



Carroll County 2023 Situation Analysis Report



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Results Summary

Summary of Top Issues Identified by Situation Analysis Survey

Agriculture	Youth Development	Family and Consumer Sciences/Health/Community Economics
Assisting famers and forest landowners in production and profitability	Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	Ensuring safe, high quality foods
Strengthening the local food system	Strengthening workforce readiness	Preventing suicide
Controlling invasive pests	Teaching good money habits	Addressing drug abuse

Table 1. Summary of Top Issues Identified by the Situation Analysis Survey

Priority Issues

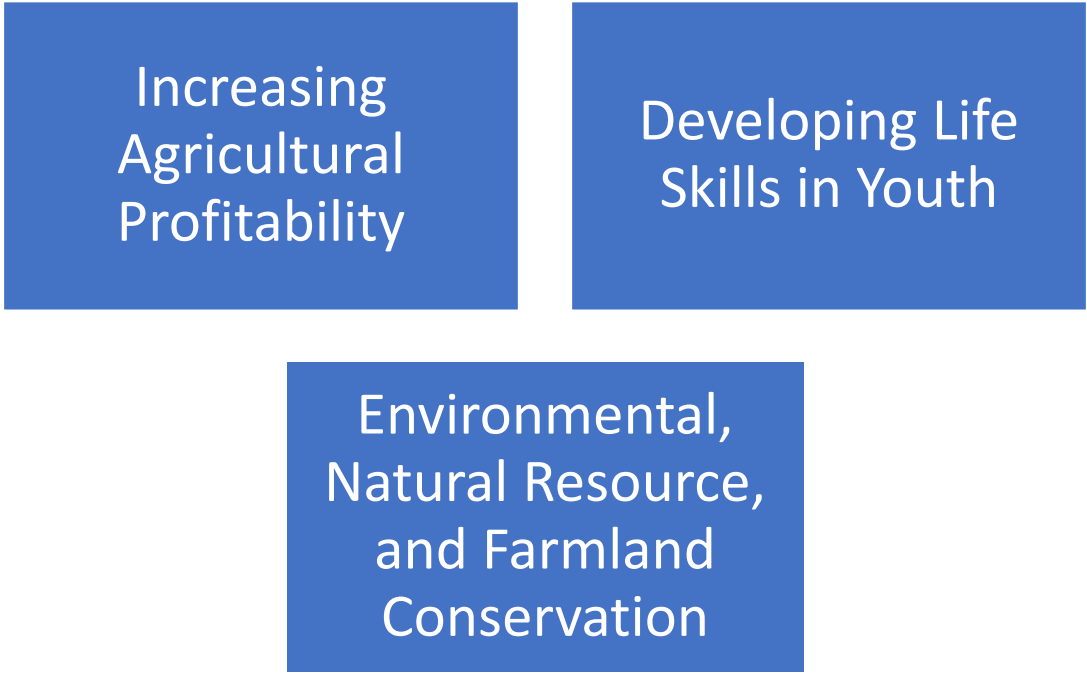


Figure 1. Priority Issues

Introduction

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) programming is based on the issues, problems, and needs of the people. In order to understand these needs, all Extension units across Virginia conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every five years. This review, or situation analysis, is used to provide the foundation and rationale for deciding which problems should receive Extension's time, energy, and resources.

Carroll County Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a situation analysis over a six-week period during the fall of 2023. A community survey was developed to collect local input and was distributed using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The survey link was distributed via email to all Extension agents' mailing lists, via newsletter mailings, and posted on relevant social media accounts and the Carroll County Extension website. An article was published in The Carroll News, the local newspaper, detailing the purpose of the survey as well as providing the survey link. Paper surveys were made available at the Carroll County VCE Office.

Individuals from a number of community groups and organizations were directly invited to participate in the survey. Information regarding the survey was shared at community events including a Carroll County Board of Supervisors Meeting, Carroll County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, a Carroll/Grayson Cattle Producers Association meeting, and 25 4-H Club meetings. Flyers containing information and the survey link were also displayed broadly throughout the county at various local establishments such as businesses, banks, medical offices, stores, community centers, churches, the Hillsville Town Office, Carroll County Library, the Carroll County Wellness Center, and Carroll County Government Center.

The Carroll Extension Leadership Council, made up of local stakeholders and citizens, also met as part of the process to review the survey and provide input on key local issues. Additional information that contributes to the situation analysis includes data from the Carroll County Unit Profile, VCE Data Commons, US Census Bureau, Virginia Department of Health, and the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Unit Profile

Carroll County, Virginia is a rural county made up of 475 square miles located along Interstate I-77 in Southwest Virginia. Carroll County is bordered by the City of Galax, Grayson, Wythe, Pulaski, Floyd, and Patrick Counties in Virginia, as well as Surry County in North Carolina. Roughly 1/5 of the county lies in the Virginia Piedmont region, while the rest of the county is part of the Appalachian Mountains. Hillsville is the county seat.

Demographics:

The 2020 Census indicated a population of 29,155 for Carroll County. According to the National Association of Counties, there was a population decrease of 2.95% from 2010 to 2020. Data from the Virginia Employment Commission projects a continued trend of decreasing population through 2040, with a projected population of 27,825.

Current US Census data reports that 50.35% of the Carroll County population is male, while 49.65% is female. The racial composition of Carroll County residents is 95.45% white, 3.96% Hispanic, and 2.28% two or more races. Black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and some other race combined make up less than 3% of the total population. There is a slight increase in residents of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity since the last situation analysis. This number is projected to continue to rise over the next twenty years, almost doubling by 2040 according to the Virginia Employment Commission.

The percentage of the older population (over age 65) in Carroll County is 24.4%, which is 7.6% higher than the percentage for the state of Virginia. This number has increased slightly since the 2018 situation analysis. The percent of working-age adults (ages 20-64) is 55.52%. Twenty percent of the population is under age 20. The median age is 48, while the median age in Virginia is 39.

Economics and Employment:

The median household income in Carroll County is \$45,220, compared to the Virginia average of \$85,873. Fifteen percent of Carroll County residents are in poverty, compared to the state average of 10.6%. Nineteen percent of Carroll County children live in poverty. As of January 2023, 85% of Carroll County Public Schools' students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Since the previous situation analysis in 2018, Carroll County saw a peak in unemployment to 8.2% in 2020. This number has since decreased to 4.1% in 2023. The Virginia unemployment rate is 3.9%, while the national rate is 5.4%.

Manufacturing (17.5%), retail trade (12.8%), health care and social assistance (12.6%), accommodation and food service (12.3%), and government (21.6%) are the top industries providing employment in Carroll County. In October 2023, Parkdale Mills closed permanently resulting in a loss of 326 manufacturing jobs. The largest employer in Carroll County is Carroll County Public Schools.

Over 5,000 residents commute outside of Carroll County for employment. Galax City and Surry County, NC are the top two locations residents are commuting to.

Health:

Carroll County is higher than the state and national averages for adult smoking (23%), adult obesity (36%), and physical inactivity (26%). There are 14 primary care physicians in the county, with a patient ratio of 1,000:1, compared to the state ratio of 1320:1. The dentist ratio for Carroll is 3759:1.

The uninsured population is 13%, which is less than the 22% reported in 2011. Life expectancy at birth for Carroll County is 78, which is the same as the average life expectancy for the state of Virginia.

The teen birth rate is higher than for Virginia, with 26/1000 females aged 15-19 in Carroll as opposed to 15/1000 in Virginia. According to the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Carroll County is ranked 59th of 133 ranked counties in the state, and 17% of the county considers themselves in fair or poor health.

Twin County Regional Hospital conducted a community health assessment for the Twin County area (Carroll and Grayson counties) in 2022. This assessment found the following significant health needs to be the focus of the work of the community over the next three years: 1.) substance use disorders, 2.) mental health, 3.) healthy eating/active living/food insecurity, 4.) socioeconomics, 5.) education/communication, and 6.) access to care. The leading cause of death in Carroll County is cancer, followed by heart disease.

Education:

Carroll County Public Schools serves Carroll County with nine schools. All nine schools are accredited by the Virginia Department of Education. Fifty-one percent of children ages 3-4 are enrolled in preschool in Carroll County, which is higher than the state average.

Of the population of Carroll County 25 years and over, 37.5% have achieved a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment. Twelve percent have an associate's degree, 11% have a bachelor's degree, and only 5% have obtained a graduate or professional degree.

The high school graduation rate for Carroll County is 95.8%, which is above the Virginia rate of 93%. Forty-seven percent of diplomas issued are advanced diplomas. Carroll County Public Schools enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year was 3,507. A total of 275 students are home-schooled in Carroll County, which is 88 more students than in 2018.

Agricultural Summary:

The 2023 US Census of Agriculture data will be released in February 2024. Therefore, this situation analysis is utilizing data from the 2017 census.

There are 900 farms in Carroll County, which is an 8% decrease from 2012. Approximately 118,989 acres are in farmland, with the average farm size being 132 acres.

Fifty-seven percent of Carroll County farmers are between age 35 and 64, while 38% are 65 and older. Sixty-eight percent of farmers in Carroll County are male. Twenty-three percent are new and beginning farmers.

The market value of agricultural products sold annually is \$44.5 million. \$13.7 million in sales come from crops (mainly vegetables), fruits, and other crops such as hay. \$30.8 million is from livestock products, mainly cattle.

Carroll ranks third in the state for vegetable production, averaging over \$8 million in sales from over 2,000 acres. Carroll has been a long-time producer of cabbage, and over the past twenty years has become the number one pumpkin producing county in the state, with over 700 acres in pumpkin production. Carroll ranks fourth in Virginia for Christmas trees, sixth for the number of cattle and calves, and ninth for fruit production.

Carroll County farms saw a 12% increase in market value of products sold between 2012 and 2017.

A number of key facilities support the viability of Carroll County agriculture. The Southwest Virginia Farmers Market is available year-round for cooling, packing, and grading. The wholesale market allows for small producers to comingle their harvest for sale for larger buyers like grocery store chains. The retail market is open to the public year-round. The Carroll County Cannery is available to everyone and allows for growers and gardeners to preserve fruits and vegetables. The Town of Hillsville Farmers Market is also open on Thursdays from June to October.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Survey Demographics

The Carroll County situation analysis survey received 101 responses. Ninety-three percent of survey respondents own or rent property in the county. Seventy-six percent of respondents have lived in Carroll County for more than 10 years. Twenty-one percent of respondents have lived in the county less than 10 years.

Two-thirds of the survey respondents were women as opposed to men, which was significantly higher than the demographic for females in the county. The ethnicity of respondents was at parity with Carroll County demographics. Responses from those under age 18 were also significantly below parity with Carroll County demographics. However, youth were not the target audience for the survey.

Variable	Survey Respondents	Carroll County Demographics
Gender		
Male	33%	51%
Female	66%	49%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	5%	4%
Not Hispanic	95%	96%
Age		
Under 18	2%	21%
18-34	28%	15%
35-54	34%	25%
55+	36%	39%

Table 2. Survey Demographics

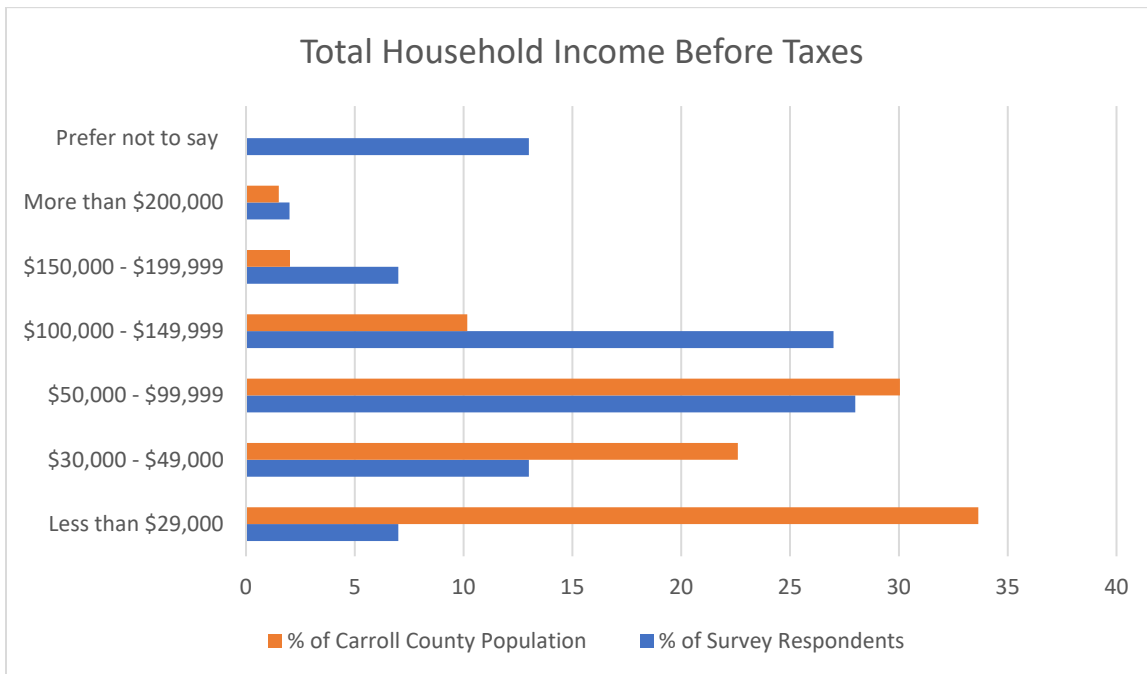


Figure 2. Total Household Income Before Taxes

The situation analysis survey was able to reach homes with a variety of incomes. This chart compares the average income level of the survey respondents to the Carroll County population.

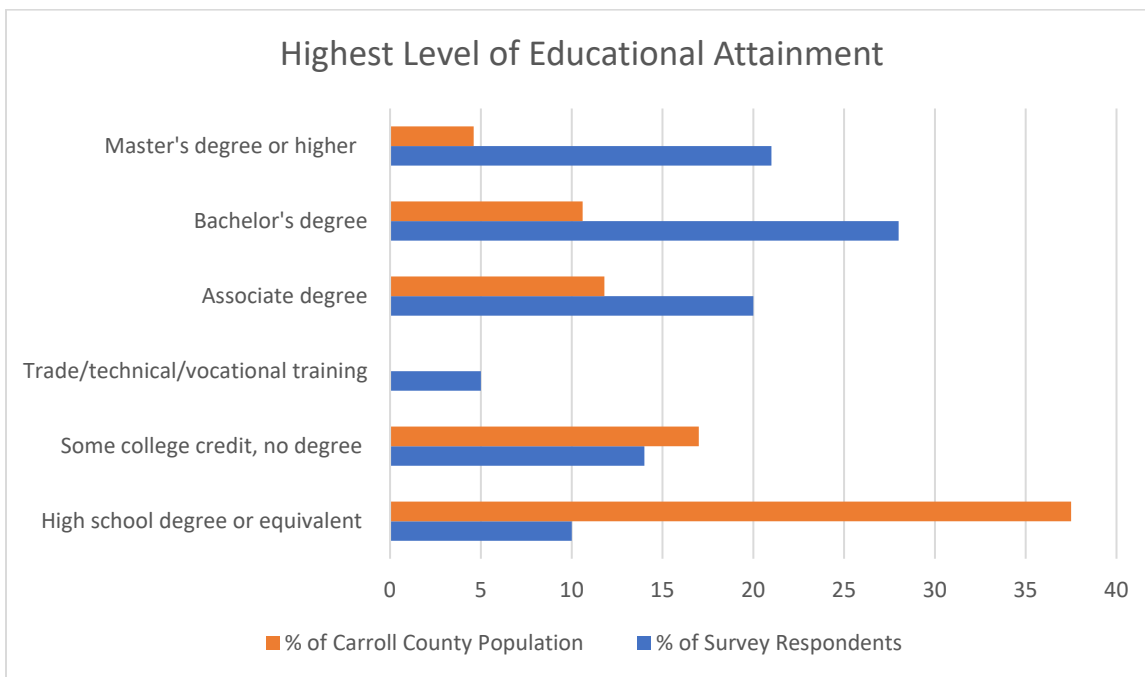


Figure 3. Highest Level of Educational Attainment

This chart showcases the highest level of educational attainment of those who completed the survey, in comparison to the attainment levels of the Carroll County population. Seventy percent of survey respondents have received a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Those who completed the survey were well educated.

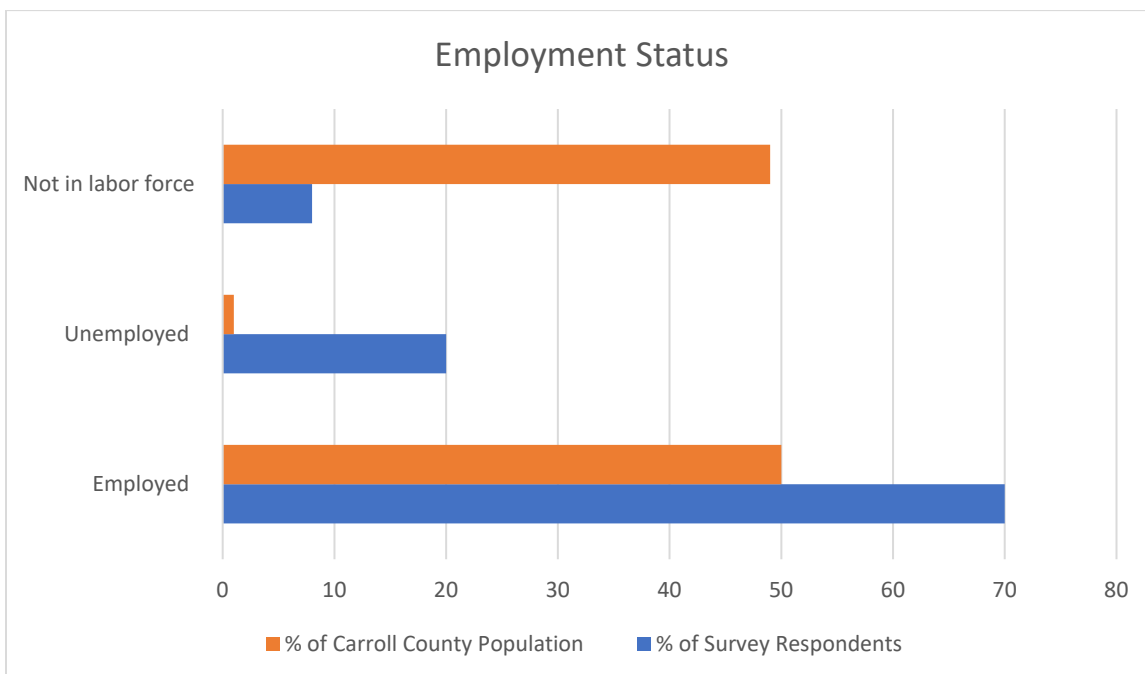


Figure 4. Employment Status

The employment status of respondents as opposed to the Carroll County population is included in this chart. This data can be used in considering respondents' perceptions related to jobs and economics in the county.

Community Issues

Survey participants were presented with a list of 52 issues and asked to select the level of effort they felt Carroll County VCE should spend on each issue. Issues were categorized into subject areas: agriculture, youth development, and family and consumer sciences/health. Additional data was collected after reviewing responses to an open-ended question where participants provided their opinion of the most pressing community issue that Carroll County VCE should address.

Priority issues were selected after reviewing survey data to identify the issues that were most commonly marked as "very high effort" areas. Like responses were grouped into similar categories and final selections were made based on VCE's ability to address the issues by our work and partnerships. The top issues identified by the survey as "very high effort" were, in order:

Agricultural Issues:

Assisting famers and forest landowners in production and profitability

Strengthening the local food system

Controlling invasive pests

Youth Development Issues:

Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills

Strengthening workforce readiness

Teaching good money habits

Family and Consumer Sciences/Health/Community Economics Issues:

Ensuring safe, high quality foods

Preventing suicide

Addressing drug abuse

Mental health and substance abuse were issues with considerable mentions in the survey responses. Additionally, there were frequent mentions of a need for increased access to healthy foods. The situation analysis survey identified particular issues with significant program area overlap. Strengthening the local food system, ensuring safe, high quality foods, and teaching good money habits are issues which all program area Extension agents and program assistants can address in local programming.

Extension Leadership Council Perspectives

In addition to the survey responses, the Carroll Extension Leadership Council met to discuss the issues facing the county. Following the meeting, the top issues identified were primarily needs related to family and consumer sciences such as household financial management (adults and youth) and food preservation. Youth development needs were also identified as a significant priority. Lack of parental involvement and lack of transportation were noted as considerable barriers to the delivery of youth programming, particularly programming conducted outside of normal school hours.

The ELC meeting also identified a key agricultural issue of lack of agricultural literacy among youth and adults. Further discussion identified issues where youth needs and agricultural needs overlap. The ELC feels that in order

for the agricultural industry in the county to be sustainable, youth must have a general understanding of agriculture and the origins of their food. Farm tours and basic agricultural education can help to promote the industry as well as potential jobs in agriculture. General life skills should also be an educational focus, including preparing youth not only for entering the workforce, but developing other skills needed to be successful such as cooking and financial management.

The council identified the need to enhance the local workforce by marketing current local jobs to youth and developing their workforce readiness skills. There is a need to increase local job opportunities to create a viable community that is attractive to young families.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

The top three priority issues were those with the greatest need that Carroll County VCE is equipped to address, through our direct programming and partnerships with others. However, these priority issues do not lessen the importance of other programming that is conducted each year. When planning to address each issue, Carroll County VCE should consider questions such as: What community organizations are already working on these issues? Is there room for potential partnerships with other community organizations? Is there work being done in other parts of VCE where Carroll County VCE could contribute or share relevant information?

One community member's quote from the survey reiterates the need for an interdisciplinary approach to address community issues. "The most pressing issue is building resources to address each and every one of these issues. It takes input from many to address each. One organized group cannot tackle all problems – it takes many to become involved."

Priority Issue 1.) Increasing Agricultural Profitability

Carroll County respondents placed a high priority on the need for VCE programming related to increasing the profitability of farming operations, while simultaneously preserving and protecting the environment and agricultural land. Farmers continually battle increased labor and input costs along with volatile markets. Farmers search for additional sources of revenue, and many are even forced to obtain additional jobs off the farm. Increased economic stress for farmers can take a toll on their mental health, family, and the likelihood of farms to be able to be passed to the next generation. Virginia Cooperative Extension will continue to offer agricultural programming with the goals of helping producers to identify new markets, increase quality and yields, obtain higher prices for their products, and diversify their operations, and manage their farm businesses toward profitability. Carroll County VCE offers agricultural programs focusing on our major commodities – cattle, fruit, and vegetable production. Applied research projects in partnership with Virginia Tech and other universities can find crop varieties and growing conditions best suited for our region. Production meetings and field days provide the latest information and recommendations for fruit and vegetable farmers from university and industry research. Added value cattle marketing programs such as the Virginia Quality Assurance program have shown significantly higher prices for cattle sold. Partnerships are critical for these programs to be successful. Carroll County VCE partners with universities, industry, local grower and cattle associations, and local businesses. Increasing farm profitability requires an interdisciplinary approach within VCE as well. Community members see the promotion of agricultural literacy as a key component of the future sustainability of agriculture in the county, which is evident by the number of comments related to teaching youth about agriculture and the agricultural heritage in the county. Connecting youth to agriculture is key for farms to successfully transition to the next generation.

Priority Issue 2.) Developing life skills in youth

Survey respondents and key informants agree that very high effort should be given to preparing youth to be successful in life, through the development of life skills, workplace readiness, and financial management. Many comments were made regarding the need to prepare students to be self-sufficient, preparing for better futures, career readiness, and how to function in society. Issues such as income status and poverty, education, and lack of transportation all play a role in the lack of preparation for adulthood. Carroll County 4-H programs teach young people leadership, citizenship, and life skills through exploring programming in many different subject areas. Programs such as Ag Education Days, the middle school Real Life program, and the Youth Entrepreneurship

Program give students experiential learning opportunities while building skill sets that will help them throughout adulthood and into their careers. In-school clubs give students citizenship and leadership opportunities while meeting them where they are. Community clubs offer opportunities for fun and enriching projects allowing students to learn and grow. Students are further enriched through camping and workshop opportunities. Further opportunities exist to increase partnership with the local high school Career and Technical Education classes.

Priority Issue 3.) Environmental, Natural Resource, and Farmland Conservation

Survey and focus group participants agree that conserving farmland, our environment, and natural resources is a critical need. In order to do this, multi-faceted programming must be conducted since there are many factors that play into the conservation of our land and resources.

Partnership opportunities exist with local agencies such as the New River Soil and Water Conservation District, Department of Forestry, Farm Service Agency, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Carroll County VCE will help to promote programs available to producers and landowners that enhance conservation, such as EQIP and cover crop programs. Extension has a role in educating landowners on proper management of their soil and water sources. Carroll County VCE will continue offering soil testing and education on land management. High rankings were given in the survey to reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers, therefore continued education will be provided on the appropriate use of pesticides and soil amendments. Pesticide safety education programs are conducted annually and fall within this priority area. Other programs Carroll County VCE offers to address this need include the Virginia Household Water Quality Program, which tests well and other private water sources for harmful bacteria and other contaminants. Caring for the land and water resources ensures that they will be available for future generations to farm and thrive.

Partnering with organizations such as Farm Bureau allows Extension to help influence legislative decisions regarding conservation and land use that ultimately affect the agricultural industry and private landowners. During youth outreach events such as Ag Education Days, Carroll County VCE partners with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Virginia Department of Forestry to educate youth on the importance of maintaining these resources appropriately. Future work can include potential environmentally focused 4-H clubs and more in-school enrichment opportunities.

Additional Considerations

Carroll County VCE's agriculture agent, commercial horticulture agent, 4-H agent, and Family Nutrition Program assistant currently conduct a number of programs that address the identified priority issues. These programs also address other issues brought forth each year in response to yearly needs assessments and program participant feedback.

According to the situation analysis survey, eighty-eight percent (88%) of survey respondents were familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension prior to taking the survey. Fifty-four percent (54%) responded that they had participated in or received information from Carroll County VCE in the past year. This discrepancy showcases that while Carroll County VCE may be conducting programming to address the priority issues, general county residents outside of the current clientele might not be aware of these efforts. A new focus should be given to promoting Extension's current programs and their impacts to the community.

The ELC suggested ways to make Extension more visible, and some recommendations included an increased presence at senior programs and outreach to other county offices such as the Carroll County Department of Social Services who could refer citizens to VCE. With the continued rise of social media use, an increase in online and social media presence can help highlight educational programs and attract the public to VCE's services. Carroll County VCE has a Facebook profile and YouTube channel, but both could be utilized more frequently and intentionally. Periodic updates to Carroll County local government is an important way to gain not only support from the county, but to showcase to citizens the work Carroll County VCE is doing and its impacts. Carroll

County VCE will continue to use all reasonable efforts to notify community members of upcoming programs and Extension resources.

Data Sources

- https://uva-bi-sdad.github.io/vdh_rural_health_site/?metric_set=unit_profiles&selected_variable=gini_index&selected_year=2021&filter.time_min=2015&filter.time_max=2021
- <https://aaec-vt.shinyapps.io/dspg23VCEhealth/>
- <https://virginiawellbeing.com/virginia-community-health-improvement-data-portal/vdh-assessment/?REPORT=%7B%22name%22%3A%22Virginia%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%22%2C%22style%22%3A%22VDH%22%2C%22output%22%3A%7B%22countylist%22%3Afalse%2C%22statalist%22%3Atrue%2C%22ziplist%22%3Afalse%2C%22tractlist%22%3Afalse%2C%22map%22%3Atrue%2C%22breakout%22%3Atrue%7D%2C%22indicator%22%3A%5B93%2C94%2C95%2C96%2C97%5D%7D>
- https://ce.naco.org/?county_info=51035
- <https://data.census.gov/>
- <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/carroll-county-public-schools#desktopTabs-3>
- <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/carrollcountyvirginia/HEA775222#HEA775222>
- <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/virginia/carroll?year=2023>
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- <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/carroll-county-va#education>
- https://www.tcrh.org/sites/twincounty/assets/uploads/About%20Us/CHNA/Compressed_CHNA_Twin%20County%20_Community%20report_2022v1.pdf
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