

# Surry County 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>
Priority 1: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity	Nutrition Programming Health and Wellness Programming Gardening Programming
Priority 2: Youth Activities	In-School Enrichments After-School Enrichments Clubs Programming with Partnering Agencies Camps Contests
Priority 3: Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability	Pesticide Applicators Training/Recertifications Soil Testing Water Testing Programming w/Agricultural Partners

## Introduction

The Surry County Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) office conducted a situational analysis in 2023. The purpose of the situation analysis was to help identify key issues with Surry County that Extension may be able to address through programming efforts. Surry collected data through an online survey and focus groups shared by the Extension Leadership Council members. A community survey was also sent out to various mailing lists, including 4-H leaders, members of the agricultural community, Surry County employees, local churches, and local civic organizations. Surry residents were able to submit their survey online or could fill out a paper survey by request.

The survey asked about several different issues and asked the participant to rank them for importance. It also provided a blank area for participants to write in comments or concerns. The survey was available to the public through our social media accounts, sent through the county list-serv, distributed to all volunteer groups and mailing lists. We had 27 total responses and results were analyzed and key issues for Surry County were identified.

## 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 6,527, and its population has been decreasing over the last ten years. 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 2023, the enrollment in Surry County Public Schools was 685 students, a decrease of 341 students since the 2017 Situation Analysis.

Surry is generally considered an agricultural and forested county. The largest business and employment areas are agriculture and solar farms, 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 2018 the unemployment rate was 7.5 and in 2021 that rate has decreased to 5.7% which exceeds the State average of 2.7%.

From 2018 to 2023, the population of Surry has declined by 13 residents. In 2018 when we last conducted the situation analysis, there were 6540 residents and in 2023, there are currently 6527 residents. Fifty seven percent of Surry residents are Caucasian; thirty-eight percent are African American; .6% of the population is identified as Asian, and .5% are identified as American Indian. Another trending topic for the county is that the average age of residents in 2030 is projected to be over 65. This trend depicts a decline in school-aged population and an increase of retirees.

Surry County has 111 farms of which 85 are family farms. The county a total of 35,876 acres of cropland in which farmers are growing soybeans, cotton, corn, hay/pasture, peanuts, wheat, sorghum, millet, rye, oats, produce, and sunflowers. Surry County also houses livestock. Surry County has 60% cropland, 31% woodland, 5% pasture, and 3% other.

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 places for residents to purchases fresh food within the county. According to the Crater Health Assessment, Surry County is ranked 66 of 133 of unhealthy counties. In 2023, Virginia's adult obesity rate increased by 3% currently 32%, and Surry County's adult obesity rate has increased to 39% from 29% within the past five years. Statistics gathered from the Crater Wellness Assessment revealed that 26% 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. The nearest grocery store is at least a thirty-minute drive and a fitness facility is now available at Surry County Parks and Recreation Center but is under-utilized.

## 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, daycares, and activities for youth. 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 may not apply, which eliminates an entire middle-income group of residents. In addition, the residents are supportive of efforts to build a grocery store and a playground for youth. 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.

## Community Issues

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

### Priority 1: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity

According to the Crater Health Assessment, Surry County is ranked 66 of 133 of unhealthy counties. In 2023, Virginia's adult obesity rate increased by 3% currently 32%, and Surry County's adult obesity rate has increased to 39% from 29% within the past five years. Statistics gathered from the Crater Wellness Assessment revealed that 26% 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. The nearest grocery store is at least a thirty-minute drive and fitness facility is now available at Surry County Parks and Recreation Center but is under-utilized.

### Priority 2: Youth Activities

Surry County places a strong emphasis on the development of youth. 20 residents rated youth development as very important and another 8 residents rated it as somewhat important. There are several programs currently available in the community such as youth athletic programs, little league, summer camps through Parks & Recreation, and after school tutoring. In 2023, Surry County was not awarded the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Program, which provided a variety of activities for middle school youth after school for the first time in the last ten years. This resulted in several educational programs and field trips being cut due to lack of after school transportation.

### Priority 3: Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability

Agricultural profitability and sustainability were identified as the third most pressing priority in Surry County. Agriculture represents a large portion of the Surry County business sector, with approximately 35,876 acres in farm production. New residents are wishing to start large and small farm operations with diversified land use for maximum profits.

## Future Programming to Address Community Issues

### Priority 1: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity

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: 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 4-H youth programming focusing on the needs of the program. 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. District-wide contests have contributed to positive youth development by increasing confidence in speaking before a group, enhancing information collection, and improving listening skills. Surry 4-H partners with workforce development and the Career and Technical Education to offer workplace readiness activities and career investigations.

### **Priority 3: Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability**

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 partners with Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program Specialists, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Safety for pesticide certifications, and recycling program, Peanut Soil and Water Conservation District and National Resources Conservation Service. VCE works closely with niche producers in the county, such as fruit and vegetable producers and value-added agriculture to provide programming to increase profitability. The Surry VCE office will provide Beef Quality Assurance training for Livestock farmers and will continue to offer regional Cattle production meetings. VCE will partner with Virginia State University Extension Department to address the needs of those inheriting farmland and incoming residents who purchase farmland that have no experience in farming.

## **References**

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