

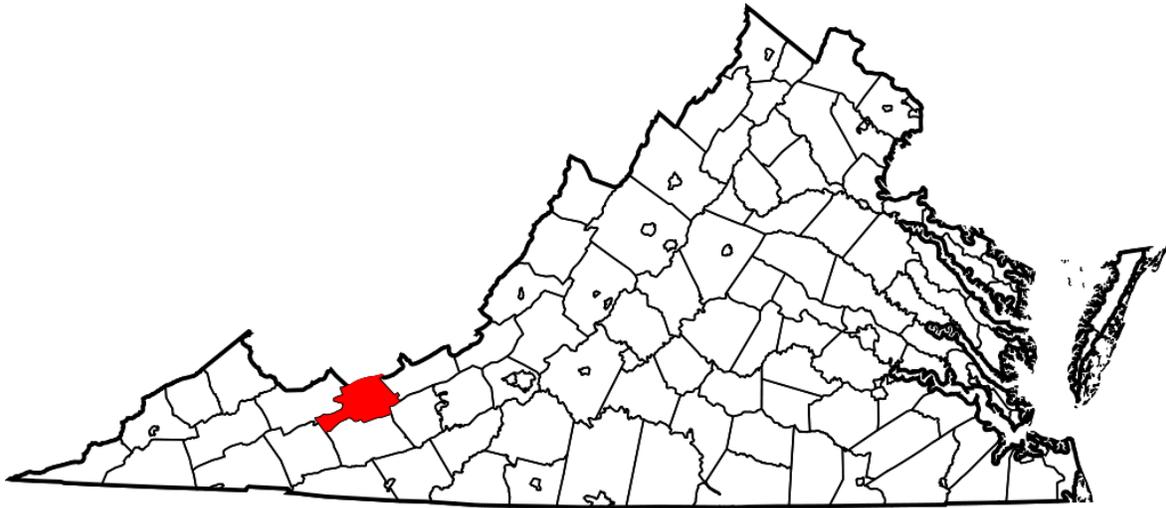


# Virginia Cooperative Extension

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## Situation Analysis Report



# Bland County 2018

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## Introduction

Bland County Extension conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the fall of 2018. The purpose of the situation analysis is to identify the needs and issues of citizens in the county. The 2013 Situation Analysis was used as a baseline to prepare and plan the process.

A community survey was developed to gather information from residents, community leaders and key informants. Extension Leadership Council (ELC) members distributed surveys and conducted interviews to collect information. Key informants included county and school administration, county agencies, social services, youth, and residents from each electoral district in Bland County

Data and information was obtained to determine needs that Extension could address with programming. Various data collection was obtained from 2010 United States Census, Virginia Employment Commission, 2012 Ag Census, 2013 County Health Rankings and 2018 Bland County Comprehensive Plan.

## Unit Profile

Bland County is located in the southwestern part of Virginia on the border of West Virginia, approximately 70 miles from Blacksburg and approximately 90 miles from Roanoke. A fifty-six mile portion of the Appalachian Trail runs through Bland County.

Bland County is a small rural area in Southwest Virginia covering 369 square miles. It is comprised of small communities and does not have an incorporated town. Nearly 78 percent of the county's total area is wooded. Approximately one-third of the county designated as National Forest, the natural character and scenic beauty of Bland County is some of the most well preserved in Southwest Virginia. Of the 6,824 population, approximately 637 of that number are housed in the Bland Correctional Center.

The main transportation infrastructure in Bland County is the road and highway system which includes all public roadways ranging from Interstate 77 to unpaved state secondary roads. I-77 travels nearly 22 miles South/North from the Wythe County line, Virginia Border to the Mercer County line at the West Virginia border.

## Demographics

- The population of Bland County increased steadily from 1980 to 2000, but has slowly declined in the years since. Currently Bland is experiencing the region-wide issue of out-migration of the younger population

- Bland County's population is aging with the median age of both males and females higher in 2010 than in 2000. Almost one in three residents (32.7%) is age 55 or older and the only two age groups with positive changes in population were the "55 to 64" and "65 and older."
- Despite the boom in new births that resulted in county growth in the 1990s, the percentage of persons under age 18 has declined since 1980, which is largely the result of low to negative natural increase and smaller families.
- Bland County's population in 2010 continued to be predominantly white. This is a consistent characteristic of every locality across the planning district and Southwest Virginia. The minority population represented only 4.5% of the total population in 2010 (307 persons). The majority of the non-white population are African American residents, with only 1.2 percent of the population composed of other minorities.

## Agriculture

- Agriculture is a declining industry within the county, with the 2010 Census reporting that a total of 71 county residents (16 years and older) were employed in agricultural production, a decrease from 116 in 2000, 145 in 1990, and 278 in 1980.
- The number of farms in Bland County decreased by 6.5% (387 in 2007 and 362 in 2012), while the acreage increased from 209 to 214 acres per farm.
- The number of farms from 2007 to 2012 has decreased from 387 to 362, which is a 6.5% reduction.. In addition, the amount of land being farmed has decreased from 80,786 to 77,456 acres.
- The market value of farms has increased from \$614,260 to \$690,022 between 2007 and 2012.
- The value of agricultural products sold has also increased from \$22,186 to \$64,199 between 2007 and 2012.

## Health

- The data indicates that in Bland County adult obesity has increased from 29% in 2010 and 30% in 2013 surpassing the national percentage of 25%.
- Physical inactivity in Bland County was 26% compared to 21% nationally.

- Data on teen birth rate indicated Bland County had 28 individuals per 1000 in comparison with 32 in Virginia and 21 nationally.
- Residents have limited access to healthy foods, 14% compared to state (4%) and US (1%).

## Education

- The Education Profile for Bland County indicates that 6% of the population 18 years and over have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, which is significantly lower than the State (20.2%) and the National (17.7%). However, the high school graduation rates for Bland County were 42%, which was higher than the State (25.5%) and National (28.4%).
- Bland County School System has continued working with the Wythe-Bland Foundation to secure grant funding and training to provide STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) for students.
- Wythe-Bland Foundation Scholarship program is available to Bland County graduating seniors and offers free tuition for five semesters to students attending Wytheville Community College.
- Bland County School System provides the opportunity for students to learn a technical skill at Tazewell County Career & Technology Center.

## Economics

- The unemployment rate in Bland County has decreased from 6% in 2013 to 2.7% in 2018. The state rate is 2.6% and the national rate is 3.7%.
- Bland County's leading industry employers are in the government and manufacturing sectors. A total of 127 businesses are housed in Bland County with a total of 1,937 employees.
- The percentage of Bland County citizens earning below \$10,000 per year was 6.57%, compared to state rate of 5.8% and 7.4% nationally.
- County median household income was \$42,864 which is far below the \$62,391 state and \$51,484 national rates.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

The Bland County ELC members and VCE Extension staff reviewed issues of the Unit Profile and discussed the needs of the county. A survey was compiled and distributed to personnel in county agencies and key leaders of the community. Surveys were also given to ELC members to gather data in each of the four voting districts. Youth and volunteers were also asked to complete surveys. ELC members and Extension staff conducted key informant interviews. Key informants were from the following agencies and organizations: Social Services, Treasurer's office, Sheriff's Department, Commonwealth Attorney's Office, Clerk of Court's Office, County Supervisor, and County Administration's Office.

## **Priority Issues**

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Bland County.

### **Aging Population**

According to the surveys, there is a need for activities, transportation, long-term care, and estate planning for the elderly. Currently, the county has a Senior Citizen program implemented by District 3 Government. In Bland County 17% of the population is 65 and older compared to the state rate of 12%. There is a lack of resources to help individuals and families address aging issues. Many families are becoming caregivers for elder relatives because of lack of affordable accessible elder care. Extension will network with other community agencies to determine resources available to help them.

### **Agriculture**

One of the issues facing farmers and landowners is wildlife nuisance. Coyotes, deer and bear are destroying farmer's crops and killing livestock. Multiflora rose and autumn olives are a growing problem in Bland County. Although producers have very little control over these costs, they are able to control how they manage their operations to minimize the amount of inputs needed. Extension programming offers educational opportunities such as Farm Management meetings, Master Cattlemen's, Multi-flora Rose Control Program, Summer Beef Field Day, forage and soil sampling, weed identification and control, on-site farm visits, Private Pesticide Applicator testing and recertification.

## **Youth/Education**

Youth life skills and educational opportunities were topics identified in surveys. Youth lack basic life skills such as cooking, changing a tire, food preservation and nutrition. Bland County 4-H currently offers in-school programming to help foster youth development. Summer and day 4-H camps address some of these issues. VCE will provide additional learning opportunities for youth in future programming. While VCE can be a key player in addressing this issue, the school system, community groups, and youth agencies must also work together to form programs to enhance and strengthen programs already in place.

## **Economic Development**

Economic Development continues to be a major issue in Bland County according to the survey conducted. Residents of the county expressed the need for more jobs, both full and part-time for adults and youth. There is a need to create more attractive employment opportunities so that younger generations will remain in Bland instead of seeking gainful employment elsewhere. Bland County residents would like to have a new school built, but without more economic growth, this would be a financial tax burden to the citizens.