



# Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

## Spotsylvania County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

*Authored By: Krystal Minter, 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent, Unit Coordinator,  
Kayleigh Mize, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent,  
April Payne, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent*



**Table 1. Top 10 issues identified in the 2023 Situation Analysis of Spotsylvania County, Virginia**

<b>The percentage of all respondents selecting high or very high efforts is needed for these issues.</b>	
77%	Controlling invasive pests
69%	Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability
62%	Strengthening the local food system
62%	Teaching beginning farming practices to new landowners.
62%	Promoting scientific, agricultural, and environmental literacy among youth
62%	Promoting small business entrepreneurs
54%	Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers
54%	Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
46%	Estate planning or farm transition
46%	Preserving foods for home use

## Introduction

A situation analysis was conducted to identify critical characteristics defining Spotsylvania County and its community's main issues. Local programming efforts should address high-priority community needs, and Extension educational programming starts with understanding community needs. To help local units determine their communities' priority issues and needs, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) facilitates a locally driven, in-depth situation analysis every five years.

In 2023, the Spotsylvania County Office adopted the state-level survey to collect unit-level information. It modified the survey to collect information regarding the unit where the respondent lived or worked. Our survey was intended to collect data from families who live and/or work in Spotsylvania County. This survey was shared through social media, email blasts, and direct emails to stakeholders, engaged community members, adult volunteers, and parents of youth involved in the 4-H Program.

The Spotsylvania County Extension Agents will use data from the unit profile and VCE Data Commons to shape future Extension programming.

## Unit Profile

Spotsylvania County contains a mix of beautiful rural and urban landscapes and is one of Virginia's fastest-growing counties. The county is 401.5 square miles, situated in the northeastern part of Virginia, bordering the city of Fredericksburg, Caroline County, Stafford County, and Louisa County. Flowing north to south is Interstate 95, which creates a major thoroughfare within the County, providing quick and easy transportation to major cities like Washington, DC, and Richmond. Within recent years, the Virginia Railway Express opened a station in Spotsylvania for easy travel to DC and Northern VA. Within its boundaries, the County possesses the

scenic beauty of Lake Anna, rural vistas, suburban amenities, and a wealth of historical attractions from the Colonial and Civil War eras. The growing Spotsylvania community has attracted many dynamic commercial and retail businesses that serve area residents and visitors. These resources also make the County a favorite tourist destination. (Spotsylvania County, 2023)

## Demographics

The estimated population as of July 1, 2022, was 146,688, an increase of 16.5% since the last census was taken in 2010. The population forecast for 2040 is 177,568 citizens. The current racial makeup of the County is 62.9% white, 18.7% Black or African American, 12.7% Hispanic or Latino, 3.1% Asian, and 2.6% other races. (Spotsylvania County, 2023)

## Education

There are 17 public elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, one alternative learning center, and one Career and Technical Center. In the 2023-2024 school year, 24,395 students were enrolled throughout the 31 public schools. (Spotsylvania County Public Schools, 2023) Approximately 82% of high school graduates pursue higher education. In Spotsylvania County is Germanna Community College, and the University of Mary Washington is nearby in Fredericksburg. (Spotsylvania County, 2023). Currently, 3,690 reported Spotsylvania County public school graduates are attending college nationwide. Citizens residing in Spotsylvania County over 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher make up 34.6% of the population.

## Agriculture & Forestry

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 338 farms in Spotsylvania, an 8% decrease from 2012. The average size of each farm was 123 acres, making 41,674 acres of Spotsylvania in agricultural use. Agriculture (crops and livestock) was a \$9 million industry for Spotsylvania County. Top crop commodities by number of planted acres include forage (hay/haylage), soybeans, corn (for both grain and silage), and wheat. The top livestock inventory includes cattle and calves, layers, horses and ponies, hogs, and goats. The top three crops by sales are grains (\$2.4 million), fruits (\$565 thousand), and vegetables (\$528 thousand). The top three livestock products by sales are cattle and calves (\$3.3 million), horses (\$640 thousand), and sheep and goats (\$87 thousand).

The total number of recorded producers in Spotsylvania County was 590, 64% males and 36% females. Of those 590 producers, 39% were 65 or older, 53% ranged between 35 and 64, and 8% were under 35. The producers in Spotsylvania County are primarily white (87%), but there are also 6% black or African American, 2% Asian, and 5% other races. (USDA, 2017)

The 2022 Census of Agriculture will be released on February 13, 2024.

## Health Summary

According to County Health Rankins and Roadmaps, Spotsylvania is ranked 30<sup>th</sup> out of 133 ranked counties in Virginia as one of the healthiest counties. The top two health behaviors that County Health Rankings highlighted as needing to be improved were that 15% of Spotsylvania adults are currently cigarette smokers; 35% of adults had a BMI of 30 or greater (obesity), which is 3% more than the average for Virginia and the United States. (County Health Rankings, 2020)

As of 2021, 11,340 individuals in Spotsylvania County struggled with food insecurity (Feeding America, 2021). Of those individuals, only 2,865 individuals receive SNAP benefits.

# Community and Resident Perspectives

Results of data collected in the Spotsylvania County survey sorted by highest level effort indicated. Table 2 lists all issues in the survey in ranked order from highest effort to lowest.

Table 2. Results of the 2023 Situation Analysis of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, from highest level of effort to lowest

Issue	Moderate Effort	High Effort	Very High Effort	Percentage
Controlling invasive pests	2	7	3	77%
Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability	4	6	3	69%
Strengthening the local food system	4	5	3	62%
Teaching beginning farming practices to new landowners	5	5	3	62%
Promoting scientific, agricultural, and environmental literacy among youth	5	7	1	62%
Promoting small business entrepreneurs	2	5	3	62%
Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers	6	5	2	54%
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	4	5	2	54%
Estate planning or farm transition	5	2	4	46%
Preserving foods for home use	5	3	3	46%
Strengthening workforce readiness skills	4	3	3	46%
Supporting residents' home horticulture practice through education	6	3	2	38%
Promoting alternative agricultural practices	5	4	1	38%
Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth	6	4	1	38%
Helping Virginians become more energy efficient in their homes, farms, and businesses	5	2	3	38%
Facilitating civic engagement	5	4	1	38%
Helping consumers make healthy food choices	5	4	0	31%
Helping communities be better prepared for and respond to natural disasters	7	3	1	31%
Preparing and cooking foods at home	4	3	1	31%
Helping families budget their food dollars	8	2	1	23%
Providing physical fitness education	4	1	0	7%
Educating about chronic disease	5	1	0	7%

Some of the written responses that were received when asked what participants would like to see from the Spotsylvania County VCE Office and how the office can make a more significant impact in our community are quoted below:

- “Continued quality programs and outreach. The Spotsylvania VCE Office does an outstanding job with their initiatives.”
- “I think the local VCE Office supplies many resources and exceptional services to the residents and county offices. I don’t have any suggestions for additional services, but I definitely appreciate what is currently being done!”
- “I believe having events closer to the area, instead of Blacksburg / VT, would generate a stronger response from the community. At times, distance plays a major factor in participating in these events.”
- “Having more classes or lectures for learning about growing food, caring for livestock, and preserving food.”
- “Continue to educate new homeowners on agriculture and how to become self-sufficient - growing their own food.”
- “Sponsor educational classes/seminars to help land owners of the county to be more self-sufficient. Have a list of recommended reading materials.”
- “Offer educational programs for landowners on conservation and restoration of natural resources.”

## **Community Issues**

Based on the responses that the Spotsylvania County office received, the priority issues selected were Controlling Invasive Pests, assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability, strengthening the local food system, teaching beginning farming practices to new landowners and promoting scientific, agricultural and environmental literacy among youth. These were the top five issues identified as seen in Table 2 above.

## **Future Programming to Address Community Issues**

### **Issue: Controlling Invasive Pests**

Although the actual control of invasive pests will fall on the business or individual, Virginia Cooperative Extension will provide programming to assist with identifying and managing these pests. The Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) program will partner with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), the Tri-County/City Soil and Water District Board, along with local Master Gardeners to provide current, relevant information to clientele. Extension programming on invasive pests, such as pesticide recertification events, will be included in established programs. Stand-alone programs on invasive pests may be possible, especially with the support of local Master Gardeners. In addition, printed materials and tip sheets will be available at community events and in the office. Online resources will be available on our unit and state-level website.

### **Issue: Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability**

While participation and involvement will depend on community members, programs will be implemented to target connecting clients to available resources in the county. Due to participation in county organizations and boards, the Spotsylvania Extension Office strives to work with these organizations to develop educational programming targeting these different sectors. Because of the interest of citizens in raising their own food, homesteading programs will be implemented. With this, the office will work to provide resources to beginning farmers. Work will be done with the state program, Graze 300, to promote less inputs on the land while attaining ground cover to reduce soil erosion, which leads to runoff in streams and affects stream biodiversity. This program will also support the idea of incorporating trees into pasture systems. Work will also be done with local foresters to promote better forestry practices among residents and farmers in Spotsylvania County.

## **Issue: Strengthening the local food system**

Because citizens are interested in growing their own and supporting locally raised and sourced food, homesteading programs will be implemented. As a product of this, a local contact list will be created to instill further a sense of comradery and partnership between these individuals. As a liaison for the Spotsylvania County Farmers Market, work will be done with this group to develop programs that allow community members to see where and how their food is produced. The office will also be working with local Master Gardeners to work with both youth and adults to deliver workshops that help participants learn how to produce their food. Lastly, the office will partner to deliver a “Community-Based Food System Assessment and Planning Workshop(s)” for residents of Planning District 16.

## **Issue: Teaching beginning farming practices to new landowners**

Seeing as the demographic in Spotsylvania is shifting due to transplants moving away from big cities, educational programming will teach individuals where their food comes from and how it is raised. This demographic supports the idea of community-based food resiliency. Therefore, programs that teach interested parties how to grow their own food and where to “shop” locally will be developed. Collaboration with Virginia State University to plan and implement beginning farmer educational events and workshops will be developed. Evaluations and community input will guide these course topics.

## **Issue: Promoting scientific, agricultural, and environmental literacy among youth**

The Spotsylvania County 4-H Program has implemented a new and highly successful monthly Agriculture in the Classroom curriculum enrichment program for the 2023-2024 school year. The 4-H Agent advertised the curriculum enrichment program to all 17 elementary schools in Spotsylvania County and had 40 teachers from 12 schools registered. Through this program, the 4-H Agent spends one hour a month with each classroom, teaching different facets of the agricultural community. For example, one month was spent learning about swine and pork products; another month, students learned about wool production and felting wool projects. In contrast, another month was spent learning about the life cycle of pumpkins, and the students enjoyed a pumpkin snack. Through this program, the Extension Office is working with local boards, committees, and landowners to secure monetary items for lessons and funding to help grow the program. The program aims to eventually work with the high schools to allow high school students to help present the agricultural lessons to the elementary students.

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

2024

VCE-596-95NP (VCE-1175-95NP)