



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report



Dickenson

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Introduction

The Dickenson County Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the fall of 2018. The process followed the guidelines, procedures and training provided by Virginia Cooperative Extension personnel from Virginia Tech. The Dickenson ELC opted to conduct a community survey and key informant interviews to obtain the greatest variety of resident perspectives. The survey developed by VCE was made available to citizens, civic groups, youth groups and printed copies supplied at area business establishments. The process involved the development of a Dickenson County Unit Profile, as well as, gathering resident perspectives on issues concerning the county. Information was analyzed by the ELC and priority issues were identified.

Unit Profile

Dickenson County is a rural county located in far Southwest Virginia with less than 50 people living per square mile. Neighboring counties include Wise to the West, Buchanan to the East, Russell to the South and Letcher County, Kentucky to the North. Dickenson County encompasses 335 square miles of mostly mountainous terrain with Clintwood serving as the county seat. According to the 2017 census, Dickenson County had a population of 14,782. A 2010 census population estimate of 15,903 reflects a 6.9% decrease in population since 2010.

Population numbers have fluctuated in Dickenson County in the past based on periods of boom or bust associated with coal and natural gas production. The 2017 census showed a population of 14,782 for a 15.78% reduction in population from the 1990 population of 17,552. The youth population of Dickenson County has followed the same general trend of the overall population within the county during this same time period.

The racial composition of Dickenson County is 98.56% White with the remaining 1.44% being represented by Black, Hispanic, Latino, American Indian and Asian populations.

The median age of Dickenson County residents has risen slightly from 43.6 in 2013 to 43.9 in 2017.

The gap continues to widen as the state income per capita continues to out-distance Dickenson County. Unable to close that gap, the county continues to suffer with a failing economy. The median household income (2013-2017) is \$29,916 which is 52.05% less than \$62,391 for the state of Virginia. Persons below poverty level in Dickenson County in 2017 was 27% compared to 14% for the U.S. The unemployment average was 5.64% for the county in 2018. In 2012, the largest percentage of jobs in Dickenson County were held in the service sector with 56.4%.

The adult obesity level in Dickenson County of 31% ranks higher than the state average of 28% and the national average of 25% respectively. High teen birth rates of 48 per 1000 teens

age 15-19 compared to 32 in Virginia and 21 nationally. Dickenson County residents have very limited access to primary care physicians with one doctor per 3,975 people, compared to the state of Virginia having one doctor per 1,356 and the U.S. of one doctor per 1,067. A large percentage of children (43%) in Dickenson County are living in a single parent household as compared to the state with 30% and the U.S. average of 20%.

The Dickenson County School System is fully dedicated to meeting the educational needs of all students to the maximum extent possible. Educational attainment – 66.6% of Dickenson residents age 25 years and over are high school graduates or higher, compared to 87% statewide and 85.6% nationally. On average, 29.84% of Dickenson County students pursue some type of post-secondary education. The Career Center has experienced a decline in enrollment in recent years. Within the school system there is greater emphasis being put on attending college and less on developing employable skills while in high school. Those students obtaining these skills often times can find well-paying jobs right out of high school.

Dickenson County agriculture consists of small scale, part-time producers who have other employment or are retired. The 1987 Census reported 120 farms with approximately 10,000 acres vs. the 2002 Census which reported 117 farms with 11,761 acres. The 2007 census reported 170 farms with 14,342 acres. The 2012 census reported 147 farms with 15,048 acres. The average farm size has increased from 84 acres to 102 acres at the same time farm numbers have decreased. The average farm income rose from \$3,645 in 2007 to \$5,314 in the 2012 census. One of the largest changes in agriculture would be the increase in the number of sheep in Dickenson County in recent years. The 2004 census revealed no sheep as compared to 2012 with 732 being reported. The other top enterprises in the county consist of beef cattle, forage crops, goats, horses and vegetable gardening activities. Additional horticultural crops on a limited scale consist of apples, and some vegetable production that is marketed locally.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The Dickenson County Extension staff and ELC met multiple times concerning the Situation Analysis process. It was decided to conduct a key informant survey and conduct face to face interviews in order to identify Dickenson's major strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. Staff and ELC developed a comprehensive citizen survey, which was completed by 73 residents regarding issues around agriculture, health, education, land use, youth, and the local economy. The survey respondents included community leaders, government leaders, school officials, soil and water conservation boards, extension advisory boards and youth.

The Dickenson County Extension Office collects information from citizens constantly about the community needs. These are in the form of daily contacts with clientele about issues that are affecting them personally and the community as a whole. These issues were brought to the

ELC along with the results from the community survey to determine the focus of future extension programming for Dickenson County.

The following issues were identified as the 5 major priorities in the situation analysis process from key informant interview responses, community survey, face to face contacts and the ELC as a focus group.

1. Health Concerns
2. Youth Concerns
3. Employment Issues
4. Agricultural Issues
5. Vacant FCS Position

These priorities are described in the following section.

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Health Concerns

Description: Citizens have a great concern about the tendencies of Dickenson County residents to have higher than state averages of obesity, cardiovascular, cancer, diabetes and pulmonary diseases and are looking for ways to change these outcomes. These health concerns affect everyone in the county including the youth, middle age and the aging population.

VCE's Role in addressing this Issue: These health concerns offer an opportunity for Dickenson VCE to partner with health-related agencies to address topics of disease prevention, nutrition and healthy lifestyles in general. Programs are conducted to promote and encourage the production of vegetables and fruits for healthier food choices. The extension office conducts the Healthy Bucks for Healthy Kids program to encourage more fresh fruits and vegetables in the diets. VCE conducts a local farmers market to encourage citizens to buy locally produced fresh produce to promote a healthier lifestyle. The Dickenson County office is currently without an FCS agent and this position could help address nutritional needs and family issues that could improve overall health of the local citizens.

Issue 2: Youth Concerns

Description: Dickenson County residents recognize that youth development is critical to both the short-term and long-term future and prosperity of the community. Youth need safe and developmentally appropriate activities to promote health and well-being. Living in a rural and isolated county, it is important for youth to experience opportunities that are readily available to youth in more urban areas of the state. As the population ages, it is also vital to develop a sense of community involvement, volunteerism, and leadership among the youth.

VCE's Role in addressing this Issue: VCE is uniquely positioned to address the youth concerns with 4-H, Family & Consumer Sciences, and Agricultural and Natural Resource agents. We also partner with stakeholders, schools, and local agencies to address the needs of the youth. Agents provide in-school, summer, and interest driven programming. Life skills are developed through project work, Reality Store/Kids Marketplace, camps, career fairs, field trips, community service, and volunteer opportunities. VCE works closely with the Dickenson County Community Partners for Prevention Coalition to support efforts to provide safe and sober, family-oriented activities to promote social connectedness, and deter substance abuse. Benefits to the community include the Safe & Sober After-Prom Party, the Christmas Angels Program, farmer's market, and countless other community events to promote a healthy lifestyle and combat the opioid crisis.

Issue 3: Employment Issues

Description: The lack of employment opportunities is of great concern to the citizenry of Dickenson County. The 2010 unemployment rate was 12.2% and the current rate is 4.9%. This may seem like a great improvement at a cursory glance, but it is not a reflection of an improved economy considering other factors. The unemployment rate in Dickenson County is almost twice that of the state as a whole, 2.6%. When taking the population change into consideration, the issue comes into better focus. The population in 2010 was 15,903 and the December 2018 population was 14,516; that is a decrease of 8.7%. The total enrollment in the Dickenson County Public Schools went from 2,519 to 2,096 during the same time frame. That is a drop of 16.8%. This indicates that families with school age children are moving out of the county. These factors create a downward spiral with a smaller tax base, declining property values, and underfunded schools.

VCE's Role in addressing this Issue: VCE has many resources to provide programming on entrepreneurship, value-added marketing, agri-tourism, and youth development. VCE Dickenson County also partners with other organizations such as the tourism committee and the Dickenson County Community Partners for Prevention Coalition to work toward the common goals such as attracting new employers. The 4-H Teen Leaders Club works to develop life-skills to prepare them for their first job or college application process. Emphasis is placed on confidence and soft-skills that employers and colleges are seeking in applicants.

Issue 4: Agricultural Issues

Description: Dickenson County contains 147 farms with 15,048 acres of farmland with \$781,000 dollars of farm products sold. The average market value of \$5,314 per farm has risen sharply since 2007 when this average was \$3,645 per farm. Agriculture is playing a larger part in supplementing take home income for farmers of Dickenson County than it has in several years. The top issues identified to focus educational efforts on are animal health,

livestock production practices, agriculture sustainability, value-added marketing and profitability.

VCE's Role in addressing this Issue: Dickenson County does not have a practicing veterinarian located within the county. VCE will emphasize educational programs on animal health care, vaccinations, internal and external parasites and overall animal health issues associated with beef, sheep, goats and horse production. Dickenson County does not have a livestock market. Extension staff can and will continue to explore various value-added marketing opportunities. The Coalfield Beef Cattle and Land Use Association participates in the Virginia Quality Assured beef marketing program in order to receive premium prices over other feeder calf sales. The Coalfield Sheep Association has been organized to help sheep producers market their products in a more profitable manner. VCE will assist producers in making the necessary improvements to their livestock in order for them to participate in these value-added sales. The Coalfield Agricultural Center has been constructed using various funding sources to help with value-added marketing and Extension educational programs. VCE will conduct educational programs focusing on soil fertility, forage varieties, management programs, hay production, pasture management and weed and brush control for livestock production. VCE currently provides educational meetings designed to provide good cultural practices, varieties and pesticide recommendations and uses for fruit and vegetable producers of Dickenson County. The ELC has recommended that this issue be kept a top priority due to the amount of home food production and home canning conducted in Dickenson County.

Issue 5: Dickenson County FCS

Description: The Dickenson County position is currently vacant.

VCE's Role in addressing this Issue: The Dickenson County VCE office will work closely with local government, district office and State VCE offices to pursue and obtain funding for an FCS position in Dickenson County.