



## Situation Analysis Report



# Mecklenburg County 2018

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## Introduction

The Mecklenburg Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension, along with the Extension Leadership Council and key stakeholders, completed a Situation Analysis in 2018. Through focus groups, surveys, and input from key informative leaders and stakeholders, several important issues were identified that will guide local programming efforts (not listed in priority order):

1. Development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce Skills in Youth
2. Agriculture and Local Foods Awareness
3. Food Safety
4. Health and Nutrition
5. Profitable Agriculture and Natural Resources

## Unit Profile

Mecklenburg County is a rural county located in Southside Virginia. Mecklenburg borders North Carolina to the south (Warren, Vance, and Granville Counties), Brunswick County to the east, Halifax County to the west, and Charlotte and Lunenburg Counties to the north. Mecklenburg has five incorporated towns within the county: South Hill, Chase City, Clarksville, La Crosse, and Boydton. Mecklenburg County also has portions of Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston within its borders which attract vacationers and retirees.

### Population Data

The U.S Census Bureau estimated the population of Mecklenburg County as 30,686 in 2017. This number has fallen from 32,380 noted in the 2010 census. The Census Bureau predicts that the population of Mecklenburg County will continue to fall over the next decade, whereas the number of residents in the state as a whole is expected to grow.

The population of Mecklenburg County is older than the state average, with declining numbers of school age children. As a result, the school board is currently moving forward with plans to consolidate the two county high schools and two middle schools.

The County's racial make-up has undergone very little change in the last ten years. As of 2010, Mecklenburg County population is 59.25% white and 37.12% African American. The Hispanic and Asian populations remained constant at only 2% and .69% of the population, respectively, after seeing relatively large increases between 1990 and 2000.

### Income and Poverty Data

Median household income has increased from \$36,069 in 2011 to \$41,126 in 2017, which is approximately 60% of the state average. The number of persons living at or below poverty level has decreased in recent years to 16.9% of the population as a whole. However, 23% of youth and 13% of seniors are still considered to be living in poverty. Over 64% of students enrolled in Mecklenburg County Public School receive free or reduced lunch. As a result,

Mecklenburg County employs a SNAP-Ed paraprofessional who focuses on nutrition education for elementary school students.

## **Education**

The Mecklenburg County School System is comprised of four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools with a total student population of 4,215. The schools have made improvements in recent years with SOL test scoring and, as of 2018, all schools are fully accredited. The school board has recently implemented changes to its curriculum in order to align with VDOE's newly released Profile of a Virginia Graduate. While nearly 82% of Mecklenburg residents have at least a high school diploma, only 18.2% hold a Bachelor's degree, about half the rate of Virginia as a whole. The low numbers are discouraging because there are two community colleges within thirty miles of the county, which also offer satellite classes in three of the county's five towns.

## **Economic Conditions and Employment**

Economic conditions are improving for Mecklenburg County residents. The unemployment rate is less than 4%, down from over 10% in 2013. This rate mirrors the US average but remains slightly higher than the state figures. Just over 5300 residents live and work in the county, while over 7300 commute to neighboring counties for work. VCU hospital, which opened a new facility in 2017, is the county's largest employer followed by the school system, and Global Safety Textiles. The county has seen an economic boost from the construction of a Microsoft data center in Boydton. Microsoft is now the county's 13<sup>th</sup> largest employer, recently announcing plans for continued expansion.

## **Community Health**

According to the 2018 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, Mecklenburg County ranks 107 out of 133 counties for health outcomes. This refers to how healthy Mecklenburg County is when compared with other counties within the state. The healthiest county in the state is ranked #1. The ranks are based on two types of measures: length of life and quality of life. The premature mortality for Mecklenburg County is 9,900. This number includes all deaths among people under age 75. The leading causes of premature death in the county include: malignant neoplasms, heart disease, accidents, diabetes mellitus, and cerebrovascular diseases. The percentage of adults reporting fair or poor health is 19% with diabetes prevalence at 16%.

Mecklenburg County also ranks 98 in health factors (what influences the health of a county). This score is an estimate of the future health of a county as compared to other counties within a state. This rank is based on four types of measures: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment factors. The most striking health behaviors for Mecklenburg County include: adult obesity at 31% and physical inactivity is at 27%. The food insecurity rate was 16%. The social and economic measure also indicated that 26% of children live in poverty in the county.

## **Agriculture**

The Agricultural trends in Mecklenburg County continue to mirror those at the state level. The number of farms and land in farms continue to decline, while the average size of farms has increased. Farm income increased 46 percent between the 2007 and 2012 Ag census. The most significant change in economic characteristics was in farms with value of sales over \$500,000, which increased 69 percent. This was predicted during the last situation analysis before the release of the 2012 Ag Census data. Also it was predicted for the 2013 Situation Analysis that beef cattle numbers were declining in the County due to farm consolidation and increased acreage of soybeans. Beef Cattle numbers declined 33 percent between the 2007 and 2012 Ag Census with further declines predicted to be reported in the 2017 Ag Census. The data from the most recent 2017 Ag Census is not available currently, but farm income levels will probably be stagnant in this report. However, more concerning is the fact that farm income for 2018 is down approximately 30 percent due to lower flue-cured tobacco production combined with weather induced 30 percent decline in yields. Prices for other commodities were also depressed in 2018. The prospect for farm income in 2019 is dismal. Flue-cured tobacco production will be 40 to 50 percent below 2017 levels with the outlook on soybean and corn prices also bearish. Producers are fervently searching for alternative crops to replace lost income from tobacco production. With the passage of 2018 Farm Bill, there has been an incredible interest in producing Industrial hemp as a means to supplement farm income.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

The Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met for an overview and discussion for the 2018 situation analysis update. A survey was developed based on priority issues determined in the most recent situation analysis. The survey was distributed by agents and ELC members to county residents at various informational and community outreach events. Participants were then asked to identify their top issues and explain why they felt that issue must be addressed. This included any NEW issues identified by respondents not previously noted in earlier situation analyses.

Unit ELC and staff members also conducted key informant interviews and participated in community forums. One such forum was a listening session hosted by Microsoft during which community leaders conducted a SWOT analysis for Mecklenburg County. Additionally, a group of local high school students conducted a community needs assessment as part of the Tech Changemakers grant program from Microsoft and National 4-H Council.

Based on the information collected through the above listed methods, priority issues were determined and strategies were developed to guide Extension's efforts to address these issues.

## Priority Issues

### Issue – Development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce Skills in Youth

Description: While the economy has improved significantly in recent years, Mecklenburg continues to struggle to recruit new employers. This is due in large part to lack of job skills among county residents. Economic issues affect youth in addition to adults and are related to education issues. Due to the poor condition of many of the aging school buildings, the county is planning to build a new consolidated upper school complex while it struggles to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. Many homes in the county lack affordable internet access, and the average family income lags behind the state average. In order to attract new industry and high-paying jobs to Mecklenburg, the county needs a workforce with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. To reach this goal, students need career-connected educational opportunities and the chance to learn and practice soft skills including leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem solving skills. The importance of these opportunities is highlighted in VDOE's Profile of a Virginia Graduate. Information technology and computer science related fields are predicted to have major shortages of skilled workers in coming years. For this reason, students need STEM education beginning early in their school careers.

A number of surveys pointed out, however, that young people also need time to “unplug” and interact with nature and with their peers and adults.

VCE's Role in Addressing this Issue: 4-H will continue to offer a variety of programs through a number of delivery modes that are designed to help youth develop life skills. In-school programs will focus on STEM education for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Economic education efforts will continue through the implementation of Kids' Marketplace, Real Money Real World, and Reality Store programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels respectively. 4-H Camp and Club experiences will encourage soft skill development and will offer opportunities for long-term involvement for area youth. Teens will be given opportunities to apply what they have learned and further develop their knowledge and skills through leadership and teaching experiences.

### Issue – Food Safety

Description: Beginning July 1, 2018, The Virginia Board of Health revised the Virginia Food Regulations (12VACS-421-55) to require all temporary food vendors to obtain a permit and “have at least one employee with supervisory and management responsibility and the authority to direct and control food preparation and service who is a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM)” (VDH, 2018). The ServSafe® Food Manager Food Protection Certification meets this requirement. Additionally, “The FDA food code requires that the person in charge of a foodservice operation become a Certified Food Protection Manager. That person must be onsite at all times during operating hours” ([https://www.servsafe.com/Instructors-Proctors/Manager-Instructor-Resources/Docs/10-2018-Update/Docs/SS\\_Mgr7\\_Instr\\_Change\\_2018\\_FoodCodeUpdate.aspx](https://www.servsafe.com/Instructors-Proctors/Manager-Instructor-Resources/Docs/10-2018-Update/Docs/SS_Mgr7_Instr_Change_2018_FoodCodeUpdate.aspx)).

VCE's Role in Addressing this Issue: Because there will be occasions when the Certified Food Protection Manager may be off premises during operating hours, additional staff will require food protection manager certification. The closest Food Protection Manager training classes are approximately 80 miles from Mecklenburg County. With the Mecklenburg FCS Agent being a ServSafe® Certified Instructor and Registered Exam Proctor the increase in demand for certification, may be met locally with manager certification classes.

### **Issue – Health & Nutrition**

Description: In Mecklenburg County, approximately 16% of adults have type 2 diabetes. This disease is characterized by high amounts of blood glucose. Blood glucose is the body's main source of energy and requires the hormone insulin to move from the blood into the cells. Diabetes occurs when not enough insulin is produced or the body doesn't use insulin well. Over time, having too much glucose causes health problems including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, amputations, and eye problems among others. Medical expenses for people with diabetes is 3.5 times more than the medical expenses of those without the disease. Helping people with diabetes learn to improve their blood sugar control can significantly decrease the health problems and medical costs resulting from the disease.

VCE's Role in Addressing this Issue: The Balanced Living with Diabetes class will be offered multiple times annually in Mecklenburg County. VCE specialists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise will support this program with educational materials and testing supplies, grant support and research assistance with the collection and analyzing of subject data. Health professionals from VCU-CMH will also lend their support for class presentations. Mecklenburg FCS will market the program and provide food demonstrations throughout the course of seven classes providing education on meal planning, portion control and preparation of meals that are conducive for individuals with Type 2 diabetes.

### **Issue - Agriculture and Local Foods Awareness**

Description: Even in a rural county like Mecklenburg, many residents are not knowledgeable of agricultural practices or the diverse nature of the commodities produced. The non-farming public is becoming more interested and concerned with how and where their food is being produced. This can produce misunderstanding between the public and the agricultural producers. It has also stimulated interest to produce commodities locally for direct market.

VCE's role in addressing this issue: VCE Agents will collaborate with other agencies such as USDA FSA, USDA NRCS, local Soil and Water District, and the Southern Virginia Maker's Market (Food Hub), producers, and interested civic groups to provide educational opportunities for residents on agricultural production practices and how these commodities are used in products that we use every day. Also programs will be offered to better educate residents on local food production, preservation, marketing and food safety. The Mecklenburg County Extension Demonstration Garden will be maintained to increase awareness of local food options in the county.

## **Issue - Profitable Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Description: Agriculture is Mecklenburg County's largest industry. Mecklenburg County ranks second in flue-cured tobacco production in the state, while also producing significant acreage of soybeans and small grains. The majority of producers also raise beef cattle. The recent dramatic decreases in flue-cured tobacco production contracts and depressed commodity grain prices are pressuring farm income and profitability. Producers are aggressively searching for profitable enterprises to include in their farming operations.

VCE's role in addressing this issue: VCE can provide producers with unbiased information and perspective to assist producers evaluating new enterprises for their operations. VCE can continue to assist producers in evaluating existing enterprises with the latest management research results allowing producers to reduce input cost while maintaining and improving yield. Grain producers are provided information on varieties and other production practices to improve yield while controlling costs. VCE assists beef producers in adding value to their feeder calves through local Virginia Quality Assured feeder cattle sales and reducing the costs through education to improve grazing practices. Private and Commercial Pesticide applicators are provided educational opportunities to maintain their certification and comply with government and environmental regulations.