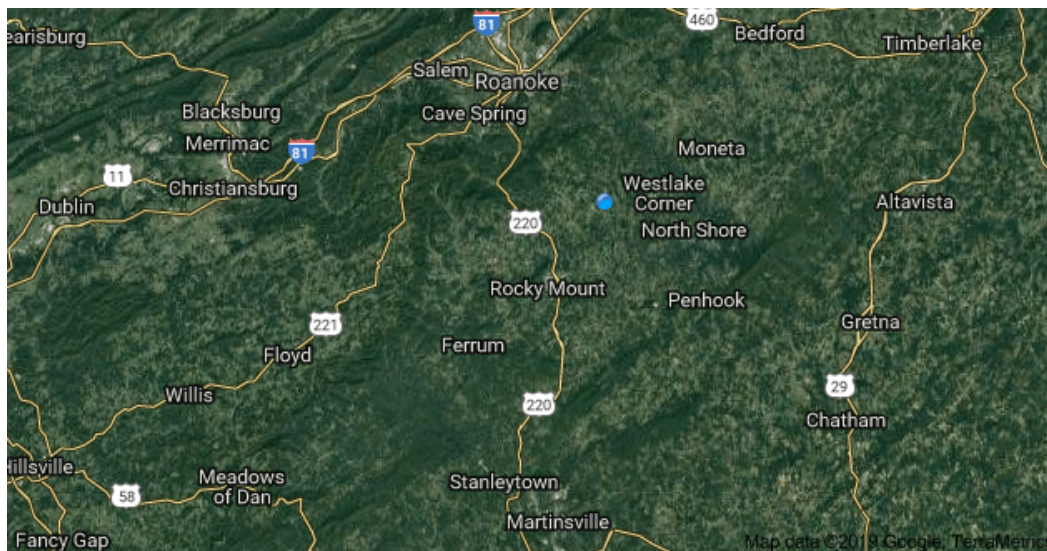




## Franklin County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

*UNIT Extension Staff*

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## Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Strengthen the local food system	Agents here in the office, work with local farmers and producers to bring the latest information and updates available from Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. We have a working relationship with the county and clientele. We also have developed a local food and garden directory to promote greater economic power for farmers and growers.
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship and other life skills	We have a 4-H Agent and 4-H Program Assistant who work with local schools and after school programing to promote leadership, citizenship and character development.
Preserving farm and forest land	Recognizing the importance of this issue the Virginia General Assembly adopted HB894, Section 3 of which charged Virginia Cooperative Extension with leading an effort to develop a map or repository of prime farmland in consultation with relevant and necessary state agencies and other partners.
Protecting water quality	Agents work with Blueridge Soil and water and other entities in the county to educate clients and the community on best practices.
Preserving foods for home use	Virginia Cooperative Extension works with homeowners and local clientele to teach food safety and research based home preservation principals. New updates are posted and sent upon request to local Franklin County residents.



## Introduction

Through the calendar year of 2023, the Franklin County Virginia Cooperative Extension Unit conducted a comprehensive Situation Analysis utilizing unit staff, community stakeholders, and citizen surveys. The process began by reviewing the 2018 Situation Analysis Report and identifying the methodology used for data gathering. While public forums were used in the last situation analysis, the unit chose on line survey's as well as engaging ELC members, master gardeners and local school board as well as general public. In addition, Franklin County Extension Office has nearly 700 followers on social media. In response, agents created a social media survey of community needs. There two face-to-face meetings, 36 online survey responses and 10 paper surveys returned to local office. After data collection, agents convened to analyze and prioritize the data to compile the final report.

## Unit Profile

### Demographic Summary

The County of Franklin is in the westernmost area of Southside, Virginia at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is bordered by the counties of Floyd to the west, Roanoke to the north, Bedford to the north-east, Pittsylvania to the east, Henry/Martinsville to the south, and Patrick to the southeast. Franklin has been given the name of "Land between the Lakes" due to the formation of Philpot Lake and Smith Mountain Lake (SML) for hydro-electrical and tourism uses.

Franklin County's population in 2017 was an estimated 56,445 people, representing a 0.5% increase from 2010 and almost a 19% increase from 2000. Trends in the population for Franklin County have increased overall, with the largest population growth occurring within the last 20 years. Since 1960, the population has increased by 54 percent and is anticipated to continue rising over the next 10 to 20 years; the population is estimated to be over 62,000 by 2020.

Franklin County's latest population figures for 2022 have seen a decrease to 55,074. A slight decrease due to the number of young adults moving out of the county.

The age group with the highest population is the 55 to 59 years group, which had nearly 4,568 people. This is similar to the Virginia as well as national demographics. The 65 to 69 years age group is the second largest for the county, with over 4,000 people. Franklin County's smallest age group includes residents 85 years or older. This age group contains about 1196 people for the county and is also the smallest for Virginia and the United States.

The gender distribution of Franklin County has remained consistent over the course of the last decade with males accounting for 49.44% and females 50.56%. This trend correlates with trends seen at the state and national level.

Household data shows the majority of household income rates remaining the same and following state trends. The mean household income is \$80,744 (up from 2019) although this is lower than the state and national average.

Overall, the basic demographics from Franklin County continue to remain consistent over the years except for the aforementioned factors.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

In addition to the online survey on the VCE county website, three groups were contacted for information at the following locations: The Franklin County Library, Franklin County Master Gardeners and the Franklin County Extension Leadership Council. The following issues were identified during the VCE Situation Analysis online and paper surveys in order from most important to less important:

1. Strengthening the local food system
2. Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
3. Preserving farm and forest land
4. Protecting water quality
5. Preserving foods for home use
6. Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability
7. Ensure safe, high-quality foods

Our survey asked a question concerning what other issues would you like to see Franklin County Virginia Cooperative Extension address and the following three issues were listed:

1. Franklin County would like to see more Agriculture opportunities for the school system.
2. Greater opportunities and interest in gardening/physical activity.
3. In school field trips/activities for trips to farms/farm related activities.

## Community Issues

Based upon the Franklin County 2022 Strategic Plan report compiled by the county and Board of Supervisors the following six areas have been identified as focus areas. Virginia Cooperative Extension resources are already addressing some of the focus issues. The final section of priority issues are outside the scope of Virginia Cooperative Extension resources and should be referred to the appropriate agency for attention.

1. Well Planned Growth
2. Conserving and Promoting Natural Assets
3. Strategic Economic Development
4. Enhanced Educational Opportunities
5. Dynamic Community Safety
6. Responsible Government Operations

## Future Programming to Address Community Issues

**Well Planned Growth.** The top issue recognized by the county and Board of Supervisors was well planned growth. Balancing economic development and natural resource conservation is an important issue to localities, the Commonwealth of Virginia, landowners, industry, and others. This challenge presents itself in a variety of ways, with one example being solar energy project development on agricultural and forested land. Recognizing the importance of this issue the Virginia General Assembly adopted HB894, Section 3 of which charged Virginia Cooperative Extension with leading an effort to develop a map or repository of prime farmland in consultation with relevant and necessary state agencies and other partners.

As an outcome of this effort VCE announced the Virginia Land and Energy Navigator (VaLEN). A collaborative effort, VaLEN brings together GIS information related to prime farm and forestland, land conservation, electric utility infrastructure, and other themes to support land use planning and decision-making at the local level. Please note that the goal of VaLEN is to support and inform decision-making, not prescribe outcomes.

<https://valen.ext.vt.edu/>

While Extension plays some role in this effort, it is recognized that this issue is bigger than one person or agency and must be addressed by the community.

**Conserving and Promoting Natural Assets.** One of the priorities under this topic is to build a County tourism program where tourism becomes a greater economic force that will enhance the community. Virginia Cooperative Extension is contributing to this priority by engaging and partnering with the County to give rebirth to the Franklin County Agricultural fair. Franklin County decided to revive the county fair in 2014 and the VCE Franklin County Extension has been a large part of the efforts. The FCS, ANR and 4-H program areas have all contributed to revive the Agricultural competitive exhibits, livestock shows, 4-H presentations and community involvement for all ages. Virginia Cooperative Extension has reached a diverse group of individuals all ages through this yearly event. Franklin County and the VCE office has worked together to combine efforts and talents along with many organizations in the county to strengthen and grow this agricultural fair. VCE will continue to work and grow in all program areas to further the efforts of the committee.

**Strategic Economic Development.** Given Franklin County's likely focus on agriculture, VCE can offer expertise in sustainable farming practices, crop diversification, and value-added agriculture. Programs supporting local farmers, such as farmers' markets and agricultural tourism, can be developed. VCE can collaborate with local educational institutions to provide training programs that align with the needs of emerging industries in Franklin County. Advising on sustainable natural resource management practices to ensure the long-term viability of local industries. Offering guidance on environmental conservation and responsible land use planning. Promoting tourism initiatives by showcasing the cultural, historical, and natural attractions of Franklin County. FCS program has designed and developed along with volunteers a barn quilt trail map for the county to align with the tourism goals and opportunities. A new map has recently been designed for 2023.

**Enhanced Educational Opportunities.** Franklin County offers quite a few opportunities for youth recreation. The Extension office provides four 4-H clubs that cater to a wide variety of interests. Extension also participates with Ferrum College by hosting practicum students in which college students shadow agents for college credit. Lastly, Extension encourages youth involvement in leadership roles through 4-H and in educational associations such as the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, in school learning and after school club meetings. School gardens and livestock opportunities are offered.

**Dynamic Community Safety.** Virginia Cooperative Extension is working with Public Safety and the Farm Bureau to bring education and training to local EMS personnel. Over the course of the next 12 months, a team consisting of Public Safety personnel, Virginia Cooperative Extension and members of the Farm Bureau will collaborate to design, plan, and deliver training on grain bin extraction equipment to Franklin County Public Safety and Fire and Rescue personnel. Additionally, the grant will support farmer CPR and First Aid classes and a community educational event, further promoting safety and well-being in the community.

**Responsible Government Operations.** A common theme among respondents was the need for a career and technical expansion of the high school and more training opportunities to develop a skilled workforce. In addition to Extension and Ferrum College's shadowing program, Extension occasionally hosts a paid student intern. The intern rotates through all program areas and is exposed to day-to-day functions of the job while meeting various stakeholders within the community. This experience has led to employment within Extension and positive references for the intern based on working relationships both within and outside of Extension. The county is currently in negotiations with the school board on executing a plan. VCE often works with youth through 4-H programs. By instilling a sense of civic responsibility and engagement in young people, VCE contributes to the development of future leaders who are actively involved in their communities and understand the importance of responsible government.

It's important to note that while VCE can play a supportive role, the primary responsibility for government operations lies with elected officials, government agencies, and other relevant authorities. VCE's role is to provide education and resources to empower citizens to participate actively and responsibly in the democratic process.

## **Status: The following priority issues are outside the scope of Virginia Cooperative Extension resources and should be referred to the appropriate agency.**

- **Lack of Public Transportation.** The second top issue among respondents was the need for public transportation. While transportation currently exists for qualifying seniors, there is a lack of consistent transportation services for the public. This is an issue that would be handled best by another agency or private business.
- **Affordable/Accessible Health Care.** Healthcare is on the forefront as an issue not only locally but nationwide. Although Extension can promote healthy lifestyles and choices, the answer to affordable, accessible healthcare is much more complex. Solutions to this issue should be proposed by the community to elected representatives.
- **Skilled/Higher Paying Jobs.** As in any rural community, higher paying jobs is a necessity for a robust economy and more importantly, a better quality of life. To attract employers, it is critical that a skilled, trained workforce be available for them to hire. A focus on expanding career and technical education at the high school should be a priority.
- **Willing and Skilled Workforce.** A common theme among respondents, especially among small businesses was the need for people that are skilled and willing to work. This issue could partially be addressed by career and technical education however willingness to work is an issue that is much more complex. Developing a willing workforce should begin with youth and should be a community-wide effort.
- **Recreational Opportunities.** As mentioned under “Extracurricular Activities for Youth”, Franklin County offers a wide variety of recreational activities and at a price that is affordable or free. If additional recreational opportunities are desired, interest should be expressed to Franklin County Parks and Recreation and those interested could volunteer to help lead these efforts.
- **Safe and Affordable Housing.** Housing can be an issue for many families in Franklin County. Not only is cost of living higher in Franklin County than surrounding counties but available and affordable housing is hard to find. This issue was not only recognized by respondents but has been mentioned several times among the Board of Supervisors. County officials have pointed out that this issue presents an opportunity for housing developers.

# References

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