



Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

www.ext.vt.edu

Situation Analysis Report



Hanover

2018

UNIT Extension Staff

Rita Schalk, 4-H Youth Extension Agent

Laura Maxey-Nay, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent

Angelette Pryor, Volunteer Manager

Introduction

The Hanover County Situational Analysis is the product of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The issues are the distillation of information and inferences derived from each genre.

The Analysis was developed by compiling quantitative data from annual reports, county departmental records and local, state and national on-line databases. These included sources such as the comprehensive 2017 National Citizens Survey for Hanover County, Hanover County Public Schools Fy 2018 adopted budget, the Human Resources Strategic Plan, 2018 Kids Count, Hanover County Public Schools, Hanover County Comprehensive Plan, Chickahominy Health District 2017 Community Health Assessment, 2012 Ag Census, and the US Census Bureau.

Key informant and citizen interviews were conducted to collect qualitative input. These informants were asked to look at issues from a professional standpoint and as residents of Hanover County.

Unit staff, VCE volunteers, community partners and agency representatives reviewed the data and noted trends, statistics, and anomalies that portend emerging issues for Hanover County.

The quantitative and qualitative results were then cross-referenced to produce the prominent issues currently confronting Hanover County and predicting those which will emerge in the near future. Issues were also reviewed for the role in which Extension can, should, or would participate with appropriate resources, personnel and support.

Unit Profile

Hanover County is located in east-central Virginia, approximately 15 miles north of Richmond and 90 miles south of Washington, D.C. The County is situated between the Chickahominy, Pamunkey, and North Anna rivers. It is bordered by the counties of Caroline, King William, New Kent, Henrico, Goochland, and Louisa counties. When measured along its southeast to northwest axis, the County is nearly 40 miles in length and 471 square miles. In size it is the largest county in the Richmond-Petersburg metropolitan area.

Hanover County is located in the outer ring of the urbanized region surrounding Richmond. The County is bisected by Interstate 95, the major north-south interstate highway serving the east coast corridor from Maine to Florida. The topography is gently rolling hills and heavily wooded forests. Population is approximately 105,000 residents.

With Interstate 295 running along its edge, the southern reaches of the county have a much more suburban and urban atmosphere. Hanover County lies both in the Coastal and Piedmont geologic areas reflected in the marked differences in soils found from east to west. The sandy soils of this eastern area lend themselves well to the operation of septic tanks. Encompassing the unincorporated but populous Mechanicsville area, it is the section closest to Richmond and is the site of most suburban and urban style development.

The northern and western areas are much more rural in nature and reflected in the sparse population and commercial development. The timber industry maintains a significant presence in this segment of the county. Several small quarries also operate in these quadrants.

In terms of race and ethnicity, Hanover remains predominately white-85% in 2017, though minority population has risen from 11% to 14%. The largest minority population is still African American-9.5%. Though small in number, Hispanics had the largest percent increase from 1.55% in 2011 to 2.65% in 2017. Five percent identified as more than one race or other race.

Historically Hanover County was primarily agricultural and rural. One of the largest agricultural producers on the east coast, Engel Farms Inc., is based in Hanover County. In the past 20 years, Hanover County has seen a significant increase in the number of niche farms, sometimes referred to as mini-farms or farmettes. These farms are typically 5 – 25 acres in size and landowners want to raise and/or are interested in obtaining educational resources about a variety of products, including cattle, horses, goats, sheep, llamas, vegetables, bees and honey, fruit trees, cane fruits, grapes, peaches, strawberries and poultry.

The Town of Ashland sits astride Interstate 95, home to Randolph-Macon College. This town of 7,800 is the only incorporated community in Hanover County.

The County is governed by a seven member elected Board of Supervisors with four year terms. Yearly a chair and vice chair are elected by the Board. Their responsibilities encompass decisions on zoning and land use, various board appointments, budget and tax rates and hiring of the county administrator.

A survey finding showed a significant number of residents say job growth is too slow. This is closely linked to the 97% polled who feel high speed internet is very important. Qualitative data reflected this same issue.

The citizens enjoy a fairly high level income reflecting one of the highest housing costs in the region. Residential building is robust with new housing starts in the \$400,000 and up market. Hanover currently has 40,000 households. According to the Economic Development Department, average household income exceeds \$106,000.

Business opportunities are expanding primarily in the Suburban Services area and seven Economic Development Zones. Hanover continues to have the lowest real estate tax rate (\$0.81) in the region. There is no business license tax (except for contractors), a distinct advantage for Hanover businesses.

Economic Development department is active in its support of the agribusiness industry. A significant change from 10 years ago.

The population shift is distinctly to an aging citizenry. The school-age population has decreased over 4% in the last few years. The current student population of under 18,000 reveals a loss of almost 1,000 students since 2015. In addition there are more youth in high school than entering elementary school.

Technology integration and upgrades are a primary focus of the school district as reflected in the current budget.

This aging group also contributes to the increase in lifestyle influenced health issues as reported by the health department. Rates of smoking are higher than average along with a lack of access to walking and hiking trails or safe bike routes as reflected in the Citizens Survey. In addition there has been a 4% increase in obesity and 3% more excessive drinking. Sexually Transmitted Diseases are also on the upswing.

Most of Hanover County citizens are financially secure with resources to weather an economic downturn. The overall good income demographics of the county dilute the needs of those in poverty. For low income residents, health care is a significant stressor. They find prescription costs a formidable hurdle for chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and COPD. The faith community has worked to support two free health clinics to serve adults in the county. A free dental clinic has also been established. Most uninsured youth are eligible for FAMIS, state supported health insurance.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Key informant, citizen interviews, human services network meeting, 2017 Citizens' Survey, and dialogue of the agriculture community were used to collect qualitative information on issues. Youth and minorities were included in this aspect. This data expanded on some issues reflected in the quantitative data but also revealed concerns that fall between the cracks.

Three issues arose repeatedly.

As in previous years, *land use/development and the environment* continue to be a top level issue. Many people give the rural nature of Hanover as the reason for moving to the county. But development threatens their perceived view of country living while at the same time residents balk at higher taxes for services such as roads, convenience centers, schools, parks and other amenities. Agriculture remains an important economic engine in the county but the rural suburban interface continues to cause friction. The Chesapeake Bay Act and its requirements are an added stressor for county staff and targeted industry especially agriculture.

Interviews with large and small producers also identified the following issues:

- Need for better tools to prepare for adverse weather damage.
- Continued pest monitoring and id.
- Perceived and real pesticide drift.
- Zoning restriction for farms, including small acreage ventures.
- Food safety training to meet Food Safety Modernization Act.
- Farm transition to maintain agriculture as a viable business.
- Incorporating new technologies including training and support for using equipment.

Along this same business development vein, affordable access to high speed internet remains a contentious issue that continues to plague the county. This reflects the school district initiative and budget commitment to improved technology for students. Many residents believe access to high speed internet is essential to the positive growth and business climate in Hanover County. Businesses, school assignments, and resident's ability to function in a technology driven society mandate this access.

The third community perspective, *the socioeconomic divide or income disparity*, is complex and contains numerous interlocking issues. Affordable homes for the workforce verses business growth and high-end residential development is a hot button topic. Apartment developments, even some condominium projects are considered a threat to the high quality of life in the county. Section 8 housing is very limited with multiple family and non-family residents sharing the apartments and motel rooms, and often not near employment. This problem feeds into another issue, the lack of public transportation. This is a chronic and serious issue resulting in low income individuals not accessing health care, job opportunities, youth activities and academic support, healthy food, job training, mental health services and leading to social isolation and disengagement. In 2018 Hanover had 34 food pantries of varying sizes and scope operated by non-profits and the faith community.

Priority Issues

Land Use/development and environment

Hanover VCE is well placed to address this issue through multiple educational modes.

Through Junior Camp, youth are trained in activities and skills that enhance the appreciation and understanding of the outdoor environment. VCE's high level of support provides the livestock clubs with resources to build on the agriculture knowledge, best practices, animal science knowledge and entrepreneurship as they build their flocks and herds. In addition the clubs assist in their outreach of agriculture education/literacy at schools, fairs and other venues and promotional sites.

4-H will continue to use media outlets, in-school programming, collaboration with partners, and 4-H events to emphasize environmentally responsible behaviors including recycling, carpooling, and no littering campaigns.

ANR and 4-H collaborate on Professional Development for educators through in-service training, resource materials and best practices recommendations. Both disciplines also participate in Ag Day which provides agricultural literacy programming through hands on experiences for all third graders in the county.

In addition Three Rivers Livestock 4-H, not only reads the Ag Book of the Year but donates a copy to every elementary school.

As members of the board of Hanover Caroline Soil & Water Conservation District, 4-H and ANR will continue to collaborate on environmental education projects such as Meaningful Watershed Experiences, in school programs, and 50-Mile Meal for the Board of Supervisors.

Attendant to this is continued use of the Character Counts! pillars; respect for their environment, responsibility for their actions, and most importantly the Citizenship pillar. This aspect emphasizes that even as youth, contributing to common good and community is essential. Being a good citizen means insuring your behavior does not negatively influence others but finds common ground.

ANR works closely with our partner agencies such as the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Virginia Farm Bureau (VFB) and the Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to insure that agricultural, natural resources and conservation programs are provided to area farmers and support their needs.

- outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days and seminars on identified issues such as new technologies, food safety and new policies, pest management, farm transitions and value added endeavors;
- establish and monitor field trials and pest occurrences;
- Assist Virginia State University (VSU) Specialists and Small Farm Agents in outreach efforts and provide meaningful classroom and field seminars to historically underserved landowners;
- Sponsor and promote the Richmond Area Vegetable Growers Conference, an annual conference for local fruit and vegetable producers;
- Hold a well water testing and educational clinic in Hanover County for landowners not on the municipal water system;
- Promote, organize and teach the annual Private Pesticide Applicators Recertification Classes for adults and youth;
- Support and promote a Pesticide Recycling Program for commercial farmers;
- Support Master Gardeners to provide general gardening, turf and landscaping educational programs through a series of Spring and Fall seminars, known as the Hanover Gardening Series (HGS), Help Desk and Speaker's Bureau;
- Work with Economic Development department to promote sustainable agriculture and expand value added products;
- Provide the Hanover County Planning Department with objective resources when planning future developments or considering changes to agricultural zoning or to comprehensive land use planning;

High Speed Internet

High speed internet access is one that VCE cannot have direct impact but be sensitive to the issue when communicating with our constituents. We will always offer hard copy publications, respond by mail or phone call requests for information, phone or in person registration for events. Within 4-H we ask youth "what is the best way to contact you". VCE will continue to be a "high touch" organization going to our community to insure equal access to knowledge, materials and programming. A mailing list of faith-based groups allows for providing available resources to a broad and fairly representative clientele, especially underserved audiences. This approach is enhanced by the many volunteers utilized in programming. By continuing to

expand and improve the volunteer outreach, we insure more residents receive what they need and want in a format that works for them.

Socioeconomic Disparity

For 4-H the economic disparity is addressed in many different and adaptable formats to increase the prospect that youth will become self-sufficient adults. By enhancing, supporting, growing and targeting life skills, youth develop characteristics that increase their resiliency and ongoing success. 4-H pursues funding that targets low income, at risk youth including afterschool programming, and scholarships for 4-H camps. Whenever possible, transportation is provided to maximize the number of youth who can participate.

The 4-H programs seek to provide the four essential elements Sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity in its programming. The social engagement of youth in 4-H activities give a sense of belonging and dispels isolation; academic/project support through mentors, leaders and other volunteers provides mastery and a sense of self confidence; exposure to new experiences and career exploration promotes independence and seeing themselves in the future. Visiting Virginia State University and Randolph-Macon Colleges are examples of expanding possibilities for youth. And finally the sense of generosity is engendered by the youth directed and initiated community service projects. Youth who volunteer, become adults who volunteer and benefit their community. By addressing the essential elements, 4-H reinforces the mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of youth. Clubs, communications arts scholarship program, project work, camp and Congress are mainstays to be continued and refined to be more accessible and effective.

Closely tied to youth well-being is their physical health. 4-H program delivery modes offer a diversity of vehicles to deliver nutrition, healthy eating, meal preparation, smart shopping and physical activity lessons. The afterschool youth participate in vigorous physical activity five days a week, considerably more than what the schools are able to provide.

4-H recognizes the broad diversity of youth and how they learn and seeks to incorporate a wide diversity of delivery modes beyond traditional clubs. The Maker Education Initiative at The Georgetown School (alternative school) has been very successful. This somewhat unique concept of education resulted in disenfranchised youth who were on the verge of school failure becoming incredibly successful, passing summer school topics of math and science. They became outgoing, engaged learners, unafraid of trying new things and feeling self-confident. We will continue to seek funding that will allow the continuation of the Georgetown site.

For ANR agent to provide classroom education and field seminars targeted to historically underserved landowners (minority, limited income) in partnership Virginia State University (Specialists and Small Farm Agents), the Virginia Association for Biological Farming (VABF), SWCD, FSA and NRCS. Targeted programs to include vegetable and fruit production, small ruminant production, livestock and forage management, and pond management and maintenance.

Continue to promote and expand the Master Gardeners' free Home Gardening Series (HGS) of Spring and Fall gardening, turf and landscaping workshops to better promote safe, practical, cost-effective and sustainable gardening and landscaping practices for all citizens.

With a volunteer manager in place, our capacity to meet the needs of the county whether a class on water conservation, the benefits of native plants, day camps for youth, animal science programs or plant/insect/disease identification is significantly expanded. Volunteers allow greater reach to address the issues most important to the quality of life for Hanover residents.

By increasing community partnerships with volunteers as an integral staffing asset, VCE can better engage underserved residents and meet community and governmental requests, needs and issues.

