



Halifax County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

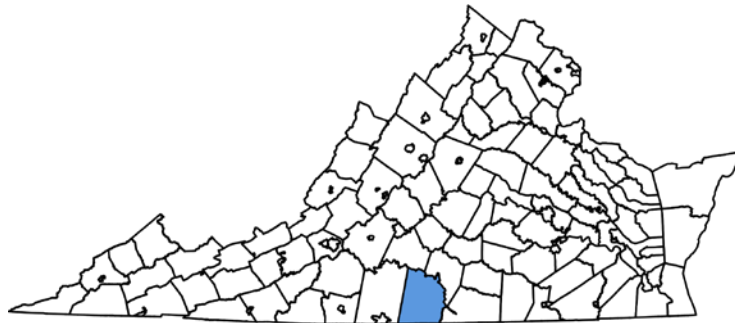
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Summary of Community Issues and Extension Office Response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Development of youth leadership, citizenship, and life skills	Planning new programs and introducing new speakers
Agricultural Profitability in Farm Financial Management and Transition Education	Introducing new programs, providing new tools and ROI sheets, and new marketing education
Pest Management and Controlling Invasive Species	Distributing pest management guides and publications and introducing an Entomologist into the county as a resource for locals
Promoting Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Environmental Literacy	Continued collaboration with other local agencies

Introduction

The Halifax Extension Office has monthly staff meetings in which relevant needs and programs are regularly discussed and recorded. The Halifax County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) has been invaluable in gathering community and resident perspectives on issues within the county. The ELC meets quarterly with the last quarter of the year being the input session. Information gathered in recent years is included in this report. Ideas and information from the local government have also been included. Additional information was collected from various governmental websites as listed throughout the report. The data collected is used to direct both individual and unit programming.

Unit Profile

Halifax County is in south central Virginia, approximately 50 miles south of Lynchburg and bordering North Carolina. It is the fourth largest county geographically in the Commonwealth covering approximately 818 square miles with a population density of 46 per square mile. The Halifax County Virginia Cooperative Extension Office is made up of two county Extension Agents; Agriculture and Natural Resources and 4-H Youth Development; five county support staff; one Unit Administrative Assistant, one Horticulture Technician, one 4-H Youth Development Program Assistant, one adult SNAP Ed Program Assistant, and one SAMHSA Project Associate; and three district faculty and staff members; one district Forestry Agent, one SNAP Ed Administrative Assistant and one SNAP Ed. Area Coordinator.

Population

Halifax County currently has a population of about 34,000. Forty-eight percent of the citizens are between the ages of 18 and 65 years old with the median age being 41. There are about 8,000 youth under the age of 18. About 61% of the population is Caucasian, 35% Black or African American, 2% Hispanic, and about 2% biracial. There are about 15,000 households.

Housing/Income/Poverty

Although there are about 15,000 households there are over 17,000 housing units making the availability of housing obtainable. The average house value is \$156,000 and about 73% of the population owns their own home which is about 10% above the national average. The average rental fees for those who do not own is \$724 a month. Additionally, 45% of children are in single parent households. The median household income is about \$49,000 with males making about \$39,000 while females are bringing in around \$30,000. The overall poverty rate is about 15%, while the percentage of children in poverty is almost 19%.

Education

Halifax County Public Schools serves just under 5,000 students in grades PreK through 12. This system consists of one high school, one middle school and seven elementary schools. High school students are able to take dual enrollment classes through the local community college and therefore some students are able to obtain an Associate's Degree while still in high school. About 80% of the overall population has a high school diploma or the equivalent. Just under 20% of the population has gained at least some college credits with 9.5% obtaining an Associate's Degree, 11% a Bachelor's Degree, and 6% completing graduate degrees.

Business/Economics/Employment

There are 677 registered businesses in Halifax County which employ personnel. The largest employers are Sentra Halifax Regional Health System, Hitachi Energy, Huber Engineered Woods, and Halifax County Public School system. There are about 1,500 people in the county who are self-employed and the majority of them are white males who have not served in the military. The unemployment rate is about 4% which is higher than the state average.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The Halifax County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met for an overview and discussion for the 2023 situational analysis update. A survey was developed based on a template used for the overall Virginia Cooperative Extension state needs assessment. The survey was distributed by agents and ELC members to county residents at various informational and community outreach events, as well as promotion through social media platforms. Participants were asked to identify their top issues and explain why they felt that issue must be addressed. The top issues expressed by participants were:

1. Development of youth leadership, citizenship, and life skills
2. Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, and insects)
3. Agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy promotion

Steps have been taken in Halifax County to combat previous poor perceptions, these being the approval of a new high school and new job opportunities. However, with these, followed new complaints and the rising of old complaints. For example, many people are concerned at the cost of the new school, the rising tax rates, and the continued issues of not being able to work together, general poverty, and a shrinking workforce. Throughout the new report was a common theme of leaderships inability to work together causing inaction and erosion of the community's well-being.

Community Issues

Development of youth leadership, citizenship, and life skills

The results of the situational analysis survey indicated that the development of leadership, citizenship, and life skills in youth is a high-priority issue, with over 93% of participants indicating that VCE should spend "high effort" or "very high effort" here.

With the knowledge that there are approximately 4,000 4-H age youth residing in Halifax County, Halifax 4-H will continue to partner and share lessons with Halifax County Public Schools, local private schools, and homeschool groups in the future. The lessons primarily focus on STEM skills and use all Virginia SOL-based curriculum. The continuing presence in the school systems will encourage youth participation in other Halifax 4-H activities and clubs. Halifax 4-H is also dedicated to the continuing growth of teen programming, with a focus on community service and building leadership skills. With the partnership of local community organizations, 4-H hopes to foster more positive youth-adult partnerships.

Programs are being planned in order to incorporate life skills, leadership skills, and citizenship. This will be done by introducing new speakers and with the help of many volunteers and community partners. We will continue to focus on community service and leadership opportunities.

Agricultural Profitability in Farm Financial Management and Transition Education

The agricultural community in the past few years has experienced stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts as well as rising input prices, supply chain bottlenecks and market demands or new requirements. Producers are small business owners and as VCE consults with producers, we will structure programs and provide support and resources that include asking questions about their farm's goals, marketing options and ways to improve profit gains. VCE will help provide budgeting tools and ROI sheets for livestock marketing groups to show value and include income and expense information. With crop production meetings, VCE will include budget enterprise tools and resources on financial feasibility. VCE will work to offer more marketing specific programs, such as the Grain Marketing 101 program that was first offered in 2023. VCE will offer marketing education and support in new programs and resources for producers that need education with farm or market websites, online marketing strategies as well as agritourism ventures that add value and market presence. VCE will offer a farm and

forestland preservation and succession planning program(s) for the agricultural community by working with the VCE Agribusiness Management & Economics Program team and contacts.

Pest Management and Controlling Invasive Pests

At production meetings and annually, VCE will distribute updated pest management guides and new factsheet publications for producers to help them be proactive versus reactive in controlling pests. VCE will continue to assist with crop damage reports or insurance claims as appropriate. VCE will initiate the new VCE Entomologist Specialist in visiting Halifax County, meeting producers and initiating pest research trials (including other specialists as appropriate). Other new specialists starting in 2024 for VCE include a soybean specialists and small grains specialist and VCE-Halifax will initiate invitations for them to visit farms and meet producers to establish relationships and understand pest challenges and impact on agriculture. VCE will include a pest management topic as well as distribute printed resources at the annual Central Virginia Crops Expo and field days and master gardener programs in Halifax County.

Promoting Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Environmental Literacy

VCE will collaborate with other agencies such as USDA-NRCS, USDA-FSA, Halifax Soil and Water Conservation District, 4-H, FFA, Quail Forever Chapter, Southside Master Gardeners and the Healthy Harvest Community Garden to educate residents and particularly youth on agriculture's role in the economy and the need and opportunities for young people. Every year, VCE will provide a youth and agricultural opportunities program or presentation to the 4-H, FFA and Envirothon youth organizations in the county. VCE will continue to be a guest speaker(s) in the CTE classes at HCMS, HCHS and Halifax Christian School and CH Friend Christian School. VCE will be an integral part in the rebuilding of the youth livestock show experience program and help organize workshops and organizing the educational components with record-keeping books. VCE will continue to partner with Farm Bureau on their Farm Animal Field Days at the Halifax County Fair and the Halifax SWCD on their Youth Conservation Camp and Quail Forever Chapter on the Biggy Hunt Campout Jamboree. VCE will encourage farms, agribusinesses and the community garden to share opportunities for shadowing experiences, volunteering and other work-based learning or experiential learning opportunities for youth locally. VCE will consider adding a special youth education component for select, major programs during the year for families to bring their children. VCE will share this need for Halifax Co. Farm Bureau annual meeting too.

Future Programming to Address Community Issue

Halifax County VCE will continue to partner with other local agencies to meet the needs of the community. New programs have been, and will continue to be, planned based on the information collected during the situational analysis survey. A "Skills Day" is being planned by Halifax 4-H for Summer 2024 to help build on youth life skills and development. This program will include demonstrations with local business owners and professionals, such as chefs, mechanics, seamstresses, and more. New Ag-related programs are also continuing to be planned to help with Pest Management, Agricultural Promotion, and Farm Financial Literacy.

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