



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Buckingham County

2018

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Introduction

The Buckingham Extension Leadership Council conducted a comprehensive situation analysis throughout 2018 by communicating directly with knowledgeable community representatives, using a community survey, holding open-house style conversations, and including points of discussion at community events. 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. Population estimates for 2017 were 17,065 (including the 2,144 institutionalized populations) dispersed over 582 square miles. The population steadily been growing from 1990 through the 2010 census, but has experienced a small (.004) decline since then. Eighteen percent of the County's residents are under the age of 18, while 19% are senior citizens ages 65 and older.

The population is approximately 63% white and 34% Black or African American, with other races making up the remaining 3% of the population.

Income

Median household income in Buckingham has been rising and is currently \$43,514. This is approximately 34% less than the \$66,149 state median income. Eighteen percent of Buckingham County residents live below the poverty level (which is a decrease of 3% since 2012). The free and reduced lunch rate in the public school system is 74.54%.

Education

The Buckingham County Public School system currently has 2,089 students enrolled. None of the students are limited English proficiency (LEP). Just under 14% (282) students are classified with some sort of disability. There are 64 homeschool students in the county. There are also two private schools in the county with a total of 183 youth enrolled. A small number of youth attend school outside of the county. The school drop-out rate has decreased considerably in recent years and is at an all-time low of 1.1% (9 youth in 2017). Forty-two

percent of the population age 25 or older has a high school diploma, with 6.17% earning an Associate's Degree, 7.97% earning a Bachelor's Degree, and 3.93% earning a Graduate Degree.

Employment

The major employers in Buckingham are the public schools and the correctional facilities. According to the Virginia Employment Commission, 5,614 commuters live in Buckingham but work outside of the county. Those who both live in and work in Buckingham total 1,425. Another 1,742 work in Buckingham but live in surrounding counties (as of 2014). The unemployment rate is 4.2% compared to 2.8% in the state of Virginia with an estimated rate of underemployment at 4.5%.

Agriculture

According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, in 2012, there were 391 farms with a total of 83,921 acres in farmland. This represents a 5% decrease from the number of farms in 2007, but a 9% increase in the overall amount of acreage. The average size of farms increased by 27 acres, reversing a previous trend in shrinking farm size. The market value of products sold has been steadily increasing for years and is currently add \$39,881,000, a 22% increase from 2007. The majority of these sales come from livestock and poultry (84%) with the remainder from crops, primarily hay, haylage, and silage. The sale of agricultural products is very important to the County because it provides a large inflow of money into the local economy.

The total economic impact (direct and indirect) of agriculture in Buckingham 2015 was 15 million (Weldon and Cooper Economic Impact study, 2017).

Forestry

Forestry is also an important segment of the economy in Buckingham County. As reported in 2017 by Dean Cumbia of the Virginia Department of Forestry, timberland in the county encompasses approximately 322,000 acres with 95% being in private ownership and the rest held by the state. There are more than 500 employees involved in wood related activities in the county. In 2016, the value of timber harvested in Buckingham was \$12.8 million. The total economic impact (direct and indirect) is more than \$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. According to the Virginia Department of Health, two people died in Buckingham in 2017 due to a Fentanyl or Heroin overdose, and 1 died from a prescription opioid overdose, both figures higher than the average for the Piedmont Health District of which Buckingham is a part. According to the most recent data available from the CDC in 2013, Buckingham County residents have a high incidence of diabetes at 33.2% compared to the state average of 28.5%, a rate closely tied to the adult obesity rate of 33%.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The 2018 situation analysis involved data gathering from 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: Youth Programs

Having a safe and supervised environment for youth to spend their time emerged as a top priority (only ahead of agriculture and forestry by a fraction). Specific areas identified were the continued need for after-school and out-of-school activities, including summer activities. Preparing youth for 21st Century skills including leadership, responsibility, communication, citizenship, goal setting, and other life skills were secondary considerations. *Virginia Cooperative Extension is currently addressing these needs along with other youth serving organizations in the community. The recommendation is that VCE continue its existing programming in these areas and expand that programming where possible.*

Issue 2: Agriculture and Forestry

Agriculture and forestry form the economic base in the county. This issue remains a priority need and is recognized as such by all segments of the community, not just those directly involved in the agriculture and forestry industries.

- **Sustainability:** Agriculture and forestry make up a large part of the county's economic base. Large-scale producers and those with timber tracts are prevalent in the county. The small family farm and those with backyard chicken flocks, home gardens, and the like are also becoming more prevalent. *VCE should continue to aid large-scale producers and should also engage in additional programming aimed at the small family farmer.*
- **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. Water quality and environmental protection emerged as common themes in discussions about county needs. *VCE currently offers programs related to these topics, including well-water testing which is a much-requested service (although not entirely related to agriculture and forestry). Additional programs related to water quality and environmental protection can be offered in partnership with the local soil and water conservation district.*

Issue 3: Economic Development

- **High Speed Internet**
The need for high speed internet/broadband throughout the county came up repeatedly in discussions with community members and in surveys. The need is based in three

areas: economic development (business needs and telecommuting), education (youth needing on-line access for school-work, and improved way of life (simple household needs). Many areas in the county have no internet at all, are on a waiting list for access, or have limited internet capabilities. The library has limited hours with only two computer workstations available. *VCE is not positioned to assist with this need.* The county government is already aware of this pressing need but the infrastructure is not in place.

- **Small Business Support**

Many individuals expressed concern over difficulty in navigating the process to start and run a small business. *VCE has resources available and can offer programs and provide resources on small businesses including home-based businesses.*

- **Child Care Availability**

There is no public child care facility in Buckingham. There are home child care services available, but most are unlicensed. Finding suitable child care is a problem for many families and often results in a parent or grandparent staying home to take care of children rather than entering the workforce. *VCE has partnered with Longwood University in the past to offer child care provider workshops, but is only positioned to offer educational information.*

Issue 4: Finance and Money Management

- **Adult Financial Management:** All adults need to know how to manage their finances appropriately. It is even more critical when finances are limited as they are for many families in Buckingham County. *VCE, through its Family Nutrition Program, is currently helping low income families understand how to better manage their food dollars. Additional financial management courses are available within VCE; however, trained agents are not located in this unit or in nearby units.*
- **Youth Financial Management:** All high school youth must take a personal finance course before graduating. This has helped tremendously, but a need remains for additional application beyond the classroom, particularly when good financial management is not modeled at home. During the data gathering for the situation analysis a common theme was to continue and even expand partnerships with the schools to assist with this need. *VCE recently initiated and will continue the Reality Store program in partnership with the high school personal finance classes and the Real Money Real World program with the middle school guidance department.*

Issue 5: 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. *VCE programs currently reach only portions of the population with Family Nutrition, ANR, and 4-H efforts addressing this to some degree.*
- **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. *FNP and 4-H programs address these skills with a segment of the population.*
- **Preservation:** Home food preservation has been a growing trend both as a necessity and as a current “hobby” practice. Education in food preservation methods and techniques are in high demand. *The District Food Safety Agent offers some adult programming in nearby counties and 4-H offers some youth programming in this area.*

Issue 6: Experiential Deficits

- Many youth and adults in Buckingham County spend their entire lives in the county, venturing to nearby localities for doctor’s appointments or shopping. They may travel further to visit family or go on vacation. However, a large segment of the community is lacking exposure to cultural, historic, or recreational opportunities because these are “unfamiliar territory”. This is a somewhat nebulous need, but has become apparent throughout the data gathering for the situation analysis. It is also unclear as to the role VCE may be able to take in addressing this need. *VCE may be able to help youth and adults feel more empowered to venture into the unknown. It may also be able to expose youth to new experiences through 4-H programs developed with intentionality to provide this exposure.*