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Situation Analysis Report

Lancaster County

2018

Unit Extension Faculty

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Introduction

Lancaster County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during fall 2018 and winter of 2019. The process was led by unit extension faculty, with assistance from 4-H and ANR advisory groups. It involved the creation of a Lancaster County unit profile as well as gathering community input on issues in the county. Data and information from these activities were analyzed and priority issues were identified.

The unit profile was developed using the data from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website, the Virginia Employment Commission Community Profile, agriculture census data, and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Community Profile. It was determined that the best way to gather perspectives from residents was to solicit input through electronic and paper surveys. Finally, key findings from the unit profile and surveys were discussed and the top priority issues for Lancaster County were identified, including those that could be addressed with current VCE resources and those that were outside the scope of current VCE resources.

Unit Profile

Lancaster County is located at the southeastern tip of Virginia's Northern Neck peninsula, approximately 75 miles east of Richmond and 120 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. It is bordered on the east by the Chesapeake Bay and on the south by the Rappahannock River. The port of Hampton Roads is 70 miles south. The county is comprised of 136 square miles of land and 330 miles of shoreline.

The overall population of the county has decreased by 5% since 2013. 34% of the county population is age 65 or older, while only 15% of the population of Lancaster County is under age 19. The median age of residents is 57. 69% of the population is Caucasian, while 28% is African American.

Data on household composition indicated that 57% of children live in single parent households. Another significant factor affecting the youth in Lancaster County is that 28% live in poverty, up from 22% in 2010. The state percentage is 16%. 13% of the overall population in Lancaster County lives in poverty.

Health data shows that the teenage pregnancy rate has decreased by 40% since 2010, but it still a great deal higher than the state rate. The adult obesity rate has increased by 3% to 30%.

The unemployment rate is 7.7%, almost 2 percentage points higher than the state rate. The top three employers are Rappahannock General Hospital, Lancaster County School Board, and Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury. A note to keep in mind is that the majority of

working age residents commute outside the county for employment. The median income is \$46,578. 49% of the adult population is currently in the workforce.

The high school graduation rate is 83%, while 32% of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Data gathered from the 2012 Census of Agriculture indicated that at that time there were 61 farms involved in active agricultural production on 10,695 acres in Lancaster County. Grain and soybean production accounted for a majority of the acreage reported. The Lancaster census report specified that 3,331 acres had been planted in beans, 2,840 acres in grain corn, and 1,761 in wheat. Since the release of 2012 data, Lancaster farmers have begun investigating the use of rape seed as an alternative winter crop in the place of some wheat acreage. Lancaster County also houses several direct market vegetable operations and cow calf operations totaling 238 head.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Community surveys were distributed via several means to reach as many residents as possible in all segments and demographics of the population. Distribution was through email, social media promotion, and US Mail.

Specific issues identified were aging issues, health care, internet accessibility, positive youth activities, availability of higher education options, poverty, agriculture sustainability/preservation and support, community services, K-12 education, affordable housing, opioid awareness and prevention, nutrition and obesity, and economic development.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data, the following top priority issues were identified for Lancaster County that can be addressed with current VCE resources.

Issue 1: Agriculture sustainability/preservation and support

Description: Among farmers, agricultural land preservation ranked highly as an issue that could be addressed by VCE. The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported that 61 farms had 10,695 acres of land involved in active agricultural production at that time in Lancaster County. When compared to the 2007 Census of Agriculture report, land in agricultural production saw a 24% reduction and total number of farms decreased 5% between 2007 and 2012. According to the United States Census Bureau 42.7 % of Lancaster County's Population is above the age of 60. A majority of that group are people who relocate to Lancaster following their retirement. As retirees continue to migrate to Lancaster County, more and more land, traditionally used for agricultural production, is being developed for housing. Farmers are better able to retain their current acreages when they are economically profitable. Profitability can be improved through efficient production practices and strategic marketing.

VCE's role in addressing this issue: Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agents of the Northern Neck provide trainings for local producers at which attendees are provided with current information on new production practices, market updates and strategies, and innovative management options. They are also provided trainings necessary to legally manage their crops. Agents also offer individual support to producers with the assistance of Virginia Tech's on campus diagnostic laboratories. Moving forward, agents will provide additional focus on assisting producers further by identifying alternative crops such as industrial hemp that may provide farmers the opportunity to obtain a premium for their product, as well as spread risk by diversifying their cropping system. Agents will also work to strengthen the relationship between farmers and residents through educational programs with the goal of creating a positive perception of agriculture in the community. Agents will also work with the Northern Neck land conservancy to encourage land owners to place properties into conservation easements, so that land will remain in agricultural production.

Issue 2: Positive youth development and education

Description: Positive youth development and education was identified as the second most pressing issue in Lancaster County. A need exists to develop youth activities that promote positive youth development where youth grow into successful adults. In light of current poverty levels and the number of single parent households in the county, many youth lack strong parental involvement and positive role models. There is also a negative view of youth in the community. It is difficult for many youth to be involved in organizations outside of school because of lack of transportation, with so many adults working outside the county. The population in the public school division is declining, with many youth being homeschooled, going to private school, or going to school in neighboring divisions. Enrichment and after school opportunities in the public school system have decreased significantly due to funding.

VCE's role in addressing this issue: Since 2008, the Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Neck and the Northern Neck YMCA have increased opportunities with children. 4-H has built a strong partnership with both of these organizations, and we envision this to continue. Because of the rural nature of the community, it is important for VCE to partner with other youth serving organizations to provide the most impactful programming without duplicating efforts. The VCE 4-H Youth Development agent, with assistance from other unit faculty and volunteers such as the Northern Neck Master Gardeners, will continue to collaborate with the school system to provide more in school enrichment programs, as these can reach the most youth where they are.

Scholarships are provided for 4-H Junior camp to allow all youth who want to attend, regardless of financial need, the opportunity.

The 4-H agent also promotes 4-H programs and the positive impact they have on youth through many types of media, including Facebook and the newspaper. This is done in hopes of showing youth in the unit in a positive light.

Issue 3: Nutrition and Obesity

Description: Chronic disease and health risk factors plague Lancaster County and affect all ages, segments, and income levels. The county's risk factors (i.e. obesity) are higher than the

state average due to many reasons, including the high concentration of residents age 65 and older, the high percentage of residents living below the poverty level, and the lack of transportation to health care facilities and healthy food options. Another factor contributing to this is the high rate of free and reduced lunch eligible youth in the public schools (63%). These youth are guaranteed 2 meals a day at school, but are often food insecure at home.

VCE's role in addressing this issue: Serving this county, we have both an adult and youth program assistant with the FNP program. These professionals provide nutrition and healthy living programming in many settings, including the public schools and health departments. The 4-H agent partners with these individuals to provide research-based nutrition programming in the schools, as well as offering healthy living programming outside of school (i.e. food challenge teams).