



Situation Analysis Report

Page County

2018

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Introduction

The Page County Situation Analysis was updated in 2018 with the assistance of the Page County ELC, community stakeholders and Extension Staff. The ELC decided that the best way to collect the community perspective on issues was through a community survey and key informant interviews.

The community surveys were distributed in Page, Shenandoah, Frederick, Warren and Clarke Counties. Extension Agents (except 4-H) in these counties serve all five counties. Survey were distributed through social media posts, radio and newspaper advertisements, Chambers of Commerce, VCE websites and direct sharing with clientele. The survey was completed by 671 residents in the Northern Shenandoah Valley over a four month period of time. Eighty-one residents from Page County completed the survey.

ELC members brainstormed to create a list of residents to contact for key informant interviews. Interviewees included business owners, elected officials, county administration, law enforcement, clergy, youth, civic leaders and educators from a variety of areas within the county.

The ELC determined the priority issues for Page County by compiling information from community surveys, key informant interviews and their own member discussions.

Unit Profile

Page County is located in northwestern Virginia. On the east it is bordered by the Blue Ridge Mountains and on the west by the Massanutten Mountain range. The county consists of a valley nestled within the scenic Shenandoah Valley. Page County is approximately 15 minutes from I-81, 30 minutes from I-66 and 90 miles from Washington, D.C. with the caveat that the primary east/west corridor must cross the mountains to reach Interstate 81 or northern Virginia and the north/south corridor consists of a two-lane highway.

Page County consists of 202,240 acres with approximately 32% of the land mass in the Shenandoah National Park or National Forest system. The Shenandoah National Park extends the entire north-south eastern boundary of the county and the George Washington National Forest runs the entire length of the western boundary. The South Fork of the Shenandoah River runs through the county and the valley floor is 12-15 miles wide and 35-40 miles long.

Page County is the fourth largest agriculture county in the state when looking at agricultural sales. The county ranks number three in the state for pullets used for laying flock replacement. It also ranks number three in the state for sales of poultry and eggs. Page

County ranks third in the state for broilers, other white meat-type chickens and for turkeys. These statistics clearly show that poultry is the primary agriculture industry in the county.

The other largest agriculture enterprises in the county are beef cattle and row crops. Feeding livestock comprises the majority of farming enterprises. The dramatic increases in all farming inputs such as fuel, fertilizer, and pesticides has impacted the bottom line for all farmers. Virginia Department of Agriculture reported in 2012 that the average age of Virginia farmers is 61 years old. Page County has a large full-time farming population with many 2nd and 3rd generations that are interested in continuing the farming industry. However, this poses concerns about how the current farm operator transfers holdings while maintaining a sufficient income stream. Another issue that comes up when discussing the sustainability of the farm is the difficulty in hiring and retaining quality labor for jobs that have historically not been as high paying as non-agricultural jobs.

According to Virginia Department of Agriculture Statistics, the average size farm in Page County is 131 acres. Page County does not have an Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) Extension Agent housed in the unit but programming is being offered by ANR Extension Agents that serve the planning district. As budgets improve in the state and county, we could benefit from an Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension Agent housed in Page County.

The unemployment rate for Page County in February of 2018 was 6.4% according to the Virginia Employment Commission. Page County's unemployment rate is currently the highest in the Shenandoah Valley and the eighth highest in the state. Census statistics show that Page County's median household income is \$45,030; approximately \$23,000 below the state average of \$68,114.

According to the Virginia Department of Education, 96.7% of Page County students graduated on-time in 2017; this is 5.6% more students graduating on time than the state average of 91.1% on-time graduation. 63.7% of high school graduates are continuing their education.

According to the 2016 Valley Health Community Needs Assessment, three of the identified priority health needs for Page County are the lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and significant obesity related chronic diseases among our population. In the County Health Rankings (2018) data source, Page County ranks 61 out of 133 counties for healthy outcomes and ranks 91 out 133 counties for healthy factors. These factors include poor health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment factors. This same data source estimates that 26% of adults in Page County are overweight or obese and 26% of them report being physically inactive. This is further reflected in our youth as recorded by the Pride Youth Survey administered to 8th, 9th and 11th graders in the fall of 2017. Twenty six percent (26%) of the 8th graders, 31% of the 9th graders and 36% of the 11th graders described themselves as "slightly or very overweight". When this survey asked if a doctor told them that they were overweight, 10% responded "Yes". Some of these poor health trends are attributed to twenty four percent (24%) of our youth under 18 are living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). This is ten percent higher than the entire state of Virginia which reports 14% live

below the poverty level. This is evident in the schools as 53% of students are enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch program (PCPS 2017).

According to the National Institute of Health, for Americans under 50, drug overdose is the leading cause of death. Since 2012, the rate of Narcan administration by EMS has risen in every county in the planning district but has doubled in Page County.

Page County has a growing number of alternative agriculture enterprises from locally grown hops that are used at the new brewery to vineyards and a distillery. Industrial hemp production is being explored by the Economic Development Department. These niche agriculture enterprises have grown substantially over the last five years.

Supplemental Nutrition programs in Page County have the highest number of households receiving SNAP benefits at 13.4%. Despite this assistance and the use of food banks/pantries, 12.3% of families reported being food insecure. Food insecure families lack access to enough food for active, healthy lifestyles and have limited availability to nutritionally adequate food.

The Community Needs Assessment conducted by Valley Health identified Page County as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA). This designation is based on a calculation of the ratio of primary medical care physicians per 1,000 persons, the infant mortality rate, the percentage of the population with incomes below the poverty level, and the percentage of the population greater than age 64. Along with the MUA designation, Page County is also in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for mental and dental health. Dental providers are available for residents at the rate of 1 per 5,962 residents compared to the state average of one dental provider per 1,570 residents.

The community's mental health needs have grown, while the mental health service capacity has not. People Inc.'s Community Needs Assessment identified the lack of substance abuse and mental health services as a growing need in the Northern Shenandoah Valley as the number of residents per mental health providers is 1 to 1,714. This statistic is even more shocking in Page, where the ratio increases to 1 provider for every 3,389 residents. Mental health care for youth is a great need as 32% of survey respondents who had children said they had experienced emotional and behavioral problems with their children in the last 12 months.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The community and resident perspectives were gathered through a combination of community survey and multiple key informant interviews. The survey identified several areas of concern for community members. The top issues included lack of a livable wage, substance abuse, workforce prep and job skills, affordable health and dental services, mental health, positive youth activities, affordable housing, maintaining/preserving farmland, safe and affordable food supply and access to safe drinking water. Key informant interviews mirrored concerns from the community survey when it came to the economy (lack of livable wage jobs), substance abuse and mental health being mentioned in nearly every one. Additional concerns that were raised

from the interviews were transportation, availability of quality child care, personal finance skills and healthy living.

The ELC openly discussed the results from the survey and key informant interviews and had their own discussion concerning the issues that were brought forth. They reviewed previous Situation Analysis Reports and were not surprised that there are several issues that have remained on the priority list for decades.

Priority Issues

1. Lack of Livable Wage

Economic concerns are an ongoing issue in Page County. Lack of Employment/Economic Development and now Lack of Livable Wage Jobs have consistently ranked at the top of each Situation Analysis over the last decade. The high unemployment rate coupled with many of the available jobs being part-time positions leaves residents without the disposable income needed to sustain their households. According to the People, Inc. Community Needs Assessment, “a living wage is the income needed to afford minimum basic needs including food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation and other necessities without budgeting for things that many Americans enjoy like entertainment, meals at restaurants, or vacation.”

There are large portions of this issue that are outside the scope of VCE to address. Locally, VCE is working with Page County Farmer’s Association and other non-profits to promote alternative agricultural opportunities to improve farm profitability.

2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Community members identified substance abuse as a major concern in our county. The issue was repeated by the community survey comments, in key informant interviews and by ELC members. Substance abuse affects not only the individual but those around them; negatively impacting health, employment, child development, homelessness and overall financial well-being. Due to those concerns, substance abuse and mental health have been identified as an underlying cause of poverty in our region.

Community survey results were filled with concerns:

“The Opioid Crisis is affecting all aspects of life in our county. Unemployment, housing, family resiliency, and mental health are all affected by drug use.”

“Substance Abuse and Mental Health Wellness – too many are going without proper treatment of mental health and substance abuse disorders.”

“The use of illicit drugs and/or the abuse of prescription and over the counter drugs is out of control. This causes a major drain on our communities both economically and emotionally.”

“The drug epidemic, particularly meth. I have seen it destroy people, families, small businesses, negatively impact our economy and property values...There needs to be an affordable rehabilitation facility available to help those who need it.”

VCE is addressing this issue within its resource ability. The 4-H Agent serves as a member of the Page Alliance for Community Action (PACA). The mission of this group is to promote drug-free, healthy and positive development of youth and families through community collaboration and prevention based initiatives. The 4-H Agent has offered programs and activities on Character Counts, leadership and personal development at a multitude of PACA events. A new Extension position that is housed in Culpeper County has been made possible because the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded Virginia Cooperative Extension nearly \$1.1 million to expand prevention training to help tackle the commonwealth's rural opioid addiction problem. The two-year Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-funded (SAMHSA) Rural Opioids Technical Assistance through Virginia Cooperative Extension project will build upon two current USDA-funded Cooperative Extension projects to expand training and technical assistance on opioid prevention through the implementation of evidenced-based curricula targeting students in nine additional rural Virginia counties. Rural communities are disproportionately affected by prescription opioid misuse and abuse. Of 134 counties or independent cities in Virginia, 53 are designated as rural. Large portions of this issue however continue to remain outside the scope of VCE to address.

3. Workforce Prep and Job Skills (Youth and Adult)

Local technical and workforce education opportunities have grown through classes offered at the Page County Tech Center and Lord Fairfax Community College, yet a gap in skills still exists. Employers reported that employees are not equipped with communication, customer service, and problem solving skills that are needed to be successful. Employee retention was another concern. The ELC discussed the need for residents to understand personal finance, budgeting and the importance of maintaining employment.

This issue is being addressed to some extent by VCE resources. The youth program: Reality Store at the high school level is helping young people to understand the importance of job training and the effects it has on their financial situation. The 4-H Agent has also developed and presented a program to classes of 8th grade students called "My Financial Future." The lesson includes identifying the parts of a check, check writing, balancing a check register, making a deposit and wants versus needs. This program concludes with a hands on simulation where the students have to pay their weekly bills and make financial choices with a limited income. 4-H has presented at both Page County High School and Luray High school concerning career readiness through a display called "Handshakes 101". Participants learn about "The Perfect Business Handshake" and making a good first impression. The students

role-play to model unacceptable and acceptable handshakes before interacting with potential employers.

4-H Camp interviews and livestock record book interviews are being held to increase youth's ability to prepare for future job interviews. 4-H Public Speaking and Presentations Contest are offered each year to teach youth the important life skill of presenting their ideas in front of a group. In today's technology driven world, verbal communication skills are not as prevalent as they once were. Texting has overtaken speaking and employers need individuals who can speak with their customers. Extension also offers a wide range of programs to adults on financial management, including family budgeting and cost saving measures for tight economic times. Extension must continue to hold these programs and find new and better ways to increase attendance. There are also large portions of this issue that remain outside of the scope of VCE to address.

4. Affordable Health and Dental Services

Access to primary and preventive health care services through a doctor's office, clinic or other appropriate provider is an important element of a community's health care system, and is vital to the health of the community's residents. Despite the new hospital opening in May 2014, access to affordable health and dental services continues to be an issue. The ability to access care is influenced by many factors, including insurance coverage and the ability to afford services, the availability and location of health care providers, understanding where to find services when needed, and reliable personal or public transportation. Page County has been designated as Medically Underserved Area with a Shortage of Mental and Dental Health Service Providers according to the Community Health Needs Assessment compiled by Valley Health.

This issue is outside the scope of VCE to address.

5. Positive Youth Activities/Youth Health and Wellness

Youth of Page County have very few opportunities and locations to come together in a non-school and non-threatening environment where they can participate in wholesome activities. Recreation centers for older youth are nonexistent and these youth must leave the county to engage in traditional forms of entertainment. Page County has above average rates of obesity, inactivity, and diabetes. Numerous research studies have shown that behavior change concerning health and well-being started at an early age has a much better chance of becoming part of a lifelong healthy life style.

The community survey repeatedly stated that: "Page County doesn't have many healthy activities to keep kids busy except school sports. We should have some type of public activities: pool, bowling, skating, etc. something that keeps kids busy and out of trouble."

The youth development program has been and continues to increase the number of programs it is offering on healthy lifestyle choices for youth. Teaching nutrition lessons and stressing the importance of physical activity to help lower the level of obesity and life style related diseases is paramount. These programs need to concentrate on making those lifestyle choices on a limited income. Lack of public transportation often affects the attendance of these activities. Activities that are held at the school when students are already there have great attendance, but summer programs and evening programs often have low attendance. Large portions of this problem continue to be outside of the scope of VCE to address.

6. Housing Affordability and Low Income Options

Concerns were raised about the availability of affordable housing or low-income options. Housing represents the largest monthly expense for most families. Low-income renters often have fewer options in their price range. There are only five low income apartment complexes in Page County. There are also some mobile home neighborhoods in the area that qualify as low income. Many rentals are older and face issues like inadequate weatherization or outdated electric and plumbing. The aforementioned issues lead to higher utility bills that create additional financial burdens on already tight budgets.

Extension can address this issue within its resource ability by offering a wide range of programs to adults on financial management, including family budgeting and cost saving measures. There are large portions of this issue that are outside of the scope of VCE to address.

7. Maintaining and Preserving Farmland, Forestry and Open Space

Page County has a rich agricultural heritage yet faces concerns about the loss of farmland due to profitability of farms and transitioning to the next generation. Many niche agriculture enterprises have emerged in an effort to diversify and increase revenue but are on a smaller scale than traditional farms. The inexpensive cost of living, quiet community and picturesque view make Page County an appealing community for retirees, commuters and those looking to be close to the city without the hustle and bustle and cost.

This issue is being addressed to some extent by VCE resources. The best avenues for controlling growth are the adoption of comprehensive plans by local government officials. Extension also has a role in designing programs to address the needs that arise as a result of this growth. Extension can also partner with other agencies and organizations to present relevant information about planning, taxes, and development rights.

8. Safe and Affordable Food Supply/Safe Use of Pesticides

When it comes to defining this issue the American Farm Bureau Federation website states: “Knowing that our food is safe and that the best science is used to ensure that we continue to have access to the most wholesome product is something that all people are concerned with. America’s farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe and affordable food for consumers in the U.S. and around the world. There are several reasons for their strong support for food safety. They share in the desire to have a safe, abundant and affordable food supply. They also have an economic interest because the demand for their products is determined by consumer confidence. Numerous nationwide food recalls have increased consumer awareness of food safety”.

Numerous VCE programs are involved in the effort to ensure a safe, high-quality, and affordable food supply. Programs for agricultural producers and youth focus on good agricultural practices that minimize health risks to those consuming agricultural products. Programs for food handlers that emphasize HACCP processes to reduce the risk of foodborne illness within the restaurant industry. Programs for consumers and youth include safe food handling and preservation, as well as incorporating healthy food choices within a realistic spending plan. Programming efforts include educational activities related to adult and youth meat quality assurance, good agricultural practices, safe food handling, adult and youth food preservation, emergency preparedness, adult and youth horticulture, pesticide application, youth financial simulations, nutrition and financial management, and stretching food dollars.

9. Water Quality

According to the 2016 and the draft of the 2018 Water Quality Assessment completed by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Page County continues to have streams declared impaired because of E.coli and fecal coliform contamination. The affected watersheds continue to work through the process of controlling sources of contamination. The stream impairment is caused by agriculture production, wildlife, and homeowner activities. Roughly half of the county population is served by private ground water supplies. Drinking water testing clinics results showed that 37% of the households participating had water with samples exceeding the standard for coliform bacteria and 6% of the samples exceeded the standard for E. coli present. Samples that were tested show a decrease in both types of bacteria from the last time the Situation Analysis was complete in 2013.

This issue is being addressed to some extent by VCE resources. Extension programs that test and provide well water analysis have been held in Page County for multiple years. Extension programs on Total Maximum Daily Load and Nutrient Management Plans, Best Agricultural Practices, Soil Quality, Alternative Energy Sources, Fencing, No Till Farming and Graze 300 continue to assist in creating improved Water Quality. There are still large portions of this issue that are outside the scope of VCE to address.