



Virginia Cooperative Extension – Culpeper 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Introduction

The Culpeper County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and Culpeper County VCE staff conducted a Community Needs Assessment / Situational Analysis during June – December 2023. The VCE staff and ELC members worked together to develop and distribute the survey in the County. The on-line survey was shared with non-profit organizations, 4-H parents and volunteers, Master Gardeners, Culpeper County employees, Culpeper County public schools and agricultural user groups. The survey link was posted in a news article, on the Culpeper County VCE website, the Culpeper County 4-H Facebook page and the VCE – Culpeper Facebook page. Once the data was collected, VCE staff reviewed the results in early December 2023.

Unit Profile

Culpeper County is located in the north-central Piedmont region of Virginia. The population in 2020 was reported as 52,552 residents. The 2010 Census counted 46,689 residents. This is an 12.56% increase in the last decade which is steady and consistent with the population growth started in 2000.

The majority of the population are white (72.79%) with the second largest population being black or African American (13.51%). The Hispanic or Latino ethnicity includes 11.88% with 6,181 residents. Of those residents, 1,177 report speaking English less than well.

Male and female residents are split approximately 50-50 in the Census data. Persons under 5 years make up 6.1% of the population, persons under 18 years make up 24%, and persons 65+ make up 17.3% of the population of Culpeper county.

The County has a predominantly rural setting but is located at the junction of several major highways. The County is 75 miles southwest of Washington D.C and has been added to the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area. Commuting to work outside the County is common with 14,224 residents indicating they drive primarily to Fairfax, Fauquier, Prince William, District of Columbia, or Loudoun for employment. There is also a large group that commutes to Culpeper County to work from the surrounding counties (9,276).

Culpeper County has developed a thriving and diversified economy with jobs in manufacturing, education, health care, finance, corrections, agriculture, horticulture, and retail. The median household income reported in 2021 was \$85,274 which is close to the Virginia median household income of \$80,968. It was also reported that as of 2023 12% of children in Culpeper live in poverty compared to the Virginia average of 13%.

Ten Largest Employers in Culpeper County

1. Culpeper County School Board
2. Culpeper Memorial Hospital
3. County of Culpeper
4. Wal Mart
5. Masco Builder Cabinet
6. Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services Board
7. Bingham & Taylor Corp
8. S.W.I.F.T.
9. Cintas Corporation
10. Coffeewood Correctional Center

Culpeper County has been known for its rural character and small-town nature, but there has been some change due to the increased population and commercial business. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the number of farms decreased from 731 in 2012 to 682 in 2017. A notable change in small farms consisting of 1-9 acres which increased from 32 in 2012 to 88 in 2017.

The principal operators of the farms have another occupation outside of farming (432) as compared to those who report farming as their principal occupation (299). The age of the principal operator is 60.2 years and most are male (576). The crops produced in Culpeper County are changing. The County ranks #2 in Virginia for number of acres of sod produced. For value of sales by commodity group Culpeper ranks #6 for nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod; #6 for horses, ponies and mules; #8 for cattle and calves; #10 for other animals and #21 for grains.

Land use for the greens industry seems to be increasing. The greens industry segment of agriculture includes greenhouse production, nursery stock, cut flowers, turf and Christmas trees. These farms are intensive operations on small acreage but with big economic benefits. Emerging opportunities in our agricultural economy include a focus on high quality horse hay, local food, and agritourism associated with our rural setting as a destination that includes wineries, breweries, farm tours and on farm events such as weddings.

According to the Public School Review, Culpeper County has a graduation rate of 90% which is slightly below the 2022 Virginia average of 92%. In 2022, there were 8,366 students enrolled in the public school system. Of the 10 schools in the County, there are 6 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high schools.

In 2022, the Culpeper Public School System conducted a Youth Risk Behavior Survey for 7 – 12 grade students. The results indicate that:

- 20.8% have tried cigarette smoking (compared to 30.7% in 2017)
- 32.9% have used electronic vaping products (compared to 24.1% in 2017)
- 23.4% have seriously considered suicide (compared to 16.3% in 2017)
- 65.1% have experienced extreme anxiety (compared to 53.3% in 2017)
- 58.9% played video or computer games 3 or more hours per day on a school day (compared to 48.9% in 2017)

In 2023, Culpeper County had 15 deaths associated with Opioid drug overdose. Several coalitions have been formed to address the drug problems in the County and surrounding areas.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Top 10 Identified Issues Respondents selected as Very High or High Effort Needed by VCE in Local Survey (n=62):

- Strengthening the local food system
- Protecting Water Quality
- Assisting Farmers in production and profitability
- Preserving farm and forest land
- Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
- Ensuring safe, high quality foods
- Assisting local government and businesses with land use decisions
- Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers
- Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects)
- Promoting agriculture, natural resources, and environmental literacy

Open Ended Question Responses in Local Survey:

- Mental Health Concerns
- Agriculture Education
- Land Use
- Youth Leadership
- Food Scarcity

- Affordable Housing

In the Northwest District (n=125), the top 5 Very High/High Effort by VCE issues were:

- Protecting water quality
- Ensuring safe, high quality foods
- Strengthening the local food system
- Ensuring safe food handling practices
- Protecting air quality

The top 10 issues respondents selected as Very High or High Effort Needed by VCE in the Statewide Survey (n=1,058)

- Protecting water quality
- Ensuring safe, high-quality foods
- Ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illness
- Protecting freshwater resources
- Strengthening the local food system
- Protecting air quality
- Addressing hunger issues
- Preventing suicide
- Protecting the marine environment
- Managing natural habitats and ecosystems

To compile a more complete report, data was pulled from multiple other sources.

Data from other sources included: United States Census Bureau, Virginia Employment Commission
UVA Health Culpeper Medical Center Community Health Needs Assessment, Virginia Department of Health
USDA Census of Agriculture

Community Issues

Three community issues were identified on all survey levels: the local, statewide, and Northwest District lists. Those were 1. Protecting water quality, 2. Ensuring safe, high quality foods, and 3. Strengthening the local food system. While these and other issues fall high on the list and will be included in our goals, we found broader categories of identifying community issues a stronger way to encompass a larger set of needs.

Three main categories of Issues were identified as being

1. Youth Well-Being and Life Skills

Specific issues: workforce readiness, financial literacy, mental health, promoting agriculture, natural resources, and environmental literacy

2. Food, Nutrition, and Health

Specific issues: Strengthening the local food system, ensuring safe food handling, ensuring safe, high quality foods, diabetes prevention, stress management

3. Agricultural Stability

Specific issues: profitability, land use, water quantity, nutrient management, small farmers, pesticides, lack of labor

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

1. Youth Well-Being and Life Skills

Specific issues: workforce readiness, financial literacy, mental health, promoting agriculture, natural resources, and environmental literacy

How is VCE responding?

VCE can best address this issue by supporting interdisciplinary programming. Combining the efforts of the 4-H, Family and Consumer Sciences, Agriculture, Horticulture, and Family Nutrition Program will allow for a broad approach to this issue. Partnerships with other agencies and community leaders is necessary to fully address the issue. The 4-H program already focuses on developing leadership skills through the community club and camping program. Working together with FCS staff to present Kids Marketplace and Reality Store teaches youth decision making and financial skills. Other life skills are learned by participating in livestock projects, food challenge, judging teams and gardening activities.

2. Food, Nutrition, and Health

Specific issues: Strengthening the local food system, ensuring safe food handling, ensuring safe, high-quality foods, diabetes prevention, stress management

How is VCE responding?

The Family Nutrition Program addresses health and nutrition education through its programming with youth and adults. Lessons provided by the Family Nutrition Program cover nutrition, physical activity, snack and meal preparation skills, handwashing, and safe food handling. FCS programming includes nutrition, cooking, food preservation and ServSafe classes. Teaching nutrient management, preventing soil erosion and gardening practices will help ensure better water quality in the area. Agents from around the region work together to offer the drinking water testing program which educates homeowners. Locally, the water testing program has changed to an every year offering versus every three years due to the increase need/request from the community.

Much of the work to address health issues will be done by working with our community partners (health department, school system, human services, community services board, master gardeners, master food volunteers, 4-H parents and volunteers, soil and water conservation district, parks and recreation, senior centers, farmers market). These partnerships are valuable to our work and helps us expand our outreach in the community.

3. Agricultural Stability

Specific issues: profitability, land use, water quantity, nutrient management, small farmers, pesticides, lack of labor

How is VCE responding?

The traditional face of agriculture is changing in Culpeper County. The Agricultural and Horticultural staff are working with the greens industry, breweries, vineyards, and small farmers to find niche markets. Technical expertise is also provided to support farm productivity. The Agricultural and Horticultural staff provide new and beginning farmer training and consultations, along with succession planning. Family and consumer Science Extension Agents are working with the newly built Carver Food Enterprise Center to support farmers in developing and producing value-added agricultural products for retail sale. New grazing practices are presented to help producers increase profitability and make better use of their land. Pesticide education and certification programs will continue to be offered to homeowners, gardeners, and commercial businesses. There is growing need for row crop information as more farms concentrate on this land use.

VCE is working through partnerships with producers, farm businesses, lenders, commercial growers, nurseries, orchards, farm markets, 4-H youth and agribusiness in our region.

References

- United States Census Bureau, Census Data 2010, 2020 <https://www.census.gov/>
- Culpeper Youth Risk Behavior Survey <https://www.culpeperschools.org/o/ccps/page/risk-behavior>
- Virginia Employment Commission Community Profile <https://virginiaworks.com/docs/Local-Area-Profiles/5104000047.pdf>
- UVA Health Culpeper Medical Center Community Health Needs Assessment <https://uvahealth.com/sites/default/files/2022-12/C%202017-2019%20CHNA%20Report.pdf>
- Virginia Department of Health Data Commons https://uva-bi-sdad.github.io/vdh_rural_health_site/?selected_variable=gini_index&selected_year=2021&filter.time_max=2021
- USDA Census of Agriculture <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>

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