

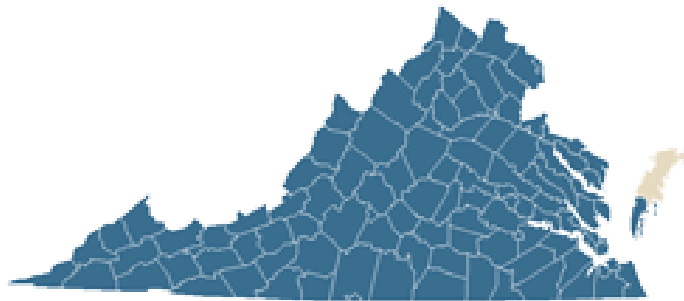


# Virginia Cooperative Extension

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# Situation Analysis Report



## Accomack County

# 2018

### VCE-Accomack Extension Staff

Theresa Pittman - Unit Coordinator/Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources

Joyce Pettit-Dix - 4-H Program Assistant

Susan O'Brien - Program Assistant, Family Nutrition Program

Rachel Barnes - Unit Support Staff

## Introduction

VCE-Accomack conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the 2018 calendar year. VCE-Accomack faculty and staff developed a Qualtrics Survey to gather information from residents. Groups listed in Appendix A were specifically targeted to receive the survey link. The survey link was also placed on the VCE-Accomack website and shared via social media. This report came from that survey.

## Unit Profile

Accomack County is one of two Virginia counties on the Delmarva Peninsula, commonly referred to as the “Eastern Shore”. The county comprises a total of 449.50 square miles and is bordered to the south by Northampton County, to the east by the Atlantic Ocean, to the west by the Chesapeake Bay and to the north by the state of Maryland. It consists of many rural villages surrounded by large agricultural tracts.

Census data shows that Accomack County’s total population is 32,545 with the majority of residents identify as white (67%) and 33% identify as non-white. There is a potential 4-H youth population of 5,766 youth ages 5-19 years. Thirty-four percent of the population is over the age of 55 and the median age for the County is 45 years. Forty-two percent are over 50 years of age. Activities and services for the elderly have improved since the last report but are still limited.

The median household income in Accomack County increased from \$34,678 in 2011 to \$42,260 in 2017. This is well below the Virginia’s median household income of \$68,766. Fifty-six percent of households make less than \$49,999 and 18% percent of people in Accomack County receive income below poverty level.

Agriculture and aquaculture are the largest industries in Accomack County totaling \$172,197,000 in cash receipts. Sixty-five percent of the cash receipts are attributed to poultry sales. There are 226 farms with the majority being less than 50 acres. Twenty-eight percent of farms in Accomack County are over 180 acres. Major crops in Accomack County include soybeans, corn, wheat, snap-beans, potatoes, poultry and eggs. Accomack County is ranked as the fourth largest county in the state for its value of aquaculture sales.

Employment and shopping opportunities are limited in Accomack County. The largest employers in Accomack County are Perdue Farms, Tyson Farms, Accomack County Schools, Riverside Medical and the County of Accomack.

Portions of the County are presently served by Broadband internet but large sections are not. Cell phone and wireless internet coverage is spotty as well. Star Transit is the only public transportation available and is also limited. Public water and sewage is limited to incorporated towns.

Housing opportunities in Accomack County are limited. There are 21,243 housing units available with 36.3% of units vacant. Most units are owner-occupied, single family houses. Multi-family housing is not available due the lack of public utilities.

Tourism is an important part of the region's economy. Accomack County is often the area through which tourists pass on their way to Hampton Roads from Maryland, New Jersey or Northern Virginia. Accomack County has two tourism commissions to help support the retail and hospitality industries.

Health Issues are a major concern for the citizens. According to Health District statistics, 32% of residents have high blood pressure; 35% have been diagnosed with high cholesterol; 10% with non-gestational diabetes and 73.4% of residents were overweight. There is only one medical facility in the county.

The Accomack County public school system has five elementary schools, two middle schools and three high schools. Chincoteague middle is combined with the high school and on Tangier Island there is a combined school for pre-k through twelfth grade. The Virginia Department of Education determined that 64% of students in the County are eligible for the free and/or reduced lunch program during the 2018-2019 school year. In 2018-19, 5,116 students were enrolled in school and of those students, 39% are white, 37% are black and 23% are Hispanic.

Accomack County has significant poverty problems. The 2017 mean household income in Accomack County is approximately \$42,260 which is lower than the mean household income of the rest of the state (\$68,766). The percentage of Accomack residents living in poverty in 2017 was 18% compared to 11% for the state. The County unemployment rate in May of 2018 was 3.7% a decrease from January 2018 (5.7%).

## Community and Resident Perspectives

The VCE-Accomack Situation Analysis Qualtrics Survey was the primary source of information. The Accomack County Extension email distribution list, which is comprised of 489 members, with an interest in both Agriculture and Natural Resources and 4-H Youth Development received a link to the online qualtrics survey. In addition, the Situation Analysis survey was posted on the VCE-Accomack website and on the Facebook page. Fifty-four individuals completed the on-line survey.

The highest priority issues cited by Accomack residents in the survey are:

Closed Ended Questions	% of Responses
1. Poverty	31
2. Affordable Housing	24
3. Parenting	24

4. Water Quality	22
5. Food Security	20
6. Obesity	18
7. STEM Education	18
8. Personal Financial Management	17
9. Healthy Food Choices	17
10. Senior Services	17

### Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data, the following top priority issues were identified for Accomack County. Issues are grouped together to address the larger focus.

#### Issue 1: Poverty and Personal Financial Management

Within Accomack County, 56% of households make less than \$49,999 and 20% percent of residents receive a total income that is below poverty level. Thirty-one percent of Accomack County children live in poverty, which is higher than the Virginia (13.9%) or the National (21%) rate.

*The VCE-Accomack Office can address this issue mainly through offering educational programs and resources to residents. VCE-Accomack can partner with the County, financial institutions, and community organizations to offer more financial management seminars on a wide range of income levels. Currently VCE-Accomack does not have a Family Consumer Sciences Agent on staff which would typically be tasked with addressing poverty prevention and personal financial management education.*

#### Issue 2: Affordable Housing

Affordable housing was identified as a priority issue in Accomack County. Respondents that commented on this issue felt the high cost of living and lack of high paying jobs contributed to the lack of success in this area. One respondent went as far as to say “a great number of college graduates cannot move back home because of the lack of good paying jobs available in the community. Over time this creates a void in our tight-knit community.” The addition of rental housing availability was identified as need for Accomack County residents within our 2018 Situation Analysis Survey. Currently, there are few or substandard housing options for the low to middle income residents and the addition of affordable rental housing might address this issue.

*This issue is outside the scope of VCE but should be addressed.*

### **Issue 3: Parenting Skills**

The 2013 American Community Survey states that 43.2% of children in Accomack live in a single-parent household. This percentage is 12.1% higher than the Virginia average and 9.2% higher than the National average. Accomack County families need education and skills to assist them with addressing challenges and issues associated with parenting youth. Parenting skills include behavior management, positive reinforcement, setting healthy boundaries, drug education, communication skills, anger-management, keeping children safe and making healthy choices. The focus of education for parents should be avoiding and prevention of: child abuse, neglect, teen parents, foster care, juvenile delinquency, poverty and single parent families.

*VCE-Accomack can work cooperatively with multiple agencies to address parent education in Accomack County. Currently, the Eastern Shore Community Services Board offers parenting classes for clients and VCE-Accomack can engage to provide programming opportunities that allow for parent and youth participation in order to strengthen families.*

### **Issue 4: Water Quality**

Caring for the environment is a desire of all Eastern Shore residents due to our sensitive geographical location with water quality and water quality education serving as the primary critical need. Accomack County depends entirely on ground water for drinking water supplies, as well as most other supplies such as irrigation water. The salt water that surrounds us causes our water to become brackish at relatively shallow depths (350 feet) in most areas. Our sole-source aquifer is a shared water resource that also needs protection through awareness and education. Drilled wells are the most common well type on the Eastern Shore with 65% of homeowners reporting ownership. Education about water quality and water consumption is critical due to 25% of residents reporting that they were not aware of the type of well they consumed water from.

Numerous federal, state, and local ground water protection programs exist and through the Eastern Shore of Virginia Ground Water Committee, residents receive assistance with understanding, protecting and managing the ground water resource. VCE-Accomack can address the issues associated with Water Quality by working cooperatively with agencies and community partners. Topics on which to focus are: conservation of groundwater resources, addressing drainage and storm water retention, and provide educational information in the areas of irrigation management, crop water requirements, non-point source pollution, types of wells and land use associated with water quality.

*VCE-Accomack conducts Household Water Quality programs every two years in order to increase knowledge about ground water and teach participants how to care for private wells. Another clinic will be held in Accomack County in 2019. VCE-Accomack also conducts*

*pesticide recertification classes each year for those who hold private pesticide application licenses. These classes help protect both surface and ground water quality by teaching license holders how to apply pesticides correctly*

## **Issue 5: Health/Nutrition/Obesity Education**

Health, nutrition, and obesity were identified as top issues facing Accomack County. Healthy lifestyles and obesity rates of the resident population are important issues to 20% of the respondents to the 2018 VCE-Accomack survey. A lack of physical activity and poor nutrition are contributing factors to an overweight population and resident obesity. A wide range of health problems and chronic diseases plague all resident age groups in Accomack County, including high cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease stroke, some cancers, and more. Nationally, the increase in both the prevalence of overweight individuals. Obesity and associated chronic diseases are well documented and have negative consequences for individuals, families, and society.

According to a 2011-2012 study done by the Eastern Virginia Medical School, the rate of overweight and obese school age children in Accomack is just over 47%. The Virginia average is 31% and the national average is 34.7%. A total of 1,628 Accomack students in kindergarten and grades 3, 5, 7 and 10 had BMI measurements taken in the fall of 2011 for the study. The highest obesity rate was found in grade 5 at 54%. Childhood obesity is associated with type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular problems, asthma, cancer and other serious diseases and also may be linked to poor academic performance according to the report.

*VCE-Accomack can address this concern by continuing to partner with the Accomack County Public School System to offer educational programs focusing on healthy lifestyle choices. VCE-Accomack offers nutrition and health education programming for middle school students including: Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, Eat Right - Move More, Fast Food and Families, Smart Drink Choices, Food Safety at Home, Smart Image/Hygiene and Character Counts. Kindergarten through second grade students receive Organ-wise lessons teaching them about making good food and drink choices along with good hygiene. Choose Health is available for third through fifth grades that focus on My Plate, eating low fat, sugar and sodium foods, making smart activity choices and learning how to read a food label.*

*Currently, VCE-Accomack does not have a Family Consumer Sciences Agent on staff which would typically be tasked with addressing nutrition education and healthy lifestyle choices. VCE-Accomack utilizes program assistants to execute in-school programming.*

## **Issue 6: STEM Education for Youth**

The availability of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education was identified as a current pressing need for Accomack County residents. STEM education not only

promotes youth development, but also prepares youth for higher education but also exposes students to real-world applications and that build upon each other. Comments from the 2018 Situation Analysis Survey focused on the specific educational needs in order to increase employment in Accomack County. Trainings requested include:

- Agriculture production and agribusiness education
- Plumbing classes
- Electrical engineering
- Aquaculture production
- Apprentice-ships/internships

Other comments included:

“The lack of jobs available on the Shore prevents folks from moving and staying here. Poor quality of education and healthcare keep potential new residents out of the community.”

“Need affordable housing and employment opportunities.”

*VCE-Accomack strives to provide educational programs that focus on STEM. Currently, VCE-Accomack does not have a 4-H/Youth Development Agent on staff which would typically be tasked with developing educational STEM programming. VCE-Accomack utilizes program assistants to execute current programming efforts in Accomack County.*

## **Issue 7: Senior Services**

In Accomack County, 42% percent of residents are over 50 years of age. An aging population results in a higher demand for health-care services and long-term care options as well as a higher demand for specialized care. The isolated area in which we live makes transportation to medical facilities and other specialized services very limited and forces aging residents to rely on their network of family and friends thus limiting their independence. Ultimately, there is a lack of resources and avenues of assistance to help individuals and families plan and address their own aging issues.

*VCE-Accomack currently works with the Eastern Shore Area Agency on Aging to plan monthly educational programs for seniors and serve as a vector for providing education programs and advocacy on behalf of the elderly. Currently, VCE-Accomack does not have a Family Consumer Sciences Agent on staff which would typically be tasked with developing educational programming for seniors and thus doesn't allow for VCE-Accomack to become the area's lead providing agency. VCE-Accomack utilizes program assistants to execute educational programming targeting seniors.*

## Appendix A

### Agencies and Departments Contacted to Participate in and Share Qualtrics Survey:

Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital  
Eastern Shore Rural Health  
NASA  
Perdue Farms  
Tyson  
Virginia Employment Commission  
Accomack County School Board Office  
Food Bank  
Eastern Shore Soil and Water  
Eastern Shore Community Services Board  
Accomack county school teachers  
Accomack County Health Department  
Light House Ministries  
Eastern Shore Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Eastern Shore Public Library  
Eastern Shore Community College  
Accomack County Social Services  
Accomack County 4-H Parents/Guardians  
Accomack County  
    Airport  
    Building and Zoning  
    Clerk of Circuit Court  
    Commonwealth's Attorney  
    Commissioner of Revenue  
    County Administration  
    Finance  
    Human Resources  
    Parks and Recreation  
    Public Works  
    Sheriff's Office