



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Washington County

2018

UNIT Extension Staff

Phil Blevins, Unit Coordinator, Extension Agent, Agriculture
Crystal Peek, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development
Bailey Dotson, 4-H Program Assistant
Sierra Speers – SNAP Ed
Lisa Little, Unit Administrative Assistant
Linda Lovins, Secretary Senior

UNIT Extension Leadership Council

Dr. Tom Van Dyke, Extension Leadership Council Chairman

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Introduction

The Washington County unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a situation analysis during calendar year 2018. The purpose of the analysis was to identify key issues facing the community and provide Extension staff with up-to-date information to use when developing educational programs for the community. Situation analysis is the first component of the Extension Programming Model and helps the organization provide programming based on the actual needs of the community.

Qualitative data was gathered through surveys and personal knowledge from client interaction which was combined with quantitative data (to develop a Unit Profile) and determine benchmarks from which to evaluate data gathered from community members and residents. Data and information from these activities was analyzed and priority issues were identified. The questions that were addressed were –

1. What are the issues related to _____?
2. Why are these issues affecting our citizens?
3. What can be done to address these issues?

Unit Profile

Washington County is a rural county of 564.2 square miles located in the Southwest area of Virginia. It is bounded on the east by Smyth and Grayson Counties, on the west by Scott County, on the north by Russell County, and to the south by the state of Tennessee. Virginia Employment Commission data indicated a population of 55,776 for the county and a population of 17,835 for the city of Bristol covering an area of 11.6 square miles. Abingdon serves as the county seat and is the largest town within the county boundaries. Other incorporated towns are Glade Spring and Damascus. Washington County has experienced significant development pressure in the past 20 years. The county population has increased 1.67% since 2013 while Bristol's remained steady.

Of the total population Black or African Americans represent about 1.31%, Asians - .38%, American Indians - .13%, some other race - .43%, two or more races - .78%, and Hispanics – 1.39%.

Washington County is a high ranking county in agriculture production among Virginia counties with over \$76,000,000.00 in farm income ranking 2nd in number of farms, 1st in eggs, 3rd in cows and calves, and 4th in beef cows. The greatest agriculture resource in the county is pasture, which drives the livestock industry.

Beef cattle represent the greatest income in the agriculture sector with over \$43,000,000 in sales in 2012. In addition Abingdon is a major livestock marketing center, being one of the largest east of the Mississippi. Weekly sales are held at 2 local markets. Changes in the beef industry are bringing about many opportunities in marketing which are being explored.

Average farm size increased from 111 to 120 acres from 2007 to 2012. However personal experience and interviews clearly indicate that some of the larger farms are being divided into “farmettes” or subdivisions. Along with this change has arrived a group of new generation farmers which are eager for assistance.

Due to reduced margins and retirements, the dairy industry has decline dramatically in the past few years. Dairy farmers continue to struggle with high input costs and frequent low market prices for their product. Nevertheless, dairy farmers continue to represent a major force in agriculture in the county.

The sheep industry, while small, has experienced a renewed growth in recent years due to strong lamb prices. Another area which remains strong in the livestock sector is goat production. Predator control represents one of the major obstacles to growth in these industries. Horse numbers are also significant in the county.

An area that has received significant media attention but very small growth is organic production of farm products. While few in number, organic growers are especially interested in learning how to do a better job and need assistance in many areas.

Data used in this situation analysis are in the tables below.

Agriculture Statistics					
	Year				
	2012	2007	2002	1997	1992
Number of Farms	1,602	1,791	1,821	2,029	1,986
Land in Farms	192,123	198,850	197,495	190,573	190,062
Average Farm Size	120	111	108	94	96
Cropland Harvested	44,465	43,494	44,350	40,888	37,786
Cows and Calves	67,259	66,021	64,381	61,635	62,248
Dairy Cows	2,587	2,252	3,117	4,536	5,807
Sheep	6,071	7,649	2,883	1,638	1,849
Tobacco (acres)	?	388	1,887	2,995	3,550
Hay (acres)	40,325	40,250	39,241	32,298	29,839
Average Age of Operator	59.9	58.5	56.7	55.4	56.0

Youth

Youth Statistics (2010-2017)	
Area	Washington County
Number of Youth (under 5)	2332
Number of Youth (5-9)	2999
Number of Youth (10-14)	3016
Number of Youth (15-19)	3244
Free and Reduced Lunches	3363
Home Schooled Children	244
Students in GED Program	*
Students in Alternative Program	*
Poverty Level (below age 18)	20.6
Single Parent Households	3170
High School Dropouts (Ages 16-19) (2010-2011)	20
Children Receiving Special Education Services (2013)	15.8
Children in Foster Care	63
Child Abuse or Neglect (Cases Founded) (# per 1,000 children)	5.4
Day Care Facilities (# of Facilities 2-12 years)	27

*Resources were not available or were combined in county statistics

< = A group below state definition for personally identifiable results

Family and Community

Housing Statistics (2010-2017)	
Area	Washington County
Total Occupied Housing Units	22,388
Owner Occupied Housing Units	16,926
Renter Occupied Housing Units	5462
Households with Cash Public Assistance	670
Households on Food Stamp or SNAP Program	2865
Households Lacking Plumbing Facilities	56
Households Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	129
Median Gross Rent	644
Median Value-Owner Occupied Housing Units	137,200

*Resources were not available or were combined in county statistics

Education Statistics (2007-2011)		
Area	Washington County	Bristol
No Schooling Completed	388	149
Less than 9 th Grade	3110	690
Completed Grades 9-12 (no diploma)	4016	1590
High School Graduate (Including GED)	12822	3610
Some College	8068	2732
Associate Degree	3115	1022
Bachelor's Degree	5203	1840
Drop Out Rate	1.1	11

Community, Resident, and Personal Perspectives

What are the issues related to _____?

Agriculture

1. Legislative Issues that impact farmers and agriculture in a negative way by placing onerous regulation on producers. Potential legislation such as Waters of the United States (WOTUS) and the Green New Deal were of concern among beef producers.
2. The development of “fake meat” was identified as a serious threat to the beef industry.
3. Need for education in production issues regarding animal health, forages, and basic management.
4. Animal rights movement. Efforts to reduce the use of animals for food, work, or fiber are constantly working against the agriculture sector.
5. Lack of involvement in the decision making process
6. Agriculture literacy. Lack of understanding of agriculture including legitimate production practices, the value of agriculture, how the issues identified above affect agriculture, and the financial pressures presented by changing markets all present challenges to the future of farming and agriculture.
7. There is a need to encourage more youth involvement in agriculture. As evidenced by the census of agriculture the average age of farmers in Washington County is increasing by about two years each census. Facilitating the entrance of young people into farming is essential. This presents a food security risk to the nation and local communities.
8. Farm transition. Good planning can allow farmers to transition the farm to the next generation in an orderly manner that minimizes tax complications.
9. Financial management and understanding costs of production is key to profitability, and an area that most producers are lacking in, regardless of industry within the ag sector. Emphasis on the global marketplace and end product are key, particularly in the beef industry.
10. Risk management is becoming more important, even for smaller producers, as costs of inputs and value of commodities continue to rise, along with market volatility. Programs to educate producers about risk management strategies, both for small and larger producers can help producers weather the ups and downs of a volatile marketplace. Also, taking advantage of value-added opportunities.
11. Lack of a reliable labor pool continues to be an issue for all agriculture enterprises, especially tobacco and vegetables.
12. Volatility of prices for both inputs and products sold.

13. Predator problems for all facets of livestock

14. Price volatility for both input prices and prices received for commodity

Youth

Elementary (K-5th grades)

1. Lack of parental involvement
2. Low Confidence
3. Lack of Lifeskills (Leadership, Citizenship, Communication, Work Ethic, Goals)
4. Low resiliency and coping skills

Middle School (6th – 8th grades)

1. Lack of parental involvement, guidance
2. Low Confidence
3. Loss of moral compass
4. Lack of future aspirations (education/trade/career)
5. Lack of positive role models
5. Lack of Lifeskills (Leadership, Citizenship, Communication, Work Ethic)
6. Desensitization from video games
7. Overuse of social media (isolation, low confidence, loss of empathy, and bullying)

High School (9th – 12th grades)

1. Lack of parental involvement
2. Substance abuse (alcohol, prescription drugs, vaping, illegal drug)
3. Overuse of social media (isolation, low confidence, loss of empathy and bullying)
4. Lack of future aspirations (education/trade/career)
5. Desensitization from video games
6. Lack of Lifeskills (Leadership, Citizenship, Communication, Work Ethic, Future Plans)

Why are these issues affecting our citizens?

Agriculture

1. Increasingly restrictive legislation and the threat of the same bring a lot of pressure to bear on the agriculture sector. These things make it hard to plan and require a deliberate effort to remain optimistic and have confidence that legislative decisions will be made that are fair and adequately address the needs of farmers.
2. A lack of experience with or knowledge of all segments of the production chain. Higher input costs and market volatility make it vital that producers understand their cost of production and develop a strategy to operate profitably. The beef industry in particular is changing, with a growing emphasis on end product and consumer satisfaction, a concept that for many years, has been lost on the average beef producer.
3. Tight margins and volatile markets, dairy producers have suffered through an extended period of low prices resulting in many leaving the dairy industry. This margin problem coupled with high value of calves make it critical that producers have a strategy in place to protect themselves against a market downturn.
4. We need people to raise and grow our food in the future.
5. While Agriculture remains the largest industry in Washington County many people do not understand the scope or the practice of the industry. To the uneducated and misinformed agriculture may only be a community garden or a small plot of vegetables. As these people support or make decisions about agriculture, their decisions often do not favor or represent the big picture of the total industry and end up negatively affecting it.
6. By not taking advantage of value-added opportunities many producers are leaving money on the table.
7. Forage management is basic to our ag industry and offers one opportunity to improve the bottom line.
8. Lack of labor has resulted in the decline of some segments of agriculture.

Youth

- Lack of parental guidance
- Lack of positive role models
- Lack of supervision/structure

What can be done to address these issues?

Agriculture

1. Extension is doing a good job in addressing the needs of the citizens of Washington County.
2. Provide information to local businesses that serve agriculture.
3. Educate the public regarding the value of agriculture and how farms work including production practices. Help people understand the scope of agriculture and how legislative decisions can either positively or negatively affect the industry.
4. Require that all K-12 students participate in a “Food and Fiber” course that provides an accurate portrayal of the industry to help educate them with the truth rather than a very narrow unrealistic picture.
5. Provide training to producers that addresses identified issues.
6. Continue to emphasize business management and good financial skills as part of ongoing programming efforts. Work with producer groups and industry partners to develop programs to help producers understand their cost of production and strategies to reduce costs and improve profitability.
7. Help producers understand the necessity and ease of participating in value added programs
8. Demonstrate the value of basic production practices
9. Help legislators understand the need for labor and the problem laws which impede a labor source create.

Youth

Elementary (K – 5th grades)

1. Parent behavioral intervention
2. Positive role models
3. Develop the whole child (consistent programming to grow with the child)

Middle School (6th – 8th grades)

1. Positive role models and mentors available for youth
2. Life skills education
3. Opportunities for leadership and goal attainment
4. Consist programming to grow with youth
5. Build communication skills outside of social media
6. Career development and exploration

High School (9th – 12th grades)

1. Teach career skill classes – mentors and shadowing
2. Provide opportunities for youth to grow and develop
3. Provide programming to encourage education and career development
4. Provide positive role models and mentors for teens
 - Leadership
 - Responsibility
 - Supervision

Youth – General (parents, services, care providers outside school system)

1. Support groups/education
2. Parenting education
3. Programs that encourage career and life skills
4. Youth programs that provide leadership, responsibility, and facilitate goal-setting and achievement

Priority Issues

- 1) Community understanding of agriculture and food production is key in combatting continued loss of farms and farm land. Since farmers are basically price takers, regulations that constantly put pressure on producer profit margins threaten the survival of farm operations. It's vital that citizens understand the challenges of farming, and that government maintains agriculture friendly policies, and since most people are far removed from the farm, it's important that key leaders and normal citizens alike understand the industry.
- 2) Financial management and understanding costs of production is key to profitability, and an area that most producers are lacking in, regardless of industry within the agriculture sector. Emphasis on the global marketplace and end product are key, particularly in the beef industry. Educating producers about value-added marketing opportunities and assisting them in taking advantage of these opportunities is essential. In addition risk management is going to play an ever increasing role in profitability.
- 3) A dependable labor force is lacking for many farms that produce crops that require many hours of manual labor. Any efforts that will help farms find and maintain dependable, affordable labor are going to be critical for the success of many farm operations.
- 4) The need for up-to-date information on production practices. Providing producers with education regarding improved production practices through one-on-one interaction, research and demonstration plot information, field days, and meetings.
- 5) **Life Skills & Career Development**
A skill is a learned ability. Life Skills are those competencies that assist people in functioning adequately in the world. Developing life skills is an important component in preparing youth for the successful transition into adulthood. For school-aged youth specific concern is noted due to a noticed decline in the following life skill areas: citizenship, communication, work ethic, and leadership. Virginia Cooperative Extension has the potential to counteract certain risk factors and build life skills through positive youth programming and education using 4-H clubs as an avenue.
- 6) **Youth Leadership and Personal Development**
Youth look to adults for leadership, guidance, motivation, education, and discipline. As identified through surveys, many youth are viewed as lacking leadership, decision-making skills, and responsibility. Virginia Cooperative Extension will positively address this issue through traditional 4-H programming. Youth are given the opportunity to nominate and elect leaders for their club, learn and use parliamentary procedure, speak to a group of their peers, and make decisions affecting the club as a whole. 4-H clubs also offer positive role models and mentors through the extension staff and the use of trained volunteers.