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Lee County Extension Office 2023 Situation Analysis Report



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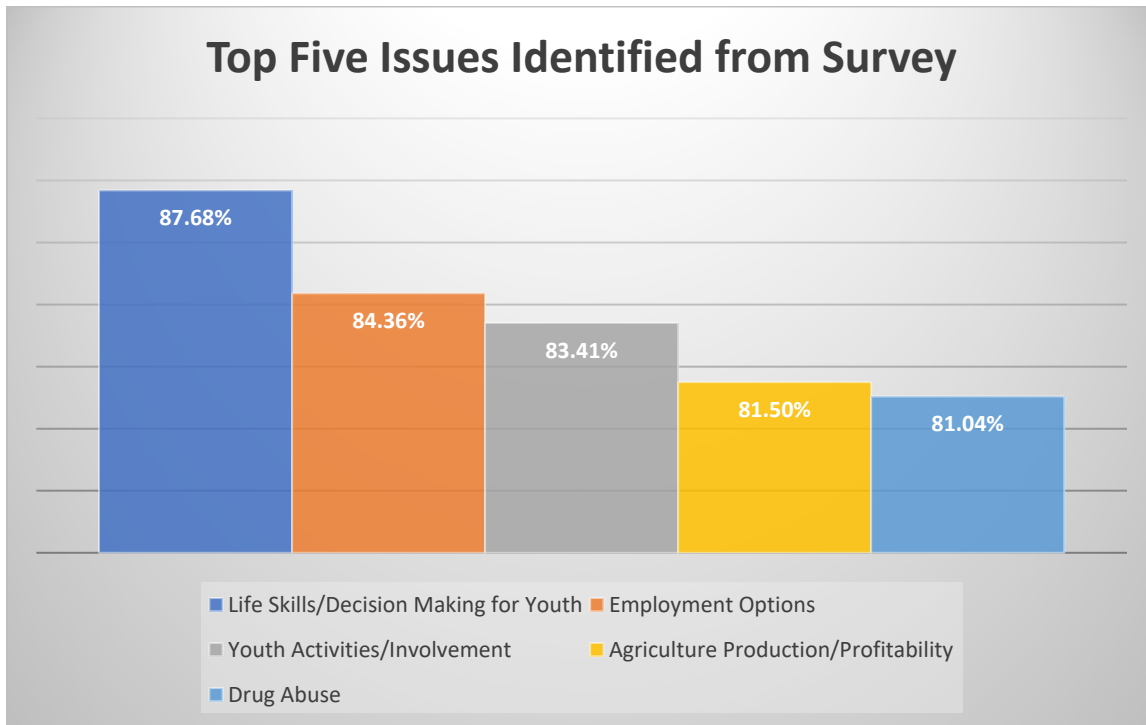


Figure 1: Number of respondents who selected top five issues as very important.

Summary of Community Issues and Extension Office Response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth	4-H Programming including Reality Store and Kid's Market Place.
Youth Activities/Involvement	4-H Programming including special interest clubs.
Employment Options	ANR & FCS Programming surrounding options for entrepreneurship.
Agriculture Production/Profitability	ANR Programming focused on farm business management and increasing production.
Drug Abuse	FCS & 4-H Programming focused on preventing with youth called Health Rocks.

Introduction

Lee County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the summer and early fall of 2023. Using the 2018 Situation Analysis as a starting point, the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met two times to discuss past issues and identify present ones. A community survey was created using QUALTRICS, online survey tool. Emails containing the survey link were distributed by all unit staff to their work/personal contacts, including ELC members, with a request that the survey be completed before October 30, 2023. A public service announcement was also run in the Powell Valley News, giving the reason for the situation analysis and the link for the survey. In addition, unit staff posted the public service announcement to their work Facebook. Hard copies of the survey were made available at the Extension Office. Staff and ELC Members also had surveys available at events and a raffle was offered for those who participated. As a result of these efforts, 211 surveys were submitted by the community.

Unit Profile

Lee County is a rural county located in extreme Southwest Virginia. It borders Bell and Harlan Counties in Kentucky, Hancock and Claiborne Counties in Tennessee and Wise and Scott Counties in Virginia. The county contains 438 square miles and has abundances of natural resources that include timber, coal, limestone, crude oil, and natural gas. Lee County is located 396 miles from Richmond, the state capitol. There are two incorporated towns located within the county: Jonesville (the county seat) and Pennington Gap.

The 2020 Census data indicated a total population of 22,482 for Lee County. Lee County's 2020 Census showed that 52.74% of the population was male and 47.26% female. White is the predominate race with 92.88% of the population followed by 3.74% black or African American and 2.04% Hispanic. According to the 2020 Census, the median household income is \$37,574.

According to U.S. Census Bureau, 76.74% of the population graduated from high school or higher and 11.1% obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Lee County has five elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools with an enrollment of 2,949 students. The dropout rate for Lee County School System for 2023 is 11.1% according to Virginia Department of Education.

According to the "County Health Rankings & Roadmaps for 2023" by the Department of Health, 21% of Lee County's residents have poor to fair quality of health. 39% of the population are considered obese and 30% are physically inactive. 26% of the population are smokers and 17% are heavy drinkers. According to the Health Rankings, 34% of children live in poverty in Lee County.

Lee County was formerly known for coal, cattle, and tobacco with economic downturns in the coal and tobacco industry the county has struggled. Appalachian Regional Commission designates Lee County as an economically distressed county. According to the Virginia Employment Commission, the largest employers in Lee County include the Lee County School Board in first place, U.S. Department of Justice as second, third as Wal-Mart, fourth as Lee County Government, and fifth Lee Nursing & Rehabilitation. Lee County is home to the federal prison known as UPS Lee that appears second on this list. 70.53% of those living in Lee County and working are commuting outside of Lee County for work. Only 29.47% living in Lee County and working actually work in Lee County. The unemployment rate for Lee County as of October 2023 was 3.7% compared to 3.0% in Virginia, and 3.6% for the United States.

According to the 2017 Agriculture Census, Lee County's agriculture receipts were \$18,393,000. Livestock sales dominate Lee County's production, with 74% of the total cash receipts with crops producing only 26%. The average farm in Lee County was 114 acres and there were 830 farms. This is a decrease in number of farms of 18% since the 2012 Agriculture Census. The county had an inventory of 21,915 of cattle and calves, making it the 21st in the state for production. In 2017, there were still 386 acre of tobacco acres, meaning Lee County was

16th in the state for tobacco production. Since 2017 tobacco acreages has decreased dramatically to less than 50 acres.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Lee County Situation Analysis Survey was answered by 211 participants. 74.4% of those that completed the survey were women and 22.75% were male. 7.5% of those completing the survey were 18-29 years old, 21.33% were 30-39 years old, 23.7% were 40-49 years old, 22.75% were 50-59 years old, 8.06% were 60-64 years old, and 13.74% were 65 years old and older. Highlights for highest level of education obtained of participants was 10.9% earned a high school diploma/GED, 29.86% had some college, 30.33% were college graduates, and 14.22% earned a Master's Degree. 92.42% of participants identify as white, 0.47% identify as black or African American, 0.47% identify as Hispanic, and 4.27% preferred not to share.

Selected comments from survey when asked for program ideas, comments, or direction of programming:

“Meal Preparation and Cooking”

“Programs for youth and elderly. Back to the basics of farming, housekeeping, parenting skills, and life skills”

“In Lee County, Virginia, I believe Extension and community programs should focus on several key areas to foster community growth, well-being, and economic development. 1. **Agricultural Development**: Given that rural communities often have strong ties to agriculture, Extension programs could focus on sustainable farming methods, livestock management, and local food production. These could benefit not just farmers but the community at large. 2. **Youth Engagement**: Initiatives aimed at youth, such as 4-H clubs, can offer educational opportunities outside of school. These programs can focus on skill-building in areas like technology, leadership, and community service, providing a constructive outlet for young people. 3. **Health and Wellness**: Given the ongoing healthcare challenges, programs focusing on preventive healthcare, nutritional education, and physical activity can make a long-term impact. Programs targeting elder care and mental health can also be extremely beneficial. 4. **Small Business Support**: Entrepreneurial workshops, coupled with financial literacy classes, can help local businesses thrive. This could be vital in creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth in Lee County. 5. **Cultural and Art Programs**: Investing in local talent through art and cultural programs can not only enrich the community but also make it more attractive for tourism, thereby generating additional revenue. 6. **Environment and Sustainability**: Educational programs focusing on environmental conservation and sustainability practices can help protect Lee County's natural beauty for future generations. 7. **Community Centers**: A multipurpose community center could serve as a hub for many of these programs, offering a centralized location for learning, activity, and community building. By focusing on these areas, Extension and community programs can aim for a holistic development strategy that caters to the diverse needs of Lee County's population.”

“We need more for our youth activities to help them evolve into good citizens”

“There need to be more opportunities for youth who are being raised in a non-farming, non-agriculture environment to learn more and be involved more. Also, I would like to see more local outreach for or food banks and supporting our older population with meals and help.”

“Any programs for youth development in agriculture.”

“Help develop young leaders that value the culture in Lee County and have a desire to be part of its success in the future.”

“Much needs to be done about drug abuse in Lee County.”

“The direction for community programs here in Lee County should definitely be geared toward teaching our youth; they are our future! There are many skills that have been lost through the generations such as food

preservation, cropping, and harvesting. I believe a great cash crop course would be great, especially if geared toward our youth.”

“Continuing education for livestock health and parasite control.”

A statewide needs assessment was conducted in 2023 as well. This survey responders were more from urban areas and had more male participation than compared to Lee County. The survey had 76% responders from urban communities and only 24% from rural. Age demographics of responders were similar for both surveys, but race varied between the two. For the state survey, 66% of responders were white, 18% were black or African American, 5% were Asian, and 11% were multiple race/other. Top issues identified included protecting water quality with 75% sharing it as very important, ensuring high quality food with 73%, ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent food borne illness with 69%, protecting freshwater resources with 68%, and strengthen the local food system with 67%. Overall, the state survey showed more emphasis on food safety and water quality compared to the Lee County survey with economics, youth, and agriculture.

Community Issues

The top five key issues for Lee County were identified from the community survey. These issues were selected based on participants rating these issues as very important.

Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth

87.68% of participants selected “Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth” as very important. Youth today are often not given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes or to make decisions for themselves. Life skills especially soft skills are key to a successful future. Youth need opportunities to learn for themselves in a safe environment.

Employment Options

Employment in Lee County has become a major issue and the survey results show this with 84.36% selecting “Employment Options” as a very important issue. Lee County’s residents predominately travel outside the county for employment. Many higher paying jobs with the mining industry have disappeared and many finding jobs that do not pay as well. Higher level science-based jobs have been reduced due to loss of the hospital in the county and the mining industry.

Youth Activities/Involvement

As youth is our future, 83.41% said that “Youth Activities” were very important. Youth development can be an issue for rural counties with limited opportunities. Lee County does not have a YMCA or Boy’s Club or Girl’s Club. There are limited youth opportunities beyond sports.

Agriculture Production/Profitability

Agriculture is a major economic contributor in Lee County and 81.5% said that “Agriculture Production/Profitability” is a very important issue. Agriculture’s cash receipts were over eighteen million dollars for the 2017 Census. In the past, agriculture was a major economic contributor to the community.

Drug Abuse

The opioid epidemic has had a major effect on the area with 81.04% selecting “Drug Abuse” as a very important issue. Prevention and recovery programs have been very limited in the area. Many youths are being raised by grandparents due to drug abuse in the family.

Additional Issues Identified

- Water Quality- 78.20%
- Local Foods Production (Agriculture)- 77.73%
- Aging Population/Long-Term Care- 77.25%

- Animal Livestock Production- 76.3%
- Alternative Agriculture- 73.93%
- Health/Preventative Health- 72.5%

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth

Lee County Extension Office offers many programs through 4-H that assist with youth learning life skills and decision making. These programs include Reality Store (financial simulator), overnight 4-H Camp, and special interest clubs. Additional programs that could be offered to assist include Kid's Market Place (financial simulator for younger youth) and more focus on in-school programs related to this topic.

Employment Options

Lee County Extension Office has limited to programs related to employment options. Family and Consumer Science Programming Area along with the Agriculture and Natural Resource Programming Area could team together to provide more training for entrepreneurs. In addition, 4-H programming could focus on career options and entrepreneur skills.

Youth Activities/Involvement

4-H is key to offering activities to foster opportunities and growth for youth. Lee County Extension offers a 4-H program that includes camping, in-school enrichment, agricultural interest clubs, and leadership opportunities.

Agriculture Production/Profitability

Lee County Extension Office offers an extensive amount of agriculture production programming including Pasture Walks, artificial insemination courses, Beef Quality Assurance Training, pesticides training, small ruminant workshops, and soil testing. More emphasis on farm business management could be place in the future to assist farmers in being profitable on the farm.

Drug Abuse

Lee County Extension Office currently does not offer programming related to drug abuse. In the future, the 4-H Program could offer Health Rocks as a prevention programming. In addition, programming focused on training youth and community members as peer counselors for addiction could take place with assistance from the Lee County Extension Office.

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