



Situation Analysis Report



Surry County 2018

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Introduction

The Extension Leadership Council (ELC) met two times during the situation analysis process. At the first meeting, an overview of the situation analysis process was discussed. A community survey was developed and ways to disseminate the survey were discussed. It was decided that the survey should reach as many residents in Surry County as possible. Information on the situation analysis process and the Community Survey was published in the local paper and posted on Surry County's government webpage. The information was also sent out to various mailing lists, including 4-H leaders, members of the agricultural community, Surry County employees, and local civic organizations. Surry residents were able to submit their survey online or could fill out a paper survey by request. At the second and final meeting ELC meeting, key findings from the unit profile and results from the community survey were presented and discussed. The top priorities for Surry County were then identified, including those that could be addressed with current Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) resources and those that were outside the scope of current VCE resources.

Unit Profile

Surry County is a rural county with a strong agricultural history located just across the James River. Surry County's current population is 6,540, and its population has been decreasing over the last ten years, which directly affects programming. Surry County has a public school system consisting of an elementary, middle, and high school. There are no private schools in the county; however, some Surry youth have matriculated to Tidewater Academy in Wakefield, VA or Isle of Wight Academy in Smithfield, VA. There is also a contingent of home schooled youth in the county. In 2017, the enrollment in Surry County Public Schools was 826, 2018 enrollment saw a decrease to 791 students.

Surry is generally considered an agricultural and forested county. The largest business and employment areas are agriculture followed by construction and transportation. The three largest employers in the county are (1) Dominion Energy, (2) Surry County Public Schools, and (3) Surry County Government. Employment opportunities in the county are limited and the commute in/out ratio shows that more residents commute to another locality for employment than people who commute into Surry for employment. In 2013 the unemployment rate was 7.3% and in 2018 that rate has decreased to 6% which exceeds the State average of 4%.

From 2018 to 2019, the population of Surry has declined. In 2012 when we last conducted the situation analysis, there were 7026 residents and in 2018, there are 6540 residents. Fifty three percent of Surry residents are Caucasian; forty-three percent are African American; and 1% of the population is identified as Asian. The projected population numbers in the next 20 years shows a very small increase. Another trending

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issue for the county is that the average age of residents in 2030 is expected to be over 65. This trend depicts a decline in school-aged population and an increase of retirees.

Mental health trends within the county shows that there are increases in adults and youth suffering with diagnosed depression and mental health related issues. Services are available for youth whose parents have Medicaid insurance through the Brother's Keepers Services housed at each of the public schools. Adults with Medicaid are able to receive treatment at the Surry Health Clinic through the District 19 Community Services Board programs. Without Medicaid insurance, this issue is not able to be treated which makes things must worse for those suffering from these issues.

Nutrition, physical activity, and overall health and wellness dominate the concerns in Surry County according to data collected. Surry County is a rural community within a food desert and lacks places for children to play and adults to exercise using fitness equipment.

Virginia has the 29th highest obesity rate in the nation according to a U.S. News and World report entitled *The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America* released in August 2017. Virginia's adult obesity rate is currently 29%, up from 18.7 percent in 2000 and from 11.3 percent in 1990. A 2005 survey by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that 28% adults do not engage in any type of physical activity or exercise. Decreased physical activity and lack of exercise results in increased body mass index, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels. Further, the 2018 OBICI Health Assessment reveals that 25.2% of Surry/Sussex residents have fair/poor health which supersedes the surrounding counties by at least 5-10 percentage points. The nearest grocery store and fitness facility is at least a thirty-minute drive, which could discourage residents from making the decision to take the extra time and drive to the workout facility or the nearest grocery store.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Other significant trends or concerns recognized in the Situation Analysis Survey are related to affordable housing, the need for a grocery store, and broadband internet. Survey comments denoted the lack of opportunity for those in the middle income bracket to rent or purchase homes. Surry apartment complexes have a salary cap, and those making more than the cap cannot apply, which eliminates an entire group of potential renters. In addition, the residents are supportive of efforts to build a grocery store and have broadband internet in the county. Residents commented that they could work from home or qualify for employment opportunities that offer home employment if broadband were available. A few residents also express an interest in building a bridge to Williamsburg that will allow more personal time due to long waits to board a ferry.

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Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile demographics and trends, coupled with the input from the community survey and focus group, the Surry Extension Leadership Council identified the five priority issues for Surry County.

Priority 1: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity

The 2018 OBICI Health Assessment reveals that 25.2% of our residents have fair/poor health which supersedes the surrounding counties by at least 5-10 percentage points. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME); the diabetes rate is 38.2%; and the obesity rate for females in Surry County is 47.7% and the male rate is 42.1. The State average is currently 36.2% obesity rate for females and 33.7 for males. Surry VCE is partnering with Economic Development, Surry Health Department, and Surry County Parks and Recreation to implement wellness programs focusing on increasing physical activity, having access to home grown fruits and vegetables at the local farmer's market, and focusing on nutrition by way of gardening and food preparation. Multi-disciplinary programs will focus on healthy eating, gardening, and exercise. Programs will be offered at school, during club/group meetings, in local meeting spaces, and churches to encourage healthy habits with gradual changes.

Priority 2: Mental Health

Mental health is a growing concern for youth and adults. Schools are reporting increased mental health issues affecting the learning environment. Farmers have had increased stress due to unexpected equipment repairs and other conditions that can cause problems on their farm to include weather. These growing mental health issues need to be addressed by providing individuals with a safe and supportive environment to address these concerns. Many adults that are experiencing mental health issues have not consulted a physician or sought medical assistance. Currently, VCE does not provide programming specifically targeting these issues; however there is an opportunity for multi-disciplinary programs to address these concerns partnering with the Surry County Public School System and the District 19 Community Services Board.

Priority 3: Local Government

Local government was identified as the third highest area of concern in Surry County. Specifically, citizens of Surry are concerned with past leadership of local government officials. A large portion of the comments collected from the Community Survey revolved around decisions made by local government (Board of Supervisors), internal conflicts among these officials that affect decision-making, and economic development concerns. This issue is outside the scope of Virginia Cooperative Extension to address but should be addressed. Information pertaining to Economic Development can be found in the Assistant County Administrator's report- "Economic Development 2018 Year in Review" at <http://www.econdev.surrycountyva.gov/>.

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Priority 4: Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability

Agricultural profitability and sustainability was identified as the fourth most pressing priority in Surry County. Agriculture represents a large portion of the Surry County business sector, with approximately 73,461 acres in farm production. Currently, VCE is offering programs to address diversified land use for maximum profits. Commodity production meetings are held annually to provide farmers with up to date information on production techniques that will increase the overall profitability of their farming operations. VCE also hosts precision agriculture meetings to showcase new technologies that are designed to increase farm production and efficiency. VCE also works closely with niche producers in the county, such as fruit and vegetable producers and value-added agriculture. Livestock is wide and varied in Surry, ranging from typical beef cattle and hog operations to dairy farms. The local VCE office will develop programs to address the needs of those inheriting farmland and incoming residents who purchase farmland that have no experience in farming.

Priority 5: Youth Activities

Surry County places a strong emphasis on the development of youth. Surry 4-H partners with the Surry County Public Schools, the Surry County Department of Youth and Family Resources, and Surry County Parks and Recreation to continuously offer youth programming focusing on character development. Surry County offers clubs and in school enrichment activities that align with the Virginia Department of Education's Standards of Learning. Surry 4-H encourages positive youth development and leadership within programming. 4-H programming also includes college and career readiness, nutrition and wellness, STEM, financial literacy, and public speaking. Consequently District-wide contests have largely contributed to positive youth behaviors by increasing confidence in speaking before a group, enhancing information collection, and improving listening skills.

Surry County offers workforce opportunities for youth and college students through grants and local funding support to develop workplace skills for youth preparing to enter the workforce.