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Louisa Unit 2023 Situation Analysis Report

Jennifer Thompson, 4-H Youth Extension Agent, and Unit Coordinator; Charles Rosson, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent; Crysti Hopkins, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent; Susan Colvin, Family and Nutrition Program Assistant; Bridgitte Groome, 4-H Program Assistant



Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Youth Life Skill Development	Provide educational and social opportunities that are developmentally appropriate, provide structure, and the opportunity to develop positive relationships with caring adults.
Preservation of Farm and Forest Land	Provide educational opportunities to the county’s residents and landowners to promote the preservation of agriculture and forest lands.
Agriculture Sustainability	Work with partner agencies to provide education to farmers to enhance agriculture sustainability
Promoting Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Literacy	Work with partner agencies to educate, increase communication, and provide infrastructure to promote agriculture, natural resources, and environmental literacy

Introduction

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) takes pride in the premise that vital programming is based on the issues, problems, and needs of the people. A thorough analysis of the situation provides context for understanding these problems. This is a process of determining what situations exist at local, regional, and state levels, and for determining which problems have become issues of major public concern. Situation analysis provides the foundation and rationale for deciding which problems should receive the time, energy, and resources of VCE.

Data was collected through surveys (response rate n=89) and a facilitated discussion with a focus group.

Unit Profile

Louisa County is in the Central Piedmont region of Virginia near the geographic center of the state. Louisa County's border is approximately 15 miles west of the Greater Richmond area, 25 miles east of Charlottesville, 25 miles south of Fredericksburg and 95 miles southwest of the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The incorporated towns of Mineral and Louisa are located within the county borders. Lake Anna, home to Dominion Energy's Nuclear Power station provides hundreds of miles of lake front property and is a thriving center for recreational activities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the 2022 population estimate is 40,116. The population in Louisa County has increased by 6.7% from 2020 to 2022. The estimates indicate population growth increased from 37,596 to 40,116. Louisa's population has continued to expand at a very high rate, particularly in the western end of the county. The growth has put extreme pressure on the agricultural and forestry sectors. In addition, the water needs of the county have increased exponentially. The school system needs have also increased with the expanded development. Urban sprawl has continued to cause concerns as the county seeks to protect its rural character and heritage.

As identified through the focus group and key informant interviews, Louisa County's location along an interstate (I-64), between Charlottesville (to the west), Richmond (to the east), and the metropolitan area of Washington DC (to the north), presents both opportunities and threats. Opportunities for direct market sales, wholesale, and agritourism. Education in the schools related to agriculture is strong with a good working relationship between the 4-H and FFA programs for youth. The County has a long history of agriculture with a wide variety of agricultural operations/commodities and is very community focused.

Due to the proximity to growing cities with urban sprawl there are opportunities to welcome and educate new residents about the history, importance/benefits/needs of the agricultural community in Louisa County, including elected officials and staff. There is competition for large wholesale markets that can be challenging.

Land preservation is important and a struggle with increasing interest in solar collection facilities and pressure of development paired with increasing interest rates and values of farmland. A lack of meeting space for both youth programs (4-H), producer groups, and possible teaching facilities for vocational education were presented. Labor shortages are another threat to the agriculture community.

According to United States Census Bureau 2022 data, the poverty level in Louisa County was 10.7%, slightly below the state average 11.5%. The Research Division of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis reports the unemployment rate in Louisa County as of December 2023 was 2.4% compared to the state rate of 3% as reported by the Virginia Employment Commission.

According to the 2022 agriculture census, Louisa County experienced a 242% increase in agriculture receipts from (\$14,971,000) in 2017 to (\$36,360,000) in 2022. Livestock and Poultry sales represent 51% of receipts with Grain sales representing 49%.

Table 1. 2022 estimated racial population of Louisa County (U.S. Census Bureau)

Race	Number	Percentage
White	32,614	81.3
Black	5,897	14.7
American Indian/Alaskan Native	230	0.5
Asian	281	0.7
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	40	0.1
Two or more races	1,083	2.7
Hispanic	1,730	4.2

Community and Resident Perspectives

Survey response was very low despite efforts to distribute the survey through social media, flyers, events, personal invitations, churches, and targeted leaders in underserved communities from May 2023 to November 2023. Respondents were presented with multiple sets of issues and asked to identify the level of effort VCE-Louisa should allocate to each issue.

Percentage of survey respondents selecting high or very high effort is needed for the issue
87% - Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
80% - Strengthening the local food system
79% - Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth
75% - Protecting water quality
75%-Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy
73%-Preserving farm and forest land

Community Issues

Based on the unit profile data analyzed, and responses from the focus group, the following top priorities were identified for Louisa County:

- Youth life skill development
- Preservation of Farm and Forest Land
- Agriculture Sustainability
- Promoting Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Literacy

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Youth life skill development

Youth today are bombarded with choices and pressures of drugs and alcohol, gangs, unhealthy lifestyles, and negative role models. To offset all the negative choices available, youth need positive activities and opportunities. VCE-Louisa will provide educational and social opportunities that are developmentally appropriate, provide structure, and the opportunity to develop positive relationships with caring adults. By offering programs that build character, instill strong values, and teach a variety of life skills and decision making, we will work to prevent youth from seeking acceptance and satisfaction from negative sources. Through partnerships with the Louisa County Public Schools, Louisa County Parks and Recreation and other organizations, VCE-Louisa will work to provide opportunities for youth and teens to develop leadership skills, mentor younger children and to volunteer in the community. Programming will be provided through a variety of delivery modes including 4-H clubs, 4-H camp, in-school programming, workshops, and forums.

Preservation of Farm and Forest Land

In support of Louisa County's Vision Statement of the Farm and Forest Sustainability Program, "We strengthen our sense of community by providing resources for residents, promoting agriculture and forestry, ensuring environmental stewardship, establishing reasonable growth areas, and maintaining our rural character.", the following programs are suggested to be held to educate our county's residents and landowners. Each individual needs to be aware that agriculture and forestry are major contributors to Louisa County's economy through the sale of timber and agricultural products, employment, and the associated support businesses. Agriculture and forestry provide direct benefits such as the protection of public water supply watersheds, preservation of the natural landscape and open space, conservation of wildlife, and the less costly service of delivery needs.

The following programs will be offered in Louisa County to provide the education needed to make decisions.

- Farm and Forest Sustainability Program
- Land Use Taxation
- Heirs' Property: Avoiding and solving cases of at the local level.
- Conservation Easements
- Approximately 3 different organizations to present on the conservation easements offered.
- Panel of 3 to 4 landowners to explain their experiences in establishing easements in the county.
- USDA & State Agencies: local department representatives to present on their current programs being offered to benefit agriculture and the conservation of natural resources in our area.
- Farm Transition Planning Generation Next – forest land transition

The programs listed above will cover top priorities of the citizens in our county which were listed as protecting water quality, promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy and well as serve as an effort in preserving farm and forest land. To further protect water quality, each year a household water quality test is offered to county residents.

Agriculture Sustainability

The production of cattle and calves is the number two ranked agricultural enterprise in the State of Virginia, only second to broiler production. The 1650 producers in the counties of Louisa, Orange, Madison, Albemarle, Nelson, Greene, and Fluvanna account for 90,000 head or 15% of Virginia's total cow/calf inventory. These Central Virginia communities face the reality of rapid residential development that threatens the very existence of the region's cattle operations and family farms. If these cattle operations are not sustainable, valuable farmland and natural resources will be lost forever. The communities could be transformed to unusable agricultural states and face the risk of losing their rural character.

Virginia Cooperative Extension's Agriculture and Natural Resource agents in Louisa, Orange, Albemarle, and Fluvanna counties have developed extended learning opportunities for residents in Central Virginia to improve

the sustainability and management of their cattle farms. Through partnering with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water District, Extension has led the effort to protect water quality and soil health by encouraging farmers to participate in conservation programs. These programs include shoreline exclusion fencing and proper grazing practices. Extension led in the formation of the Central Virginia Cattleman Association in 1998 as a means for education and marketing cooperation. The Central Virginia Cow-Calf Short Course was developed to cover beef cow-calf management, genetics, nutrition, herd health and animal husbandry. In addition, the Louisa Cattleman's Club was formed to provide a forum for local cattle producers to share and learn from one another while also receiving research-based lectures and instruction to further enhance their learning experience. These meetings along with the addition of newsletters and on farm consultation visits by extension staff have worked to solidify this effort.

Promoting agricultural, natural, resources, and environmental literacy

The Louisa Ag Visioning Forum consisted of a facilitated focus group and follow-up key informant interviews to help set direction of the VCE programming and the initiatives that VCE will pursue with community partners. There was a strong buy-in from the Louisa County ag community to support the growth and viability of this economic sector for not only the stewardship of the land but for current and future generations. As a result of the Ag Visioning Forum the community came together to start planning a Louisa Ag Complex that will provide the necessary infrastructure to support the three common themes resulting from the Forum.

Education - for youth and of residents about agriculture

There are numerous opportunities for Louisa County and the agriculture community to prosper and develop long lasting infrastructure and impact for decades to come. The group can focus on education for youth and residents about agriculture. This can include continued support of 4-H and FFA programs, partnering with the Louisa County Public Schools to provide a 4th grade Agriculture Day, supporting the Louisa County Fair, and ensuring agriculture stays as the focus, and providing education for the next generation of ag producers, supporters, and leaders in the community and beyond.

Communication/Marketing

Work on collaborative communication amongst the agriculture support organizations about opportunities for farmers as well as youth program opportunities (ex. 4-H, FFA). Provide more or new marketing efforts about the good work and history of the agricultural community. Incorporate non-ag residents in conversations to better understand and successfully market and educate them about Louisa agriculture and collaborate with non-ag organizations to build support and capacity for the ag community to thrive. Investigate collaborative opportunities for marketing of products and services of Louisa County farms or regional agriculture production.

Facilities

To support agriculture, youth programs, and provide continuity, VCE-Louisa will work with the County and partners including Louisa Farm Bureau, Farm Credit, and the Louisa County Public Schools to provide infrastructure to support 4-H and FFA programs, and the Louisa County Fair.

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