



## Southampton 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

<b>Priority Issue</b>	<b>Planned Unit Response</b>
Issue 1: Ag Profitability - Farm Land Preservation, Variety Selection, IPM, Production Practices, Resistant Weeds and Pesticide Training Requirements	VCE is actively working to improve farm profitability, land preservation tools, enterprise expansion and access new markets.
Issue 2: Youth Leadership Development	VCE's 4-H youth development program offers a range of curricula that develop knowledge, character, and leadership.
Issue 3: Youth Activities (Esp. in Agriculture)	VCE's 4-H Clubs related to agriculture can be expanded and enhanced through collaboration with local organizations (SWCD Farm Days, Fair Exhibits, etc.), in-school programming, and periodic workshops to focus on agriculture.
Issue 4: Human Issues around Finance, Food, Critical Thinking, Racism, Citizenship	VCE's 4-H curricula focusing on citizenship, social justice, food, and finance can be brought to bear through in-school and periodic workshops as well as through club officer training.

# Introduction

Southampton County Extension conducted a revision of its situation analysis during 2023. The purpose of the analysis was to gather and organize statistical data, identify key issues affecting county citizens and provide Extension staff with current information useful in developing educational programs. Southampton County's Extension staff currently consists of: one Ag Agent (vacant), a shared 4-H Agent (1.5 years) with neighboring Isle of Wight County, a 4-H Program Assistant, a Unit Coordinator who is also a District Forestry and Natural Resources Agent, and one Unit Administrative Assistant. The situational analysis was created by determining community needs by surveying key stakeholders about issues facing the community as well as utilizing the statewide Qualtrics survey to determine needs from the general citizen of Southampton County. A diverse group of stakeholders were assembled to represent the variety of needs and perspectives across the county spanning geography, occupation, age, gender, race, and socio-economic status. The members gave of their time and talents and served diligently throughout the entire process. We were privileged to have individuals from our state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, churches, schools, and parents to help with this process.

# Unit Profile

Southampton County is a 600 square mile rural county in Western Tidewater with agriculture as the primary economic driving force. Neighboring counties include Greensville to the west, Sussex and Surry to the north and Isle of Wight and Suffolk border the east. Two North Carolina counties, Northampton and Hertford are opposite the southern county line. An independent city, Franklin is located between Southampton and Isle of Wight County. Counties and cities to the east are much more populated than Southampton County.

Population growth has stabilized after decreases from the 1950s to 1990s. The current population is 18,006 in 2023. Population density has remained mostly constant at around 30 people per square mile from the 1990s to present. Population under 20 years of age was 20.9% in 2022. The older resident proportion, those 65 years and older, remains stable at 19.4% of the population. The gender makeup is 52% male to 48% female.

Racial composition of Southampton County changed little from the 1990s to present. In 2022, the white population was 62.5%, black population 32.0%, and all other were 5.0%. This represents a very small increase in the proportion of the white population over the last two decades. Among other races; Multiple, Hispanic or Latino, Other, American Indian, and Asian reported in at 623, 360, 110, 36, and 43 individuals, respectively.

Income per capita for Southampton County, in total 2022 dollars not adjusted for inflation, has increased very slowly to \$32,218, up from \$25,784 reported in 2017. Per capita income for Southampton County has decreased to 68% of the per capita income for Virginia as a whole compared to 77% in 2017. Median household income in 2022 was \$67,813. Unemployment rate remains low in Southampton as well as across Virginia at less than 3%. The poverty rate in Southampton was 14.1% compared to the average Virginia poverty rate of 10.6%.

## Top 6 employers

1. Southampton County Public School Board
2. Deerfield Correctional Center
3. Vitalcore Health Strategies
4. County of Southampton
5. Enviva Management Co. LLC
6. Meherrin Agricultural and Chemical Company

Teenage pregnancy continues to drop since the late 1990s. There were 11 teenage pregnancies per 1000 female age 15-19 in 2023 compared to 41 in 2010 and is less than Virginia (15) and national rate of 19. The incidences of sexually transmitted infections are at 476 (per 100k) which is slightly better than the 500 Virginia average and the 525 national numbers.

In 2017, 83% of the county's citizens 25 years and older graduated from high school. Nineteen percent had received some education at the college level. 33% of children live in single-parent households compared to only 20% national average. And 15% have limited access to healthy foods. This is nearly 4 times the state rate and 15 times the national rate. Only 64% of the population has broadband internet access as of 2017.

The data indicate that over 80% of households have broadband. That does not seem to align with my experience interacting with clients. Perhaps they have access but do not utilize it? In either case work crews have arrived on a massive scale for the past couple of months and optical fiber is quickly going in with service quickly following. So, this issue will quickly resolve, but this may bring additional issues that Extension may need to adapt.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

Survey results indicated the following priority issues.

Issue - percentage high or very high (scale average)

Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability	93%	(4.4)
Preserving farm and forest land	87%	(4.3)
Assisting forest landowners with sustainable management practices	80%	(4.1)
Water Quality	73%	(4.1)
Strengthening the local food system	73%	(4.0)
Promoting economic development	53%	(3.8)
Air Quality	60%	(3.7)
Safe Food Handling	40%	(3.5)

Issue - percentage high or very high (scale average)

Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	93%	(4.3)
Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth	80%	(4.3)
Ensuring safe, high quality foods	60%	(3.9)
Helping consumers make healthy food choices	47%	(3.7)
Reducing obesity	33%	(3.5)
Providing physical fitness education	33%	(3.3)
Preventing chronic disease	27%	(3.2)

Issue - percentage high or very high (scale average)

Supporting businesses which engage in agritourism	66%	(3.8)
Conservation and utilization of forest resources	60%	(3.8)
Helping communities improve their quality of life	53%	(3.7)
Helping communities be better prepared for and respond to natural disasters	53%	(3.7)
Assisting local government and businesses with land use decisions	40%	(3.6)
Helping Virginians become more energy efficient in their homes, farms, and...	47%	(3.5)
Building the capacity of community nonprofits	13%	(2.9)

Issue - percentage high or very high (scale average)

Addressing hunger issues	47%	(3.6)
Preserving foods for home use (canning, dehydrating, fermenting, freezing)	40%	(3.4)
Facilitating civic engagement	40%	(3.3)
Addressing adult and youth mental health	33%	(3.2)
Preventing suicide	33%	(3.1)
Addressing alcohol abuse	20%	(2.8)
Addressing prescription drug abuse	20%	(2.8)

## Community Issues

The VCE Situation Analysis Qualtrics Survey was the primary source of information. The survey was distributed by email, postal mail, face-to-face at meetings. The County Administrator tasked each member of the County Board of Supervisors to solicit feedback from at least 5 constituents from each district. In addition, the Situation Analysis survey was posted on the VCE-Southampton website and through social media outlets such as Facebook. Sixteen individuals completed survey. One was not a Virginia resident. This may be due to many clients that we serve in adjacent localities and many people in adjacent counties in North Carolina do business and receive services as they travel to the Franklin area to work, school, etc. 67% of the respondents were between 35 and 64 years of age, and 60% were female. 20% were older than 75. We did not receive responses from any younger than 35. 75% of respondents were white, 25% were black or other race. Annual household incomes varied over the entire range.

It seems that some of the main issues are related to farmland preservation particularly involving utility-scale solar facilities and Chinese corporate investors. The solar facility issue was present in the last situation analysis, and it does continue although it does seem that there is a slowing for the moment at least for Southampton. The land use changes and ownership issues are fairly new and there is not much Extension can offer to these legal decisions apart from awareness, as it is a policy issue for state government or perhaps county government. And beyond land use much of the issues are the same as in past years. Agriculture will remain the large entity continuing to face pressure placed by taxes and development and neighbor issues as people move into the area. Thus, land use taxation, profitability, and zoning will all play in and become increasingly important.

## Future Programming to Address Community Issues

### **Issue 1: Ag Profitability - Farm Land Preservation, Variety Selection, Integrated Pest Management, Production Practices, Resistant Weeds and Pesticide Training Requirements**

Southampton County is agriculture. It is on the county seal. It is the largest row crop county by acreage in Virginia and that is recognized by the number of agribusiness enterprises that have located in the area. However, the proximity to infrastructure which provides a leg up on markets and distribution, also can be a hindrance as the Hampton Roads population continues to expand attempting to convert this agricultural culture into a bedroom community for the larger metropolitan area.

Increasing taxes are not unique to Southampton County but come in the wake of neighboring and sharing some services with urbanizing localities to the east such as Suffolk and Isle of Wight. Needs for increased teachers and law enforcement as well as infrastructure improvements all require more tax revenue. There is always historical temptation to place this burden on real estate, which in the case of a rural county is farmland. Southampton does implement a land use taxation plan which considers agricultural production potential as opposed to highest and best assessment (i.e., development potential). More landowners have recently formed ag and forestal districts to safeguard the productive agricultural lands. Continuing educational efforts will be needed to bolster the understanding that preservation of these working land acres is critical for food, fiber, and fuel production.

Farmland conversion to solar panel facilities has taken several thousand acres out of row crop production in the last several years. While this is viewed as a general economic boon for the county overall, it impacts productive acres available for food and fiber production as well as employment of local residents. Extension has aided in finding siting solutions with applications such as VALEN (Virginia Land and Energy Navigator) which is a GIS system which shows areas that would be better or worse for siting projects based on user-determined criteria.

Extension professionals from Ag, 4-H, as well as staff have continued to be active in partnering with local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, the Public School systems, and area partners to provide agricultural education opportunities through area “Farm Days” as well as co-hosting the Fishing Extravaganza, and other short-term natural resource educational opportunities (i.e., shooting sports and equestrian clubs) which educate students about the importance of agriculture as well as responsible sustainability practices and outdoor recreation opportunities which also add significantly to Southampton’s economy.

The local Extension agents and specialists are also called upon to keep producers up to speed with the most productive crop varieties and agricultural practices. Peanut varieties continue to be developed, evaluated, and introduced in partnership with North Carolina State University. Similarly, cotton varieties are evaluated for suitability with local soils and cropping systems. Additionally, the battle against herbicide resistant weeds is now pushing into significant additional training requirements to utilize auxin herbicides (i.e., 2,4-D and Dicamba “over-the-top” formulations). Also, the explosion of Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) has resulted in a multitude of exasperated calls on how to control this invasive pest. Extension is there to share the best evidenced based means of dealing with this pest, while also presenting the reasoning that it is just something that we have to live with now, they will not be eradicated.

Hundreds of area growers cannot legally apply these products without the training received at Extension arranged annual recertification programs. Southampton also continues to be the leading county in the state in pounds of pesticide containers that are recycled annually (over 8,000 pounds/year) which significantly reduces tipping fees that would be otherwise absorbed by the county in addition to the expense of many trips to the landfill to dispose of these containers in a less desirable manner. Extension also partners with the Chowan Basin Soil & Water Conservation District to aid in the disposal of agricultural tires, waste oil, and unused pesticides. All these aforementioned programs and activities have been identified by county stakeholders as important to maintaining agricultural profitability in the county.

## **Issue 2: Youth Leadership Development**

Traditional as well as new approaches are needed to address the identified youth issues of:

1. Life Skills/Decision Making
2. Leadership Development
3. College readiness - Career exploration
4. General positive / outdoors activities

The 4-H Camp as well as 4-H club programs have been traditional, time-tested means of improving life skills as well as leadership development. The camp program in particular exposes the teenagers who are counselors or counselors-in-training to specific leadership skills as they oversee the daily supervision of safety, hygiene, health, welfare, entertainment, and learning for groups of younger children. This provides guided exposure and hands-on experience in guiding a group of similar-aged youth to set and accomplish goals as a coordinated unit. Additionally, the Character Counts curriculum is intertwined into this experience to provide the theoretical framework which supports the action-oriented tasks which cannot be effectively completed without exercising these attributes.

At the end of each camp season, we observe youth who are more comfortable and adept in being assertive in organizing and communicating with a group of people, helping them define and formulate goals and objectives to solve problems, then to motivate them to carry out these objectives to complete the tasks within time and resource constraints. Likewise, the younger youth are motivated by slightly older peers whom they respect and look up to, to take more responsibility for themselves and others. Many of these younger youth end up following in the footsteps of predecessors in taking on leadership roles as camp counselors.

Similarly, in 4-H club context, young people take on officer roles and learn parliamentary procedure and communication skills to facilitate groups. These clubs also utilize research-based curricula to increase knowledge, skills, and abilities in many areas including, care and production of livestock and horses, safe and responsible operation of firearms, robotics and STEM projects, food production and preservation, home economics, communications and presentation skills, business and financial records keeping and reporting, journalism, etc. These subjects are not merely learned by reading and regurgitating, but by hands-on experiences in controlled and supervised projects where evaluation and constructive criticism as a means of improvement are provided by peers and nurturing adults.

College readiness and career explorations are enhanced by these general leadership opportunities, but also by exposure to many professionals who volunteer their time to speak to the clubs. Some examples in the last few years are opportunities where the Sheriff's Office and DWR CPOs have given presentations to teen leaders about chain-of-command, leadership concepts, and citizenship. Likewise, many teens have participated in 4-H Day at the Capitol and have been actively engaged in learning about legislative processes and building confidence and encouragement from engaging their elected officials. Entomologists have given demonstrations on insect identification and why some pests can create some economically devastating consequences if not controlled by good Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques. Farriers have demonstrated how proper hoof care is essential for horse health. Agribusiness leaders have covered topics from veterinary care to soil nutrients to financial management. Law enforcement and legislators explain how each of their duties are critical for a civil and orderly society to function. Each opportunity affords these young people to observe practitioners of a wide array of professions for consideration of their own career tracks.

Adding to these traditional modes of youth development, expanding partnerships and funding opportunities, will continue to be explored. The goal for more leadership consistency to increase youth involvement to state and national levels will also be emphasized. It is encouraging how many youth who have previously been involved in these programs have gone on to become successful citizens and then have the motivation to give back to the 4-H programs of which they have identified as being integral to their own quality of life.

Efforts to collaborate with Southampton County Public Schools, Southampton Academy, Franklin-Southampton County Fair, YMCA, Paul D. Camp Community College, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Corrections, Library, Sheriff's Department, community centers, and other youth organizations will continue to be built and sought out.

### **Issue 3: Youth Activities (Esp. in Agriculture)**

As there is not a Parks and Rec Department in Southampton County, organized youth activities largely consist of those within the school systems, the Franklin YMCA, local churches, and community sports leagues. Many community sports leagues are losing ground to "travel ball". To our knowledge, there is a Boys and Girls Club in Franklin, activities in local libraries, as well as one Girl Scout chapter and one Boy Scout chapter. Apart from this there are pop-up summer activities organized by some local volunteer and church organizations.

Extension plays a role in this by offering several clubs for 4-H aged youth, some of these are focused on outdoors and agricultural related interests, all are focused on positive youth development and building leadership skills. Southampton has had active shooting sports, equestrian, and livestock clubs for at least the past couple of decades. Additionally junior 4-H camp (and year-around teen leadership) contributes to various interests. The Franklin-Southampton County Fair also partners and offers opportunities for youth to serve through pageants, serving on the Junior Fair Board, and other assorted community events. Southampton Extension also partners with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) to host the Fishing Extravaganza annually on the first Saturday in June. These offerings can be expanded as additional volunteers are identified, recruited, and trained.

## **Issue 4: Human Issues around Finance, Food, Critical Thinking, Racism, Citizenship**

Other issues that are frequently brought up as needs are human needs around citizenship, racism, finance, critical thinking, and food and nutrition. We have been attempting with limited success to hire a nutrition education agent. In the meantime we do disseminate information from the statewide offerings of Virginia Cooperative Extension related to these human issues. We need to continue to build upon distribution networks on getting this information out. We have partnerships with the local Department of Social Services, the Sheriff's Office, the Franklin-Southampton County Fair, and the Southampton County School System but our impact has been limited by time availability. Programs such as Reality Store have been periodically conducted, and have been frequently requested. Extension staff has served on the Career and Technical Education (CTE) local board and has offered internship opportunities to students. We have also assisted in providing information and training to incarcerated individuals for preparation for them reentering the workforce upon completion of their incarceration. Nutritional and health information is distributed in conjunction with Food Bank distributions. We typically partner with adjoining localities to offer access to the Household Drinking Water clinic. Citizenship and racial relations are large parts of our 4-H Camp counselor training as well as club officer trainings. During the Covid pandemic a good amount of online resources related to improving understanding across diverse racial backgrounds was made available. More could be done to help bring more of this communication to the community to improve understanding. Staffing transitions have cause many fluctuations in conducting these programs.

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