



Virginia Beach 2023 Situation Analysis Report

City of Virginia Beach Extension Staff

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VCE Program Advisory Committees and Boards

***Agriculture and Natural Resources:** Virginia Beach Agricultural Advisory Commission; Virginia Beach Farm Bureau Board of Directors; Virginia Beach Master Gardeners Board of Directors; Virginia Cooperative Extension- Virginia Beach- Fruit and Vegetable Production Advisory Group; Virginia Cooperative Extension- Virginia Beach- Grain Programs Advisory Group; Virginia Dare Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors*

***Family and Consumer Sciences:** Virginia Beach Family and Consumer Sciences Advisory Committee; Hampton Roads Bank on Steering Committee*

***Food Nutrition:** Virginia Beach Community Partners Advisory Committees*

***Youth Development:** 4-H Youth Development Leaders; 4-H Adult Leader Association; Youth and Community Action Team; VA Beach Youth Opportunities and Parks and Recreation Leaders; Virginia Beach Public School's Family and Community Engagement Group; 4-H School Advisory Council*



Top 7 issues in Virginia Beach

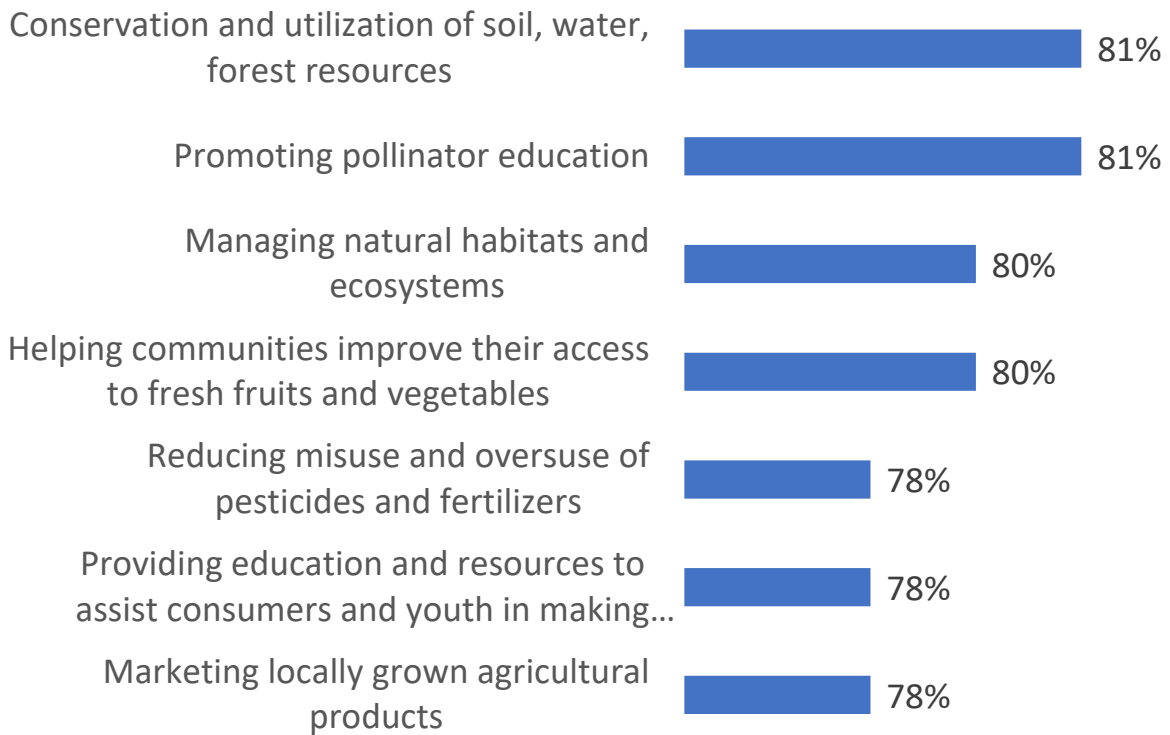


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents in Virginia Beach indicating high or very high effort for each issue listed.

Introduction

Every five years Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducts a Situation Analysis to analyze the current needs within the community as well as determine new trends. The data gathered from the analysis helps VCE staff determine the scope of the problem and how best VCE educational programming will be able to address the needs of the community. In addition to the VCE survey, the City of Virginia Beach conducts a citizen satisfaction survey every two years to assess the residents' satisfaction with services provided by the city departments. The city took several measures to ensure the respondents represented the diversity of the city. The VCE Situation Analysis and Virginia Beach Satisfaction survey are also designed to reveal resources and educational gaps that may exist. The Virginia Beach VCE Staff reviewed the 2022 Census report to obtain information about current trends in the City of Virginia Beach. These data sources assist VCE staff in exploring new educational sources as well as innovative methods of engaging residents in the educational process to address their needs and concerns.

A review of the Virginia Beach Satisfaction Survey data revealed information that has indirect as well as direct relationships with the educational work conducted by the VCE Staff; the survey showed how services were perceived by residents, some emerging concerns, and how best to deliver educational programs. The data will assist VCE Staff with further programming planning. The satisfaction survey data indicated that 91.4% of the residents rated the quality of living in the city with an excellent or good rating. Sixty-seven percent of the residents indicated a combination of excellent and good ratings for horticulture and agriculture services. Forty percent of the residents gave the housing options in the city either an excellent or good rating. Results from the satisfaction survey also indicated that 49.9% rated effective communication as excellent or good while 47.7% rated the available options for communication as excellent or good.

Virginia Beach VCE staff used various methods to gather residents' assessments of the needs in the communities which included focus groups. Other sources of community needs were communicated using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis. At different times of the year Extension Agents consult members of their Advisory boards and committees to conduct an informal analysis of current VCE educational program offerings. Several of the bottom priority issues on the Virginia Beach Situation Analysis survey were on the top of the Advisory Committees' analysis.

Virginia Beach VCE Staff utilized the state-wide survey instrument that was created by Virginia Tech Specialists. The needs assessment survey was accompanied by a memo that explained the purpose and benefits of the survey. The memo also stated that taking the survey was confidential and voluntary. Several Issue questions with similar implications were combined to reduce the size of the survey from 53 Issue questions to 45 questions. A QR code was used along with a website link to obtain the survey questionnaire. Virginia Beach Cooperative Extension Staff and Program Assistants distributed the survey through their email lists and during educational programs. The 4-H Extension Agent included the survey in the Clover Clips newsletter. The newsletter is a quarterly publication that is distributed to 4-H members and families. The survey QR code and link were included in the Clover Clips newsletter that was distributed to 1,300 4-H households. Members of the VB-VCE Staff's advisory groups were also asked to share the survey with community stakeholders. The survey was also displayed in the City of Virginia Beach Department of Agriculture's July/September Newsletter. The newsletter has a distribution of 7,500 residents.

Unit Profile

The town of Virginia Beach became an independent city in 1952 and merged with Princess Anne County in 1963. On January 1, 2023, the City of Virginia Beach celebrated its 60th anniversary since its strategic merger with Princess Anne County in 1963. The City of Virginia Beach is one of seven cities that comprise Hampton Roads. The other six cities include Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Suffolk. Virginia Beach is located on the southeastern coast of Virginia bordering the Atlantic Ocean, Chesapeake Bay, and parts of the northeast sections of North Carolina. The majority of the city is characterized as suburban. Virginia Beach is home to three military installations, NAS Oceana, NAS Oceana Dam Neck Annex, and Little Creek/Fort Story. According to the Navy Statistical Economic Report, Virginia Beach military installations are the largest active-duty personnel in the U.S. with 10,000 service members and 3,000 civilian employees. Virginia Beach is internationally known as a tourist destination due to its miles of beaches, hotels, and restaurants that are positioned in the mid-Atlantic. A Virginia Beach 2022 tourism economic impact study reported that 13.6 million people visited Virginia Beach in 2022 generating \$2.4 billion in revenue for the city. Another \$1.3 billion was realized from indirect revenue from the tourism industry. Virginia Beach residents and tourists enjoy various family activities during all four seasons, winter, spring, summer, and fall. Two of the most popular events that bring tourists across the nation to the city are the East Coast Surfing Championships and the Something in the Water Music Festival.

Although Virginia Beach is known for its military and tourism industry, agriculture is the third largest industry in the city. Virginia Beach is home to about 23,500 acres of farmland which generated almost \$191 million in economic impact in 2022.

Virginia Beach is the largest city in the Commonwealth by population and total area, the ninth most populous city in the Southeast region of the United States, and the 42nd most populous city in the U.S. with 459,470 residents according to the 2020 Census. The U.S. 2022 Census reported that the median age for individuals living in Virginia Beach was 37.8 years and 23% of the population was over the age of 60. The Census indicated the demographics include 59% White, 18% Black, 9% Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 7% Multi-Race. The Census report also showed that 14% of children and 9% of seniors live in poverty in Virginia Beach. Data from the Virginia Department of Health, indicate that 12.8% of the children in Virginia Beach were living below the poverty level compared to 16.2% in Virginia. The education completion levels are high in Virginia Beach with 94.3% of the population obtaining a high school diploma or higher of which 40.3% obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income was \$83,245. The census also indicated that the average travel time for individuals working in the city is 23 minutes. According to the 2023 Federal Reserve Economic Data, Virginia Beach had a 3.9% unemployment rate.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Although several attempts were made to get residents to respond to the VCE Situation Analysis survey, the responses were very limited. The Virginia Beach Unit received only 59 responses to the 2023 Situation Analysis survey. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were over the age of 55. Additional demographics of the respondents included 76.3% white, 22% black, 1.7% multi-race, and others. Many the respondents were women reflecting 84.7% female and 15.3% male. One hundred percent of the survey respondents had completed high school or higher; of which 84.8% had obtained a college degree or higher.

The top seven issues as seen in Table 1 ranged in results from 78% to 81.4% indicating that the issue was a top concern. The results from the respondents indicated that they perceived improving the conservation and the environment in the city as major concerns. Other issues included providing fresh produce to consumers, providing educational resources to reduce obesity for both adults and youth, and educating consumers to make healthier food choices.

The top seven priorities from the respondents are listed below in priority order:

1. Promoting pollinator education.
2. Conservation and utilization of soil, water, and forest resources
3. Helping communities improve their access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
4. Management of natural habitats and ecosystems
5. Marketing locally grown agriculture products
6. Providing education and resources to assist consumers and youth in making healthier food choices.
7. Reducing obesity in children and adults

Agriculture Community Perspectives

Five out of the seven key priorities identified from the community's viewpoint were centered on agriculture. These priorities encompassed the following: enhancing education about pollinators, conserving and utilizing soil, water, and forest resources, aiding communities in increasing their access to fresh fruits and vegetables, managing natural habitats and ecosystems, and promoting the marketing of locally produced agricultural products. Results from previous community surveys revealed residents believed that growing their fruits and vegetables was the best way to ensure access to those foods. This is integral in providing families with fresh and safe food to consume and creating enjoyable experiences throughout the plant growing season. Results from previous community surveys revealed residents believed that growing their fruits and vegetables was the best way to ensure access to those foods. This is integral in providing families with fresh and safe food to consume and creating enjoyable experiences throughout the plant growing season.

Family and Consumer Sciences Community Perspectives

The Family and Consumer Sciences Advisory Committees consist of staff representing the City Departments of Housing and Social Services, local Financial Institutions, and retired residents. At different times throughout the year, members of the committee share their observations of trends within the city as well as information their colleagues share regarding the needs of residents. The FCS Advisory Committee also served as a focus group and the results are seen in Table 2. The major trend the Advisory Committee shared was the need to improve the mental health of residents. The committee indicated that COVID-19 had both direct and indirect negative impacts on the mental well-being of residents. Additional community needs identified by the committee were to increase residents' knowledge to make better financial decisions, help youth establish good money habits, help residents make healthier food selections, and help residents protect themselves from scams and identity theft. Another community issue shared by the Advisory Committee was to address issues related to poverty such as an increase in affordable housing, an increase in transportation options, and options to guide against food insecurity.

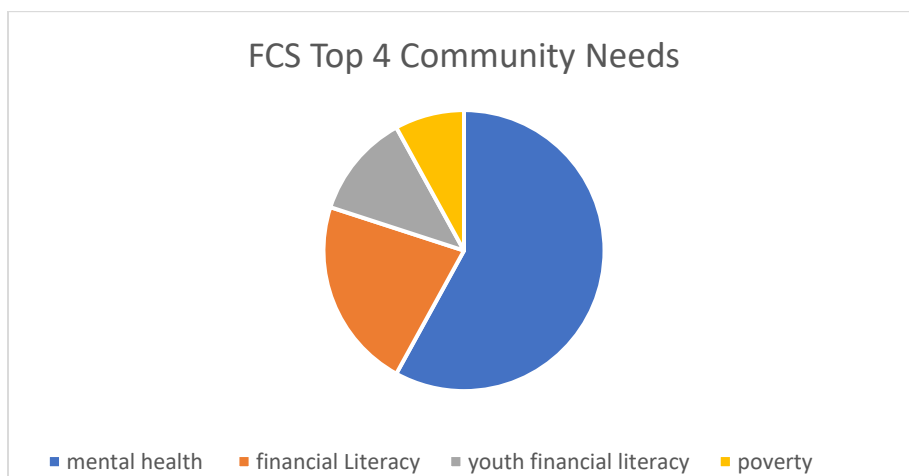


Figure 2. Family and Consumer Sciences Top Community Needs

The Advisory Committee shared information from a SWOT Analysis (Table 3) with the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent regarding Family and Consumer Sciences educational programs addressing the needs of the community. Information from the SWOT Analysis concluded that the Strengths of the FCS educational programs

were diverse and adaptable to address the needs of various audiences. The major Weakness is residents who could utilize the educational materials and resources to address their needs are unaware of the educational program offered by VCE-FCS. The Advisory Committee stated that Opportunities for VCE-FCS programming would be to market the programs in non-traditional VCE areas and to non-traditional residents who seek VCE resources. The Threats are when individuals are unaware of the educational programs that are available to address their needs and will seek unreliable sources.

Table 3: Family and Consumer Sciences SWOT Analysis

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS Educational programs are diverse and adaptable.	WEAKNESSES Educational programs lack community visibility.
OPPORTUNITIES Increase awareness of educational programs in the community.	THREATS Residents seek unreliable sources to address their needs.

4-H Community Perspectives

The Virginia Beach Youth and Community Action Team (YCAT) is focused on bringing awareness of the severity of the issue in the youth communities. Substance abuse and use among youth was identified as a major issue in the city by YCAT. Efforts are focused on educating youth and families about the short- and long-term effects of substance use and abuse. Great efforts are dedicated to connecting families and youth to services and resources where they can receive help and support to help beat addiction.

Mental Health is still a prevalent issue among youth. It has been discussed that youth are internalizing things in ways that are harmful to their mental and emotional state. Youth are struggling with reconciling the comprehension of evils dominating man-on-man violence and crimes. Youth have not acquired the necessary and healthy coping skills they need to navigate the challenges they face. It was noted that external factors of society have ingrained in them from an early age that everyone is a winner and created a generation of youth who do not know how to lose or how to process loss.

The Virginia Beach Youth community advisory committees and groups associate the cause of maladjusted youth with the current instability of parenting. It was discussed that parents need mental health coping strategies to help them navigate new challenges that have been brought on by changes to the economy and social standards. Larger day-to-day challenges for parents have created a parenting stigma that has produced strong denial in younger parents that their children need special services, and accommodations, and/or should seek help in diagnosing cognitive and developmental delays in their children. The prevalence and ever-growing contentious custody battles and conflicts affecting kids are also contributing to the struggles in developing healthy coping skills among young people.

The struggles parents have for balancing work and home life take them away from their kids resulting in them not being present for the emotional needs of their kids. The villages that were in place to support children and families have crumbled creating a communitywide situation where kids are more at risk. So, when a parent is at work and can't get off, or there are lapses in communication between estranged parents, the kids are left at recreation centers, schools, and bus stops without warning. Younger parents have notably been less responsible and more inconsistent with picking up their kids on time after school and from community-organized events. The mental and emotional distress this is causing younger children is immeasurable.

Youth who fall in the middle school age and younger teen “tweens” are the ones who need and are looking for structured things to do to actively engage them. While they are showing up in search of these opportunities, they lack appropriate social engagement skills. It has been noted that due to COVID and the immediate switch over to electronic programming and schooling, important social development did not occur. The results are many “tweenaged” youths who do not recognize body language and non-verbal communication. The loss of key social cues has created an environment of mistrust, conflict, and social anxiety amongst this age group. When cultural awareness, appropriations, and gender identity issues are prevalent, youth are further forced into boxes that they may not necessarily fit. Because adults are overly cautious and overly regulated to not offend anyone, necessary conversations are avoided creating increasingly more misunderstandings. All of which deny the opportunity for human connection and the opportunity to teach and facilitate emotional and social intelligence.

Virginia Beach School liaisons have also noted that teens have access to a plethora of information on which they should know certain things, but they don’t. Furthermore, they don’t know what they don’t know, and even though electronic information is readily available, it is not the same as being able to physically manipulate teaching tools. By not providing youth with hands-on learning opportunities, it curbs questioning and reasoning and takes away a child’s natural curiosity leading to youth who have become sedentary spectators at home and school.

Other community needs the youth groups cited were financial and food security. The cost of living is increasing while paychecks are staying the same, causing some families to have to make difficult decisions regarding everyday necessities. School meals are sometimes the only meal the kids get. The current FDA School Nutrition Program only reaches ten Virginia Beach Title 1 afterschool parks and recreation programs where youth are given a full meal. Emphasis is drawn to the analysis of differences between healthy and nutritious foods with heavily processed foods which provide caloric intake to alleviate hunger but lead to an increase in obesity. For many families, healthier and fresher options are not affordable. The problem is further compounded due to generational gaps in knowledge of cooking with fresh ingredients and having the time after work or between jobs to do so.

Community Issues

The Virginia Beach Cooperative Extension staff reviewed the data results from the Unit Situation Analysis and noticed the scope of three needs had implications for all the VCE programming areas.

These needs included:

1. Helping communities improve their access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
2. Marketing for locally grown agriculture products.
3. Providing education and resources to assist consumers and youth in making healthier food choices.

The Extension staff also shared information obtained from their advisory boards and committees. A comparison was made between the results of the survey and the information to determine if there were trends that emerged from all educational programs. One of the major trends that emerged from the discussion was the direct and indirect impact COVID-19 has had on individual mental and emotional conditions. Virginia Beach VCE Advisory groups were also consulted to help identify urgent and emerging needs of the locality. The top three needs that were identified were: 1) Mental Health and Well-being, 2) Access and availability of fresh produce, and 3) Conservation of natural resources.

Mental Health Issues among youth and adults encompass the need for mental resilience as well as social and emotional intelligence. More needs to be done to connect families and producers to have a greater impact on improving access to fresh produce that will positively impact family food budgets and physical health improvements. Increasing the awareness and knowledge of residents to increase their understanding of how soil and water conservation impacts local natural resources and public waters was also a need for the community.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

After a review of the VCE educational programs and resources as well as potential program offerings, the Virginia Beach Cooperative Extension Staff decided to address both the community issues identified in the Situation Analysis and those identified by the Advisory Committees and community groups as emerging trends.

The Virginia Beach Cooperative Extension Staff will address the community needs collaboratively by implementing educational programs and working with community partners. The collaborative efforts will be to connect families and producers to have a greater impact on improving access to fresh produce that will positively impact family food budgets and physical health improvements. The efforts will also be aimed at improving the mental well-being of Virginia Beach residents

The Agriculture Agent will continue to work with producers to ensure fresh fruit and vegetables are accessible to all Virginia Beach residents. VCE-VB partners with organizations to promote the fruits and vegetables that are in season locally, even publishing the Virginia Beach You-Pick-Strawberry guide that is sent to libraries as hard copies and emailed out to over 7,000 individuals and organizations in Virginia Beach. Through the consumer horticulture programming the Virginia Beach Master Gardeners conduct programs targeted at youth (in coordination with 4-H) as well as adult education opportunities on how to maximize your success when growing fruits and vegetables. The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Agent will continue to collaborate with community partners to offer educational programs to stretch the household budget to incorporate more locally grown fruits and vegetables.

To address the need to improve conservation and environmental education outreach efforts, the Agriculture Agent will continue working with Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation District, Lynnhaven River NOW, Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Virginia Department of Health - SWAPA to further reach urban audiences with nutrient runoff management, watershed education, and overall environmental health. The 4-H Agent will expand its partnership with the Virginia Beach schools and Parks and Recreation to engage youth in environmental education which will include groundwater model demonstrations, knowledge, and skills-based competitions. The Horticulture Agent and Master Gardeners will continue to expand their reach of Arbor Day programs, speakers' bureau opportunities, and urban gardening techniques.

The FCS Agent and FCS SNAP-Ed Agent will continue to collaborate with the Foods Nutrition Program (FNP) Assistants and community partners to educate residents about where and when to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables. They will also provide educational resources designed to teach residents how to prepare and store foods to assist with increasing residents' awareness of locally grown agriculture products. Virginia Cooperative Extension provides various educational programs for making healthier food selections for both adults and youth. Several of the nutritional programs are targeted at low-income residents. FNP Assistants and the FCS Agent will continue to expand their reach to audiences with limited access to fresh food options. Programs such as *Eat Smart. Move More.*, *Shopping Matters*, *Cooking Matters*, and *Home Food Preservation* will be utilized to address the needs of access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Healthy Eating, nutrition, and the importance of physical activity are the top issues that Virginia Beach youth are facing hindering a healthy lifestyle. The Family Nutrition Program, SNAP-ED Agent, and the Senior Youth Program Assistant offer youth nutrition programs addressing the issues facing youth with nutrition education programs in schools, afterschool settings, and park and recreation centers. Youth Nutrition programs are all researched-based programs: Literacy, Eating, and Activity for Preschools (LEAP) (3 to 5 years old) offers 10 lessons on food and nutrition using a storybook-style approach. Pick A Better Snack (Grades K-2) is a hands-on curriculum designed to encourage children to try new fruits and vegetables. Learn, Grow, Eat, Go! (Grades 3-5) a gardening, nutrition education, and physical activity program. Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness (Grades 3-6) this program is designed to encourage students to be more active and to make better choices by drinking more water and eating more vegetables and fruits, as well as whole grain foods. The 4-H Agent will collaborate with the FCS Agent and FNP Assistant to offer the *Teen Cuisine* program to youth across the city. *Teen Cuisine* (Grades 6-12) is a hands-on cooking program that teaches students the important life skills that will stay with

them as they grow. Lessons cover how to choose healthy foods and prevent food-borne illness. With a cooking demonstration in each lesson, students learn by doing. Students learn the basics of MY Plate.

Five of the top seven priorities identified in the Situation Analysis included the following: promoting pollinator education; conservation and utilization of soil, water, and forest resources; helping communities improve their access to fresh fruits and vegetables; management of natural habitats and ecosystems; and marketing locally grown agriculture products will be addressed within the VB-VCE by the Agricultural Extension Agent, and through programs provided by the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Virginia Dare Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and/or the City of Virginia Beach Department of Agriculture. The protection of watersheds, and preserving natural environments (pollinators, wildlife, native plants) will continue to be addressed by the Horticulture Agent and the Virginia Beach Master Gardener Program.

Although it has been three years since the COVID-19 pandemic disturbed most individuals' lives, the negative external and internal factors are still prevalent in people's everyday lives. A statement in a study conducted by the American Psychological Association indicates that "We are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield health and social consequences for years to come." The study revealed the major stressors individuals face since COVID-19 consist of the death of family members and friends, loss of jobs, reduction of financial stability, and uncertainty of the future which have elevated stress levels. Virginia Cooperative Extension Human Development Program Team has developed programs to address mental stability for adults. The Program Team has also worked with the 4-H Program Team to develop programs targeted to youth's well-being. The FCS and 4-H Agents will incorporate several of these strategies in the current programs to address the mental health and well-being of the Virginia Beach residents.

The Virginia Beach 4-H Agent will continue to work with local Community Service Boards and behavioral health services to implement existing VCE programs. Increased attention will be taken to reach youth and families through targeted programs like the grant-funded Health Rocks! and Strengthening Youth and Families.

Farming is physically and mentally demanding, with worries about fluctuating prices for their commodities, weather issues, and debt load just to name a few of the stress-creating aspects of farmers' jobs. The Ohio State University College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences cited major stress sources for farmers as seen in Figure 1. In Virginia a Farmer Stress Partnership exists to help combat this issue, this partnership and resources are promoted at our local farmer-based programs. <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/education-farmer-stress.shtml> Virginia is part of the Farm Response network to help provide Extension of a full range of competencies to provide appropriate mental healthcare for agriculture producers and their families. At least one agent in Virginia Beach will seek certification through this program to help address this need as identified through the survey.

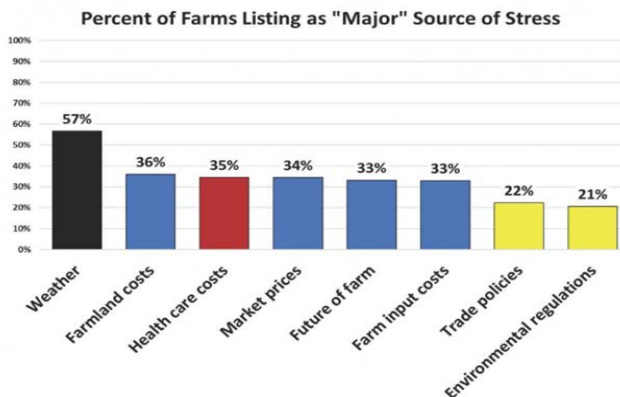


Figure 4. Farming Stressors from cfaes.osu.edu

The Cooperative Extension staff have reviewed the Virginia Beach Situation Analysis document and agreed that the measures suggested in the document are the most appropriate methods to address the needs of the communities. Thus, Virginia Beach Cooperative Extension staff is dedicated to ensuring Virginia Beach residents receive educational materials and resources to address the needs of the communities. The staff is also dedicated to collaborating with existing partners and establishing new partnerships.

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