different water systems. Water resource availability restricts potential for large industries that depend on waterways for processing and transportation. Water Quality Education Programs are needed to educate the residents of Tazewell County on how to protect water resources.

## **Helping youth and adults develop leadership, citizenship and other life skills**

Tazewell County has an identified need for Leadership Development among youth and adults. There is a need to organize young farm operators to fill leadership roles in agriculture as the average age of farmers is 59 years. With relatively high unemployment rates for Tazewell County, development of programs to address employment needs is a priority issue.

## **Promoting agricultural, natural resource, and environmental literacy**

We need to increase awareness of how agriculture works with many natural ecosystems to fulfill our nutritional needs. It is important that citizens understand the dynamics of agricultural systems and learn ways that they can help or may cause damage to the environment. Agricultural producers need timely training in production and marketing research with a focus on sustaining and protecting the environment.

## **Strengthening the local food system**

Healthy living and making positive life choices continues to be an issue among Tazewell County youth. Food sustainability and the safety of our food sources are among the growing concerns in Tazewell County. There is more interest in not only growing our own food but also in learning to preserve those foods through canning and other means of preserving our food to produce high quality food that saves money and builds self-reliance.

# Introduction

The local Extension Leadership Council (ELC) led the Tazewell County Extension Office in conducting a comprehensive situation analysis. The situation analysis was developed to help guide Virginia Cooperative Extension's programming efforts to address the needs of the population that we serve. The 2018 Situation Analysis was used as a baseline to prepare and plan the process. The data has been obtained and analyzed through a number of credible sources. Key informant interviews, focus group meetings, web-based searches and researching demographic information were the primary modes used to gather these perspectives.

Tazewell County began gathering information for the situation analysis in the spring of 2023, according to the guidelines, procedures and training provided by VCE. The Extension Office developed a Situation Analysis Community and Resident Perspective Survey. This survey was given to focus groups after discussion of the local needs assessment.

1. Needs assessment surveys were sent to stakeholders and community leaders and compiled by Virginia Tech Data Analysis Team.
2. Focus group meetings like Livestock Producers, Forest Landowners, Ag Advisory Committee, Tazewell Soil & Water Conservation District, Tazewell County Farm Bureau, Tazewell Industrial Development Authority, 4-H Volunteer Leaders, 4-H Livestock Club.
3. Key informant interviews with county and community stakeholders.

Community, County, Regional and National data, such as the 2021 United States Census Demographics Summary, 2017 Ag Census, 2023 County Health Summary, 2021 Census Education Summary, were used to compile the report. To obtain a more current perspective of demographics the Unit will continue to evaluate and recognize community needs for informal educational programs.

Tazewell County is in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains in the southwestern portion of Virginia, on the border of West Virginia. The county borders Bland, Buchanan, Russell and Smyth counties in Virginia and McDowell and Mercer counties in West Virginia. It is a region of beautiful green mountains, rolling hills and wide-open valleys that covers 522 square miles. The county's accessibility to Interstates 77 and 81 makes it a convenient location for all markets east of the Mississippi and the Midwest. Richmond, the state capital, is 281 miles northeast; Roanoke is 110 miles east; and Bristol is 70 miles southwest. The county is ideally located within the geographic center of the east coast and within one day's drive of 50% of the most populous states in the country. The northern area of Tazewell County is geologically coal and natural gas while the southern area is geologically limestone and agricultural. Hardwood forests cover the entire county, including Jefferson National Forest, Beartown Wilderness Area, and the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area.



## Unit Profile

This profile presents data across multiple time periods and data for Virginia and the US population for comparison purposes. There are multiple worksheets for different levels and areas of analysis. Some of these most common worksheets include Demographics, Agriculture, Health, Education, and Employment. This profile provides a snapshot of the unit for program planners and residents indicating current baseline data to gauge the effectiveness of Extension educational programs. Combined with data available in the [VCE Data Commons Dashboard](#), Extension personnel and stakeholders have access to a wide range of county level information. Data is everywhere; it's the analysis of this data that provides useful information for making productive decisions.

## Demographics

2021 United States Census Demographics Summary found that Tazewell County had a decline in populations from ages 25-59 while showing a slight increase in retirement age individuals. Racial demographics have somewhat changed since the SA 2018. The percentage of people reporting their race as being white of 93.94% was virtually unchanged. The percentage of African American citizens, those of two or more races, and Hispanic populations have increased.

## Agriculture

There were increases in the number of small farms (10-49 acres) and in large farms (1000+ acres) while all other sized categories showed a decrease. Farms sold in Tazewell County decreased by sales while the market value of the farms increased. Tazewell County had an increase in sales of Agricultural Products and Equipment. Beef cattle continues to be a strong industry for Tazewell. The Dairy cattle industry has had a significant decline. Corn continues to be a strong commodity crop with a slight decrease from 2012 Agricultural Summary. Tazewell County has a strong industry in timber sales.

## Health

Tazewell County has had a slight decline in population since 2021 with an increase of premature deaths under the age of 75. Tazewell County had an increase in the number of primary care physicians making health care more accessible. We saw a decrease in adult smoking and in teen birth rates. Adult obesity had a slight increase of 2 percent. There are more residents insured in 2023 making health care affordable.

## **Education**

When in comparison of educational attainment in Tazewell County and the state of Virginia the statistics are higher for Tazewell in high school graduates and for residents receiving Associate degrees. The percentage of residents receiving a high school diploma is higher than the state and national average. Tazewell residents are eligible to go to Southwest Virginia Community College for free tuition which shows results for those students attaining an associate degree.

## **Employment**

In 2022, Tazewell County had 14,065 people working. The top three employment industries were Government (22.8%), Retail Trade (18.8%), and Health Care and Social Assistance (13.8%). The top three employers were Tazewell County Public Schools, Walmart, and Clinch Valley Community Hospital.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

Below is a collection of the approximately 88 survey responses as well as conversations with Tazewell County residents and key partners. Survey takers were encouraged to write in their opinions. Surveys were available online and via hardcopies. The survey was advertised on social media, 4-H groups, and through agriculture groups.

## **General**

Overall, the citizens of Tazewell County feel positive about the future of our community. They do have areas of concern which are identified in the section below.

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture is one of the most important industries in Tazewell County. The farmers are looking for more education to help produce crops, raise animals, and to market their product. The farmers are concerned about the accessibility of purchasing farm products such as hay, lime, and other items.

## **Food Supply**

The goal of many citizens is to make our community more self-sustainable. To be able to produce vegetables and food for their families. We need to teach our community how to raise and grow vegetables as well as to raise our own meat for our families. Many of citizens mention the need of a meat processing facility for Tazewell County. Tazewell County received a grant to build a meat processing facility in the near future. Another concern was the public needs to be taught where our food comes from. There is a need to train people to work, be educated, and to pursue careers in the food supply industry. Food safety and preservation needs to be taught in our community.

## **Community Health**

Our community needs easier access to health care and insurance. The community needs more public health education to improve health. Tazewell County needs more mental health care support. There is a need to provide education to our youth about substance abuse.

## **Natural Resources**

Citizens feel that we need to educate the public in conservation and to become better land stewards. We need to provide ways to protect our soil and to protect our water in order to have a better climate for future generations.

## **Youth**

To empower youth by educating and encouraging the promotion of agriculture awareness and development. Empowering the youth to be the next leaders of our country. We are an agricultural community and should

continue to help our youth to understand the careers that are available in agricultural areas. Community involvement is needed to provide better results in our youth.

## Focus Group Responses

### Soil & Water Conservation District

- Natural Resource Conservation
- Teaching youth to protect their environment through programs with Tazewell County Schools currently: Our Living Soils, Food & Fiber, Water Wizard, Kids in the Outdoors, Tour du Parc, Kids in the Creek
- Protecting our water quality (urban and agriculture)
- Agriculture Marketing
- Agriculture Production/Profitability
- Agriculture Sustainability/Preservation
- Animals/Livestock Production Education
- Providing implements to farmers for seeding, spreading and spraying

### Department of Wildlife Resources

- Help with the Hunter Safety Education Program
- Wildlife Identification
- Kids in the Outdoors
- Wildlife Plot Seeding and Management
- Water Quality Education
- Fishing Education
- Shooting & Archery Safety Education
- Natural Resource Production/Profitability
- Nuisance Species Management

### Clinch Valley Community Action

- Head Start/Early Head Start
- After School Workshops
- Activities for Day Care providers
- Activities for Home School Students
- Partner with CVCA on Grants to show matching contributions
- Provide programming for underserved audiences

### Tazewell County Farm Bureau Federation

- Agriculture Education and Literacy
- Education on drugs
- Violence in our schools, communities, and surrounding area
- Helping children deal with peer pressure
- Leadership and Citizenship Education
- Farm Safety Program
- Expand Young Farmer Opportunities
- Protect Virginia Fencing Laws

### 4-H Youth Development Program

- Recruitment of Adult Volunteers
- Revitalize 4-H All Star
- Resident Camp/Day Camps
- Leadership/Problem Solving Skills

### Virginia Cooperative Extension

- Community Service
- Character Education
- Control the abuse of drugs
- Internet security
- Places for teens to hang out
- Control violence and bullying at school
- Reach diverse and underserved audiences
- Promote youth agriculture literacy
- Outreach for home school

#### Tazewell County School System

- Conduct 4-H in-school programming with 4th - 8th grades
- Promote youth activities and competitions
- Work with the Agriculture Education Departments
- Share resources to enhance school programs
- Education Programs on Water Quality and Soil Conservation
- Expand career and technical education opportunities at all schools and Career and Technical Center
- Financial Literacy

#### Post-Secondary Education

- Utilize International Program Opportunities
- Utilize the Community Center for Competitions, Meetings, and Training
- Programs for Agriculture, Environment and S.T.E.M.
- Financial Literacy

#### Tazewell County Tourism & Recreation

- Promote Agri-tourism with groups visiting Tazewell County
- Promote Youth & Adult Outdoor Activities
- Utilize our Parks and Facilities in Tazewell County
- Participate in County Festivals & Fairs

#### EMS, Fire & Rescue

- Fire Prevention Programs
- Rural Water Supply (Quality and Quantity)
- Homeland Security
- Natural Resource Production/Profitability
- Environmental Disaster Remediation
- Food Safety & Preservation Emergency Preparedness

#### Tazewell County Livestock Producers

- Agriculture Production/Profitability
- Animal and Livestock Programs
- Family Farm Succession Planning
- Control of Invasive Species
- Land Use
- Decline of Dairy Farms and milk prices
- Decline of Coal Industry
- Lack of Internet & Cell Phone Accessibility

#### Extension Leadership Council

- Recruitment of Extension Volunteers
- Employment Career Opportunities
- Fair Employment Compensation
- Economic Viability
- Exploring Alternative Energy Resources
- Health and Chronic Diseases (Cancer)
- Opioid Crisis
- Families in Poverty
- Teen Birthrate
- School Dropouts
- Protecting the Environment
- Limited Health Care Options (Facilities & Providers)

#### Family and Consumer Sciences Program

- Aging Population and Long-Term Care
- Child Development Issues including before and after school programs and career development
- Chronic Disease and Health
- Nutrition and Obesity
- Parent & Guardian Skills
- Financial Management, Small Business/Entrepreneurs and Consumer Issues
- Food Safety/Preservation
- Drug Dependency and Substance Abuse Education

#### Family Nutrition Program

- Healthy Eating
- Exercise Opportunities

#### Master Gardeners

- Economic Viability
- Strong Education System
- Environmentally Sound Horticulture Practices
- Water Wise Gardening focusing on water quality and quantity
- Healthy Living and Growing Safe Fruit, Vegetables and Meats for Home Use
- Sustainable Safe Growing Processes and Preservation of Food and Energy
- Youth Gardening Programs with Community Partners focusing on decision making and life skills

## Community Issues

### Protecting Water Quality

Water quality is an important issue because there are no streams flowing into Tazewell County. All water flows out of the county as it is located at the head of five different water systems. Water resource availability restricts potential for large industries that depend on waterways for processing and transportation. The Clinch River is the largest stream leaving the area and creates a habitat for many species of fish and wildlife. Rare mussels and fish species are found in the Clinch River and other rivers flowing through Tazewell County. Programs are held to educate youth on how to protect water resources through Water Quality Education Programs. Drinking Water Clinics are held as needed to assure citizens with wells, cisterns, springs, and other sources of private drinking water for their homes that their water is safe to consume. We collaborate with other agencies on river cleanup, aquatic habitats, conservation methods and Tazewell County's unique freshwater resources.



## **Helping youth and adults develop leadership, citizenship and other life skills**

Tazewell County has an identified need for Leadership Development among youth and adults. The Virginia Cooperative Extension-Tazewell County Office (VCE) offers Leadership Development opportunities through Advisory Committees, Extension Leadership Council, 4-H Clubs, Ag Producers' meetings, and volunteer positions throughout Extension Programs. There is a need to organize young farm operators to fill leadership roles in agriculture as the average age of farmers is 59 years.

With relatively high unemployment rates for Tazewell County, job readiness programs like résumé building and interview skills is important for both youth and adults. Development of programs to address employment needs is a priority issue. Awareness of higher education options and career connections at the local, regional, state, and national levels is a deficiency.

Hands-on real-life simulations give youth the ability to explore career opportunities and make lifestyle and budget choices like those adults' face on a daily basis. Partnerships with the school system, public libraries and other educational agencies support the need for a strong educational program.

Resident camping and educational field trips help youth foster community and civic engagement, building knowledge, character, citizenship, and life skills to help build knowledge and character.

## **Promoting agricultural, natural resource, and environmental literacy**

We need to increase awareness of how agriculture works with many natural ecosystems to fulfill our nutritional needs. The production processes and components used, determine the effects of agriculture in the environment. It is important that citizens understand the dynamics of agricultural systems and learn ways that they can help or may cause damage to the environment.

Agriculture and natural resource management is a research and science-based activity influencing the development and application of technology for the public producing our food. We focus on the inputs and outputs of agriculture and food industry involving many technologies exercised by both public and private stakeholders.

Tazewell County's Livestock Industry makes up 93% of the total value of agricultural products produced and sold. Forage production is also very important as the staple food source for livestock in Tazewell County. Agricultural Producers need timely training in production and marketing research with a focus on sustaining and protecting the environment.

## **Strengthening the local food system**

Tazewell County has a rich heritage encompassing local food production that makes Agriculture our leading industry. Food safety is very important in all aspects of the food supply chain. This includes all food safety and preservation processes, as well as raising quality livestock, dairy, and vegetable crops.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) begins teaching these life skills to citizens as youth through 4-H programs and continues the learning experiences through adulthood. VCE engages farmers producing the commodities, as well as restaurant workers and family members who are preparing the meals for consumption. VCE-Tazewell County offers multiple programs that teach fundamental skills supporting this effort.

Nutrition Education when put into practice helps reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses associated with obesity. Research on cancer and cancer-causing agents is important to explain the number of people affected by the disease. Healthy diets consist of fresh fruits, meats, dairy, whole grains, and vegetables that promote local production and availability to the consumer.

Women, infants, and young children have a need for proper nutrition and safety practices. Family Nutrition Program Assistants are needed to share nutritional information with eligible individuals.

Healthy living and making positive life choices continues to be an issue among Tazewell County youth.

Food sustainability and the safety of our food sources are among the growing concerns in Tazewell County. With the growth of farmer's markets and the increase of needs and desires to consume healthier fresh foods comes the importance of food entrepreneurs, vendors, and handlers to understand the issues involved in food safety. There is more interest in not only growing our own food but also in learning to preserve those foods through canning and other means of preserving our food to produce flavorful, high-quality food that saves money, builds self-reliance, and creates lifelong memories.

## **Future Programming to Address Community Issues**

### **1. Protecting Water Quality**

VCE Tazewell County will partner with the Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Conservation and Recreation, local schools, and landowners to provide research-based information and hands on education to increase awareness of protecting our water quality.

### **2. Helping youth and adults develop leadership, citizenship and other life skills**

VCE Tazewell County will educate youth about leadership, citizenship and other life skills through 4-H programming partnering with the public, private and home school systems to target life skills such as teamwork, character, healthy lifestyle choices, decision making, learning to learn, goal setting, conflict resolution.

### **3. Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy**

VCE Tazewell County will work with agriculture producers engaging them in profitable and environmental sound practices to improve their operations. We will work with other agencies and volunteers to maximize our educational reach and become stewards of our natural resources.

### **4. Strengthening the local food system**

VCE Tazewell County will help strengthen our local food system by providing education on food production, preservation, and preparation. Putting knowledge into action for businesses and families with programs such as ServSafe, Community Food Security and growing your own food.

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