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Charlotte County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Vegetable Production is a growing farming enterprise in Charlotte County- Photo taken by Joanne Jones

Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
1. Local Food Systems	Agent will work with the local food hub, farmers markets, and schools to connect producers with buyers.
2. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	Extension will address this issue through working with other youth-oriented programs and agencies. Extension will train adult volunteers to lead clubs and special interest groups that will provide after school and weekend programming for youth.
3. Environment/Water Quality	Conduct house hold water testing programs and work with partnering agencies such as NRCS and Soil and Water District.
4. Land Use Preservation	<i>Educate about farm succession planning, conservation easements, as well as non-traditional ag land use.</i>
5. Agritourism/ Alternative Agriculture	Conduct farm tours and educational opportunities.

Introduction

The Charlotte County Extension Office re-invigorated the Extension Leadership Council in 2023 to help staff prepare, circulate and complete the 2023 situation analysis for the Unit report. Information was collected through surveys, digital platforms, local newspapers, informal discussions with ELC members, residents, and one on one data gathering conversations between clients and extension staff.

The Virginia Tech survey used identified issues for citizens to rank. The data collected and analyzed was then used to identify the primary issues in Charlotte County and set goals for the Extension staff to use moving forward to plan programming that meets community needs.

The unit profile was developed using information supplied from the VCE Data Commons website and the U.S. Census Bureau. The ELC plans to continue to meet moving forward to guide VCE staff in implementation programs that meet the communities needs.

Unit Profile

Demographics

Charlotte County is a rural county in south-central Virginia. The Roanoke/Staunton River and Buggs Island Lake form the county's southwestern boundary. The area is known for its strong agricultural heritage and its rich forest resources. The county contains 475 square miles. The county is located 90 miles southwest of Richmond, the state capital; 192 miles southwest of Washington, D.C.; and 98 miles northeast of Raleigh, N.C. and is bordered by the counties of Mecklenburg, Lunenburg, Halifax, Campbell, Prince Edward and Appomattox. There are four incorporated towns in Charlotte County: Keysville, Charlotte Court House, Phenix and Drakes Branch.

The total population of the County slightly decreased from 12,040 in 2019 to 11,605 in 2021. Approximately 21.6 percent of the population is under the age of 18 while 22.8 percent of the population is 65 or older. The remaining 55.6 percent of the population falls between the ages of 19 and 64. Females comprise 50.1 percent of the population while males comprise 49.9 percent. The racial makeup of Charlotte County includes 26.6 percent African American, 2.7 percent Hispanic, 0.3 percent Asian, 2.1 percent Two or More Races and 68.3 percent White.

Income

The median household income in Charlotte County is \$51,548.00 with 18.2% of individuals living in poverty. Approximately 26 percent of children are in poverty compared with 13 percent for Virginia. This rate is slightly lower than the 30 percent reported in 2021. The 2023 unemployment rate was 3.7 percent, which has increased from the 3.5 percent reported in 2021.

Education & Health

Of the population, 84 percent are high school graduates and 60 percent have attained some college. There were 19 teenage pregnancies per 1000 female youth (15-19) in 2023 compared to a state average of 15. Low birth rate affects 11 percent of the live births for County citizens and has remained the same from 2021. This rate is slightly higher than the state average of 8 percent. The premature death rate (years lost before age 75 per 100,000 individuals) is 11,300 compared to a State average of 6,700. Health behaviors such as obesity (41 percent of the adult population), adult smoking (24 percent), physical inactivity (28 percent), excessive drinking (16 percent) and sexually transmitted infections per 100,000 individuals (454.5) are concerns for County citizens. In Charlotte County 11 percent of individuals are uninsured, which is slightly lower than the 15 percent in 2021. However primary care physicians are still a concern with the ratio at 1,970:1 in 2023 this is much higher than the state average 1,320:1.

Agriculture

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Charlotte County has 460 farms making up 121,667 acres in agricultural production with the average farm size being 264 acres. The 2017 averages are lower than the 2012 census, which reported 518 farms making up 149,355 acres with an average farm size of 288 acres. 17,005 acres are in forage production, 11,485 soybeans, 2,033 wheat, 1992 corn, and 523 tobacco. There are 705 agricultural producers with 171 identifying as new and beginning farmers. Of the total producers 258 are 65 or older and only 66 being less than 35-year-old.

The market value of farm products sold in 2017 was \$25,976,000.00 with 62 percent coming from livestock, poultry, and products and 38 percent from crops. In 2017 the net cash farm income was \$9,344.00. Family farm operations make up 99 percent of farming operations and there is 1 organic farm in Charlotte County. Marketing is predominantly not direct to consumer with only 9 selling directly to consumers.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Top 10 Community Issues Identified as High or Very High for VCE effort allocation from the survey

1. Assisting farmers and forest land owners in production and profitability (82.9 percent)
2. Strengthening the local food system (78 percent)
3. Supporting businesses which engage in agritourism (78 percent)
4. Preserving farm and forest land (75.6 percent))
5. Building capacity for farm to school programming (73.2 percent)
6. Protecting water quality (70.7 percent)
7. Promoting agricultural, natural resources and environmental literacy (70.7 percent)
8. Promotes production ag. in positive public manor (70.7 percent)
9. Ensuring safe food handling practice to prevent foodborne illness (68.3 percent)
10. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills (68.3 percent)

The Extension Leadership Council and staff used information from the unit profile to rank and establish the top ten issues. For issues that had the same percentage, the ranking was developed using the very high response number as the tie-breaker. Surveys were distributed through Facebook, local newspapers, handed out to constituents attending programs as well as walk-ins in the office. Staff set up at both local farmers markets and set surveys out around town in local businesses.

Community Issues

The ELC and Charlotte County Extension Staff utilized the survey results and the previous 2018 situation analysis to identify the top 5 priority issues for the Charlotte County Extension office to address with future programming.

The top 5 priority issues for the Charlotte County Extension Office are:

1. Local Food Systems
2. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
3. Environment/Water Quality
4. Land Use preservation
5. Agritourism/ Alternative Agriculture

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Local Food Systems

Alternative Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing, Commercial Vegetable Production, Safe Food Handling, Farm to School, Agriculture Profitability, and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) are all issues we wish to address within local food systems. Agents plan to achieve this through a multi-program area approach that will contain both a youth and adult component. Programming will include educational efforts that will address the whole scope of local foods, from food safety including GAP and Safe Food Handling. Extension will continue to work with local growers to build relationships with local schools and the Farm to School program to gain new marketing avenues. As commercial vegetable production continues to grow, Extension will work diligently to educate and promote best growing practices. Staff will continue to work with farm marketing and direct to consumer education that will include health and economic related issues as it relates to local foods.

Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills

Extension will address this issue through working with other youth-oriented programs and agencies. Extension will train adult volunteers to lead clubs and special interest groups that will provide after school and weekend programming for youth. Extension will work with schools to provide school enrichment, after school curriculum and programming help. Extension will provide leadership training opportunities and 4-H camp counselor training to promote youth development. Grant monies and partnerships will be sought to increase programming efforts and capabilities.

Environment/Water Quality

Water quality is a growing concern for our area as well as throughout the country. Many of our waterways are impaired and the quality of our groundwater is becoming a concern. We will address water quality through a comprehensive approach. We will continue to educate our agricultural producers on best management practices and aid our partner agencies such as NRCS and Soil and Water District. We will conduct rain barrel workshops for youth as well as adults to increase their awareness of water issues. Annual household water testing will be offered through the Charlotte County Extension Office. The testing program will be followed up with an informational meeting to interpret results. In addition, an educational process will be implemented through various youth educational efforts including field days, classroom projects and day camps. These events will be a cooperative effort between 4-H, ANR, Soil and Water District and the school system.

Land Use/Preservation

Priority Issues identified include education about conservation easements, education on alternative options to keep farm land in agricultural production, as well as farm succession planning. We will address the land use preservation issues by holding educational opportunities to inform on farm succession planning, conservation easements, as well as non-traditional ag land use.

Agritourism/Alternative Ag.

VCE-Charlotte will conduct annual meetings covering how to setup and navigate non-traditional agricultural operations. We will arrange farm tours to allow producers to see current agritourism operations and gain perspectives. We are currently working with other agents in the district to put together an annual agritourism conference that will move around the Central district.

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