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Situation Analysis Report



Pittsylvania County

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Introduction

The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) – Pittsylvania County Office conducted a Situation Analysis beginning in fall of 2018. The process began with VCE – Pittsylvania County staff members examining the Unit Profile data sets provided by VCE and identifying pertinent information. Staff members then identified key stakeholder groups within the respective program areas and developed a strategy for obtaining relevant data. This program development included identifying groups and individuals as well as developing effective survey tools for each participating entity. VCE – Pittsylvania County distributed surveys to 275 individuals and received input through an 81% return rate. Individuals surveyed included the membership of the Pittsylvania County Cattlemen's Association, Virginia Tobacco Growers Association, each Principal within the Pittsylvania County School System, various educators and key stakeholder producers representing each of the main cropping systems in the County. In addition, a public forum was held to allow community members not involved in any of the aforementioned groups to provide input. Staff then used the results of these surveys to categorize indicated issues into Agriculture and Natural Resources, Youth Development and Community, Family and Personal designations. The resulting categorizations were evaluated and ranked by staff members to develop a list of issues of importance in descending order of prevalence. Stakeholders were provided the opportunity to rank the issues and that input was used to further refine the final listing.

Unit Profile

Pittsylvania County is located in the southern Piedmont plateau of Virginia and borders North Carolina to the South, Halifax County to East, Henry County to the West, Franklin County to the Northwest and Campbell County to the North. Pittsylvania County is the largest county in Virginia with a land area of approximately 629,000 acres. Elevation ranges from 400 to 800 feet above sea level with the highest point being Smith Mountain at 2,043 feet above sea level. The county seat, Chatham, is 140 miles from Richmond, 68 miles from Roanoke and 50 miles from Lynchburg.

Since the 2013 Situation Analysis, Pittsylvania County's population has declined by 1,107 residents, which is a 1.7% decline in total population. Upon closer inspection, there was a relatively large drop in the 35-54 year old adult demographic at 2.2% decline. Further examination showed a decline of 1% in 35-44 year olds and a 1.2% decline in 45-54 year olds. These two demographics have been in decline over the past five years and the rate of decline continues to increase. Conversely, there was a relatively large increase in 60-84 year old adults at 3.1%, with the largest individual demographic gain belonging to the 65-74 year old age group at a rate of 1.5% growth. This particular demographic has increased in recent years, but the rate of increase has slowed significantly when compared to the 2013 and 2008 Situation Analysis Reports. Race demographics have remained relatively steady, with slight

decreases present in both White and African American populations and a slight increase in Asian populations.

Although the population of Pittsylvania County is on the decline, there are some positive trends taking place in socioeconomic arenas. In 2018, the unemployment rate was down 2.1% when compared with 2013. In addition, vacant housing units have decreased by 0.8% and as a whole, the County's housing unit value has increased in the past 5 years. In contrast, owner-occupied units have decreased, while renter-occupied units have increased indicating a trend of declining home ownership. Income and employment-type statistics provide an interesting look into shifting industries within the County. Individuals earning \$35,000 to \$49,999 annually have increased significantly at a 2% gain in 5 years. In addition, individuals earning in excess of \$100,000 annually have increased as well. Unfortunately, there has been a large decrease of 3.8% in the number of individuals earning \$50,000 to \$74,000. Much of these trends can be attributed to an increase of 1.7% in employment designated "professional, scientific and management" while a 2.4% increase occurred in the "retail trade" designation. While these statistics illustrate some improvement in the County populations' economic state, the overall poverty rate was up 0.2% with the 18-64 age group remaining at 14.4% while the 65 and above age demographic declined by 2.2% from five years previous.

Educational attainment continues to be an area of improvement within the County. The high-school graduation rate increased by 3.3% over 5 years prior. College attendance and completion at bachelor's degree level have increased as well as a slight increase in graduate or professional degree attainment.

In addition to economic and educational factors, Pittsylvania County also faces health and fitness challenges. There have been improvements in the area of exercise and fitness with a 7.8% decrease in individuals reporting little to no recent physical activity. The number of individuals reporting poor or fair health declined slightly to 18%. However, the rate of obesity increased nearly 5% with 34% of individuals being classified as obese. These figures are directly correlated to statistics indicating limited access to recreation facilities and health foods. In additional areas of health concern, teen birthrate has decreased and sexually transmitted disease incidence experienced a negligible increase.

Agriculture and forestry continues to be the driving engine of Pittsylvania County's economy. Agricultural product value increased 39% from 2007 to 2012 to generate nearly \$87 million in revenue. The County is ranked ninth in the state in agricultural value and in the top ten of 13 different agricultural products. The industry operates 1,354 farms on 287,262 acres in the County and is the largest segment of the local economy.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Input gathered during the Situation Analysis process fell into three subcategories: Youth, Community/Health and Agriculture. For the purpose of organization, input shared through surveys, community forums, and stakeholder interviews will be broken into the aforementioned categories.

Youth

Individuals working directly with youth were selected to provide input on issues facing youth within in the community. These individuals included educators and community-based program organizers/managers. These individuals indicated varying degrees of need, primarily based on age group.

The following were identified as issues of importance for ages ranging from 0-8:

- Creative arts
- STEM education
- Agricultural education
- Life skills
- Healthy living and foods
- Environmental/Outdoor science

The following were identified as issues of importance for ages ranging from 9-18:

- Reading literacy
- Life Skills/decision making
- Leadership/citizenship
- Animal and agricultural science

The following were identified as issues of importance for ages 18+:

- Leadership
- Professional development
- Life Skills/decision making
- Leadership/citizenship
- Environmental/Outdoor science

After gathering general impressions of issues facing youth from a large survey sample, key stakeholders were asked to rank these issues according to importance. The following issues were identified and are listed in descending order of importance.

- Life Skills/decision making
- STEM education
- Creative arts
- Reading literacy

- Professional development

Agriculture

Individuals from all facets of agricultural production were selected to provide input into issues facing the agriculture industry. These industry partners included various producer associations, individual farmers, agricultural service suppliers, agricultural educators and government employees. As predicted, the issues identified were widely varied depending on the respondent.

The following issues were identified by one or more participating groups:

- Cooperative marketing resources for livestock
- Labor availability
- Forage production
- Livestock equipment infrastructure
- Invasive species
- Land use (state and local policy)
- Farm business management and consulting
- General public education
- Animal/livestock production
- General crop production
- Agricultural profitability
- Marketing
- Pesticide recommendations
- New chemical evaluation
- Government program awareness
- Business management
- Food safety

After gathering input from various agricultural related interests, key stakeholders were asked to rank these issues according to importance. The following issues were identified and are listed in descending order of importance:

- Production/profitability
- Farm business management
- Marketing of agricultural products
- Public awareness of agriculture
- Livestock equipment infrastructure

Community/Health Issues

Various stakeholders within community systems and health-focused organizations were asked to provide input regarding key issues facing the community of Pittsylvania County as a whole.

These individuals included nutrition educators, youth educators, local government employees and non-profit organization employees/managers. These individuals identified the following issues facing the community as a whole:

- Life Skills/decision making
- Youth activity
- Career development
- Professional development
- Finance education
- Parenting education
- Energy consumption
- Food safety
- Community health
- Food availability
- Nutrition education
- Food preservation
- Small business
- Lack of food access

After gathering input from various parties involved in community viability and health education, key stakeholders were asked to rank identified issues. The following identified issues are listed in descending order of importance:

- Parenting
- Nutrition education
- Finance education
- Food safety
- Life skills

Priority Issues

Issue #1: Agricultural Production and Profitability

The agricultural industry is, and has been for many years, a multi-million dollar industry in the region, and therefore the economic importance remains a priority. One of the top ranking and most often listed issues in both survey results and individual interviews was addressing ways to find the most profitable and in some cases more marketing options. This issue was not limited to livestock and crossed in to row crop production. Tobacco, small grain, and beef cattle producers all stated that there was a need for progressive marketing opportunities, new technology information and cooperative efforts to strengthen the agricultural economy in the county.

It is vital to continue to support and expand the economic engine within our region. For these reasons, agricultural production and profitability continues to be a top priority that is continually

addressed by VCE resources in Pittsylvania County. Various other agencies and groups such as Young Farmer groups and Pittsylvania County Farm Bureau also work heavily to accomplish this.

Issue #2: Nutrition

As indicated by the data in the Unit Profile, Pittsylvania County has a large percentage of residents identified as obese or reporting poor health. The obesity rate has risen nearly 5% over the last 5 years with 34% of individuals in the County being classified as obese. In addition, 18% of County residents report being in poor health.

This issue has continued to emerge through day to day contact with community members and continues to be identified during the Situation Analysis process. Previously, VCE – Pittsylvania County has been without a Family and Consumer Sciences Agent and unable to provide significant programming in that program area. However, beginning in 2015, Pittsylvania County began sharing a FCS Agent with neighboring Franklin County to provide programming support. This agent, along with SNAP-Ed and EFNEP Program Assistant staff, have been providing programming to clientele. In addition, there are a number of partnering agencies providing support to and receiving support from VCE – Pittsylvania County staff including non-profit organizations, governmental based programs and community oriented action groups.

Issue #3: Life Skills for Youth

There can never be too much work done to support developing the youth in the County and helping them to enhance critical thinking skills, decision-making skills, and other life skills. This is currently being addressed by VCE through 4-H Youth Development. The Pittsylvania County 4-H Teens in Action Club strives year-round to develop these skills in its participants through monthly meetings, frequent youth development trainings, and experiential learning opportunities. In addition, life-skills are targeted through each 4-H planned program using the Targeting Life-Skills Model. Through this model, 4-H participants are able to visualize and identify how each life-skill ties in to the larger scope of the 4-H organization. Programming opportunities to expand the reach of life-skill development do not stop here though as there are many areas to expand this type of work with partner organizations in the county.

Issue #4: Small Business Support

Whether family owned and operated or employees are unrelated, every farm or agricultural entity is a small business. Many challenges threaten the viability and sustainability of small business/ agriculture including residential growth, farm profitability and increasing age of agricultural producers. In a climate of rising input costs, producers need relevant and timely production related information in order to make well informed decisions. Therefore, small business support remains a high priority. A desire for “information and guidance on cooperative marketing opportunities” as well as guidance and explanation of guidelines/regulations facing the agricultural industry within the region was noted in multiple surveys. Financial and regulatory guidance for agriculture producers is key to their success.

Therefore, VCE will serve as a continuous resource of information to guide agriculture producers of all commodities toward financial farm success.

Issue #5: Cooperative Marketing Opportunities

Based on the economic down turn of the beef cattle industry, cattle producers are searching for alternative methods of selling and marketing their cattle. The producer ultimately has several options when selling/marketing his cattle: private trade/sale, local livestock markets, or cooperative marketing/te-lo-auction. Cooperative marketing gives individuals the ability to showcase and sell their cattle to buyers across the nation while providing confidence in the cattle. Marketing cattle to a larger audience equals higher premiums for cattle producers. To accomplish this, producers must meet numerous quality standards set forth by buyers, consumers and national beef organizations such as National Cattlemen's Beef Association. VCE- Pittsylvania County is providing beef cattle producers with genetic improvement information, herd health and proper vaccination protocols as well as opportunities to become certified as a Virginia Beef Quality Assured producer. VCE-Pittsylvania County will continue to support beef cattle producers through improving genetics, herd health and overall cattle management (via Virginia BQA), so that cattle producers can reduce input costs while improving the quality of their cattle.

By professionally pairing modern technology with national beef cattle standards, cattle producers are able to market their cattle more effectively and profitably while reducing input costs, improving cattle genetics and overall herd health.

Issue #6: STEM Education for Youth

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) has been a prominent topic in the field of education over the past several years. As such, strides have been taken to implement STEM Education into many 4-H Youth Development programs within the county. Because STEM components are easily found in day-to-day tasks, students are encouraged to find STEM all around them. Through the installation of in-school delivery modes, students will have more access to 4-H programming with a STEM focus.

Issue #7: Creative Arts for Youth

Reading and writing are the foundational principles of creative arts. Without these two basic skills, it becomes difficult for one to complete a variety of creative arts tasks including, but not limited to preparing a written speech, presenting science fair findings, or sharing a presentation with an audience. Also addressed through 4-H Youth Development efforts, is the Public Speaking contest; a contest in which students learn to creatively deliver a message of their choice to an audience. Concerted efforts to emphasize reading and writing concepts throughout all 4-H youth development programs will continue as youth connect reading and writing with creativity and their future success.

Issue #8: Public Awareness of Agriculture

Agriculture and forestry remain the number one industry in Pittsylvania County and its importance was voiced during numerous stages of the Situation Analysis process. Though many residents of the County are involved in an agricultural related field there is a growing portion of the population that is not directly involved in the industry. As a result, many respondents felt additional emphasis should be placed on education of the general public, particularly youth on the importance of agriculture and the process by which their food and fiber are produced.

VCE – Pittsylvania County addresses this topic through numerous activities such as AG DAY, the Pittsylvania/Caswell Junior Livestock Show and Sale, Ag Chat articles in the local media and cooperation with local media outlets on agricultural-related products. VCE – Pittsylvania County will continue to partner with other governmental and non-profit organizations to provide agricultural education to the general public.