



Situation Analysis Report

Southampton 2018

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Introduction

Southampton County Extension conducted a revision of its situation analysis during 2018. The purpose of the analysis was to gather and organize statistical data, identify key issues effecting county citizens and provide Extension staff with current information useful in developing educational programs. Southampton County's Extension staff currently consists of: one Ag Agent, a shared 4-H Agent with neighboring Isle of Wight County, a 4-H Program Assistant, a Unit Coordinator who is also a District Forestry and Natural Resources Agent, and one Unit Administrative Assistant. The situational analysis was created by determining community needs by surveying key stakeholders about issues facing the community. A diverse group of stakeholders were assembled to represent the variety of needs and perspectives across the county spanning geography, occupation, age, gender, race, and socio-economic status. The members gave of their time and talents and served diligently throughout the entire process. We were privileged to have individuals from our state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, churches, schools, and parents to help with this process.

Unit Profile

Southampton County is a 600 square mile rural county in Western Tidewater with agriculture as the primary economic driving force. Neighboring counties include Greensville to the west, Sussex and Surry to the north and Isle of Wight and Suffolk border the east. Two North Carolina counties, Northampton and Hertford are opposite the southern county line. An independent city, Franklin is located between Southampton and Isle of Wight County. Counties and cities to the east are much more populated than Southampton County.

Population growth has stabilized after decreases from the 1950s to 1990s. The current population is 18,570 in 2017, a 5.33% increase since 1997. Population density has remained mostly constant at around 30 people per square mile from the 1990s to present.

The median age of Southampton County residents has increased to 45.8 years from 33.8 in the 1990s. Population under 18 years of age was 18.7% in 2017. The older resident proportion, those 65 years and older, remains fairly stable at 19.6% of the population. The gender makeup is 52% male to 48% female.

Racial composition of Southampton County changed little from the 1990s to present. In 2017, the white population was 62%, black population 35%, and all other were 3.0%. This represents a very small increase in the proportion of the white population

over the last two decades. Among other races; Multiple, Hispanic or Latino, Other, American Indian, and Asian reported in at 465, 240, 64, 24, and 19 individuals, respectively.

Income per capita for Southampton County, in total 2017 dollars not adjusted for inflation, has increased very slowly to \$25,784, up from \$16,930 reported in 2000. However, per capita income for Southampton County has held steady at 77% of the per capita income for Virginia as a whole compared to 79% in 2004. Median household income in 2017 was \$53,295. Unemployment rate in 2018 is less than 3% which mirrors the nearly full employment situation across Virginia. The poverty rate in Southampton was 14.7% compared to the average Virginia poverty rate of 10%.

Teenage pregnancy continues to drop since the late 1990s. There were 30 teenage pregnancies per 1000 female age 15-19 in 2017 compared to 41 in 2010 and is pretty much in line with the Virginia average but over 50% higher than the national rate of 21. The incidences of sexually transmitted infections are at 517 (per 100k) which is significantly greater than the 385 Virginia average and 500% greater than the national average of 92.

In 2017, 83% of the county's citizens 25 years and older graduated from high school. Nineteen percent had received some education at the college level. 33% of children live in single-parent households compared to only 20% national average. And 15% have limited access to healthy foods. This is nearly 4 times the state rate and 15 times the national rate. Only 64% of the population has broadband internet access as of 2017.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Our office utilized a combination of online and written survey responses from existing databases, and through broad-based advertising among local organizations including schools, libraries, administration offices, and public postings. Additionally, key informant interviews helped to provide more details than the broad survey responses returned.

The main issues that surfaced dealt with agricultural profitability, youth development, and employment preparation and opportunities.

Ag Summary

Southampton County is the one of the most important agricultural counties in the state of Virginia in terms of acreage and economic impact to the community. Southampton County produces more acres of row crops than any other county in the state of Virginia. There are approximately 100,000 acres devoted to row crop production. The major crops produced are soybeans, cotton, peanuts, corn and wheat. There is also a significant acreage of watermelons and pumpkins produced as

well within the boundaries of this 600 square mile county. In 1995, there were over 28,000 acres of peanuts produced in the county. This declined to about 7,000 acres in 2014, and now increasing to between 10,000 – 12,000 in the last several years. Over the last decade, cotton and soybeans have remained the top two crops in terms of acreage and value for Southampton County farmers. The county is typically the largest producer of cotton, peanuts, and watermelons in terms of acreage on an annual basis. In 2018, there were 27,700 acres of soybeans, 38,067 acres of cotton, 10,429 acres of wheat, 16,800 acres of corn, 11,200 acres of peanuts, and 328 acres of watermelons, and 8000 acres of other crops.

The estimated farm gate value of agricultural production is nearly \$61 million dollars. There are also many businesses that are directly in support of row crop production. These include grain elevators, peanut buying stations, seed suppliers, crop protection materials retail centers, and trucking. Agriculture is the most important industry in this largely predominantly rural county situated in the fertile coastal plain of Virginia.

Grain prices have dropped drastically in the past 5 years, and currently impacted by global trade negotiations. Cotton still remains a stable and profitable commodity for the sandy soils of Southampton County. More growers have taken risk with corn in lieu of soybeans in order to maintain an increased rotation for peanut production. Peanut contracts have not been terribly attractive due to nationwide overproduction, however it still allows for diversification over commodity grains.

There are 257 farming operations in Southampton County that operate an average farm of about 552 acres. The largest operations encompass 2,500 to 4,000 acres, but the vast majority of these operations fall in the 500 to 1,500 acre category. The average age of primary farm managers is about 59 years old. There will be many operations that change hands in the next decade when these farmers near retirement age. The county government has supported agriculture very prominently over the last 10 years by creating fairly restrictive development ordinances in order to control growth. This has helped to preserve farmland, but there continues to be cropland lost to development and in particular solar panel facilities in recent years.

Overall, the agricultural sector has been the primary economic engine for Southampton County providing jobs and income for many people in this county. The overall success and sustainability will ultimately be determined by market prices, efficient management, and effective communication of research data down to the farm level.

A community survey was conducted in 2018 to assess the needs and concerns of Southampton County farmers, landowners, and extension stakeholders. There were issues that seemed to be consistent across the majority of the surveys. These issues were high cash rental prices for farmland, cropland loss due to solar panel facilities, farm transition planning, and herbicide resistant weeds. There were many other issues that were mentioned in the survey comments as well as in personal interactions with producers by local extension agents.

These issues included wildlife damage to crops, soil sampling services, retaining agents for long term careers, and youth development opportunities. There is also a concern from many farmers about the relationships between producers when it comes to land rent issues. The aforementioned issues are critical to the sustainability of successful row crop production in Southampton County.

In summary, there are many positives when speaking of the agricultural sector in Southampton County, but the struggles of making a living off of a fixed acreage and profits in the face of rising costs are chronic.

Youth Summary

Stakeholders of Southampton County desire opportunities for youth to focus on:

- 1) Life Skills/Decision Making
- 2) Leadership Development
- 3) College readiness - Career exploration
- 4) General positive / outdoors activities

Efforts to collaborate with Southampton County Public Schools, Southampton Academy, Franklin-Southampton County Fair, YMCA, Paul D. Camp Community College, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Corrections, Library, Sheriff's Department, community centers, and other youth organizations will continue to be built and sought out.

Priority Issues

Issue 1: Ag Profitability - Farm Land Preservation, Variety Selection, Resistant Weeds and Pesticide Training Requirements

Increasing taxes are not unique to Southampton County, but come in the wake of neighboring and sharing some services with urbanizing localities to the east such as Suffolk and Isle of Wight. Needs for increased teachers and law enforcement as well as infrastructure improvements all require more tax revenue. There is always historical temptation to place this burden on real estate, which in the case of a rural county is farmland. Southampton does implement a land use taxation plan which considers agricultural production potential as opposed to highest and best assessment (i.e., development potential). More landowners have recently formed ag and forestal districts in order to safeguard the productive agricultural lands. Continuing educational efforts will be needed to bolster the understanding that preservation of these working land acres is critical for food, fiber, and fuel production.

Farmland conversion to solar panel facilities has taken several thousand acres out of row crop production in the last several years. While this is viewed as a general economic boon for the county overall, it definitely impacts productive acres available for

food and fiber production as well as employment of local residents. It is not certain the exact role that Extension can play in this contentious issue, however our expertise has already been brought to bear as initial contractors and subcontractors have relied on local expertise for determination of cover planting species, herbicide resistant weed detection and elimination strategies, as well as invasive insect identification and eradication information. Similar expertise may be required to mitigate any weed or reseeding issues arising from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project that will also be coming through the county in the next couple of years.

Extension professionals from Ag, 4-H, as well as staff have continued to be active in partnering with local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, the Public School systems, and area partners to provide agricultural education opportunities through area “Farm Days” as well as co-hosting the Fishing Extravaganza, and other short-term natural resource educational opportunities (i.e., shooting sports and equestrian clubs) which educate students about the importance of agriculture as well as responsible sustainability practices and outdoor recreation opportunities which also add significantly to Southampton’s economy.

The local Extension agents and specialists are also called upon to keep producers up to speed with the most productive crop varieties and agricultural practices. Peanut varieties continue to be developed, evaluated, and introduced in partnership with North Carolina State University. Similarly, cotton varieties are evaluated for suitability with local soils and cropping systems. Additionally, the battle against herbicide resistant weeds is now pushing into significant additional training requirements in order to utilize auxin herbicides (i.e., 2,4-D and Dicamba “over-the-top” formulations). Hundreds of area growers can not legally apply these products without the training received at Extension arranged annual recertification programs. Southampton also continues to be the leading county in the state in pounds of pesticide containers that are recycled annually (over 8,000 pounds/year) which significantly reduces tipping fees that would be otherwise absorbed by the county in addition to the expense of many trips to the landfill to otherwise dispose of these containers in a less desirable manner. Extension also partners with the Chowan Basin Soil & Water Conservation District to aid in the disposal of agricultural tires, waste oil, and unused pesticides.

All of these aforementioned programs and activities have been identified by county stakeholders as important to maintaining agricultural profitability in the county.

Issue 2: Youth Leadership Development

Traditional as well as new approaches are needed to address the identified youth issues of:

- 1) Life Skills/Decision Making
- 2) Leadership Development
- 3) College readiness - Career exploration
- 4) General positive / outdoors activities

The 4-H Camp as well as 4-H club programs have been traditional, time-tested means of improving life skills as well as leadership development. The camp program in particular exposes the teenagers who are counselors or counselors-in-training to specific leadership skills as they oversee the daily supervision of safety, hygiene, health, welfare, entertainment, and learning for groups of younger children. This provides guided exposure and hands-on experience in guiding a group of similar-aged youth to set and accomplish goals as a coordinated unit. Additionally, the Character Counts curriculum is intertwined into this experience to provide the theoretical framework which supports the action-oriented tasks which cannot be effectively completed without exercising these attributes.

At the end of each camp season we observe youth who are more comfortable and adept in being assertive in organizing and communicating with a group of people, helping them define and formulate goals and objectives to solve problems, then to motivate them to carry out these objectives to complete the tasks within time and resource constraints. Likewise, the younger youth are motivated by slightly older peers whom they respect and look up to, to take more responsibility for themselves and others. Many of these younger youth end up following in the footsteps of predecessors in taking on leadership roles as camp counselors.

Similarly, in 4-H club context, young people take on officer roles and learn parliamentary procedure and communication skills to facilitate groups. These clubs also utilize research-based curricula to increase knowledge, skills, and abilities in many areas including, care and production of livestock and horses, safe and responsible operation of firearms, robotics and STEM projects, food production and preservation, home economics, communications and presentation skills, business and financial records keeping and reporting, journalism, etc. These subjects are not merely learned by reading and regurgitating, but by hands-on experiences in controlled and supervised projects where evaluation and constructive criticism as a means of improvement are provided by peers and nurturing adults.

College readiness and career explorations are enhanced by these general leadership opportunities, but also by exposure to many professionals who volunteer their time to speak to the clubs. Some examples in the last few years are the 4-Hers were able to tour the NOAA weather station where meteorologists demonstrated how they interpret predictive models based on ever-increasing amounts of data. Entomologists have given demonstrations on insect identification and why some pests can create some economically devastating consequences if not controlled by good Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques. Farriers have demonstrated how proper hoof care is essential for horse health. Agribusiness leaders have covered topics from veterinary care to soil nutrients to financial management. Law enforcement and legislators explain how each of their duties are critical for a civil and orderly society to function. Each opportunity affords these young people to observe practitioners of a wide array of professions for consideration of their own career tracks.

Adding to these traditional modes of youth development, expanding partnerships and funding opportunities, will continue to be explored. The goal for more leadership consistency to increase youth involvement to state and national levels will also be emphasized. It is encouraging how many youth who have previously been involved in these programs have gone on to become successful citizens and then have the motivation to give back to the 4-H programs of which they have identified as being integral to their own quality of life.