

# Hanover County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

*Authored by:*

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Preserving and Promoting Farm and Forest Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More legacy training for agriculture producer families</li> <li>• Promote farm Land-Use and the county offering land tax reduction for under 5 acres</li> <li>• Partner with National Parks, State Parks, county parks, historical societies, and American Battlefield Trusts</li> <li>• Workshops on conservation programs and trusts</li> <li>• Press releases sent to the county, local papers, and social media for optimal distribution</li> <li>• Provide resources for risk management especially as it pertains to adverse weather</li> <li>• Outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days, and seminars on identified issues such as new technologies, food safety and new policies, pest management, farm transitions, and value-added endeavors</li> <li>• Establish and monitor field trials and pest occurrences</li> <li>• Assist Virginia State University (VSU) Specialists and Small Farm Agents in outreach efforts and provide meaningful classroom and field seminars to historically underserved landowners</li> <li>• Provide the Hanover County Planning Department with objective resources when planning future developments or considering changes to agricultural zoning or to comprehensive land use planning</li> </ul>
Protecting Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train the trainer for water quality improvement strategies</li> <li>• Workshop highlighting conservation practices</li> <li>• Homeowner clinics on how to interpret fertilizer and pesticide labels.</li> <li>• Incorporating Natural Resources and Conservation into our youth programs.</li> <li>• Hold a well water testing and educational clinic in Hanover County for landowners, not on the municipal water system</li> <li>• Promote, organize, and teach the annual Private Pesticide Applicators Recertification Classes for adults and youth;</li> <li>• Support and promote a Pesticide Recycling Program for commercial farmers;</li> <li>• Support Master Gardeners to provide general gardening, turf, and landscaping educational programs through a series of Spring and Fall seminars, known as the Hanover Gardening Series (HGS), Help Desk, and Speaker’s Bureau</li> </ul>

<p>Strengthening the local food system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an “Agricultural Resource Page” on the Hanover Website</li> <li>• Provide business classes for farmers to explore new revenue options</li> <li>• Canning/food preservation classes</li> <li>• Incorporating the Buy Local campaign into programs</li> <li>• Exploring developing meat processing facilities</li> <li>• Voluntary list of direct-to-consumer producers</li> <li>• Showing the need for a Family and Consumer Science (FCS) Agent</li> <li>• Performing a feasibility study looking at re-opening Cannery as a commercial kitchen</li> <li>• Outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days, and seminars on identified issues such as new technologies, food safety and new policies, pest management, farm transitions, and value-added endeavors</li> <li>• Sponsor and promote the Richmond Area Vegetable Growers Conference, an annual conference for local fruit and vegetable producers</li> <li>• Work with the Economic Development department to promote sustainable agriculture and expand value-added products</li> <li>• Provide a 50-mile meal to highlight the importance and impact of local foods to the Hanover Board of Supervisors and other lead county officials</li> </ul>
<p>Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills to address community-identified issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase our youth development impact by focusing on 4H planning, program overview, youth recruitment, and open houses</li> <li>• Use 4H/FFA to promote general Ag Awareness</li> <li>• Support FFA and youth programs by providing ag expert</li> <li>• Create a list of agribusinesses that are willing to sponsor youth to gain experience</li> <li>• Public speaking and communication skills</li> <li>• County-level 4-H Community Service projects</li> <li>• Implement skills classes such as sewing, cooking, basic auto, finance, and budgeting</li> <li>• Form a Hanover 4-H council with members from each club that meets 3-4 times a year</li> <li>• Develop a youth volunteer Recruitment with programs that are in place like the Weimer scholarship</li> <li>• Train youth through Junior Camp in activities and skills that enhance their appreciation and understanding of the outdoor environment.</li> <li>• VCE’s high level of support provides the livestock clubs with resources to build on agriculture knowledge, best practices, animal</li> </ul>

	<p>science knowledge, and entrepreneurship as they build their flocks and herds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating clubs to assist in their outreach of agriculture education/literacy at schools, fairs, and other venues and promotional sites.</li> <li>• Use media outlets, in-school programming, collaboration with partners, and 4-H events to emphasize environmentally responsible behaviors including recycling, carpooling, and no littering campaigns.</li> <li>• Collaboration on professional development classes for educators through in-service training, resource materials, and best practices recommendations</li> <li>• Lead booths at Ag Day which provides agricultural literacy programming through hands-on experiences for all third graders in the county</li> <li>• Collaborate on environmental education projects such as Meaningful Watershed Experiences, in-school programs, and 50-Mile Meal for the Board of Supervisors</li> <li>• Continued use of Character Counts! pillars; respect for their environment, responsibility for their actions, and most importantly the Citizenship pillar.</li> </ul>
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## Introduction

The Hanover County Situational Analysis is the product of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The issues are the refinement of information and inferences derived from each genre.

The Analysis was developed by compiling quantitative data from annual reports, county departmental records, and local, state, and national online databases. These included sources such as the 2023 Hanover Extension Needs Assessment Survey, 2023 Hanover Comprehensive Plan, Land Use and Solar Farming Assessment in Hanover County (Data Science for the Public Good Program), Feeding the Economy 2023 Report, Hanover County Public Schools FY 2023-2034 adopted budget, Ashland by the Numbers 2021-2022 Report, the Human Resources 2022 Annual Report, 2023 Kids Count, Hanover County Public Schools, Community Health Improvement Hanover County, Virginia 2018 - 2022, 2017 Ag Census, and the US Census Bureau.

Key informant and citizen interviews were conducted to collect qualitative input. These informants were asked to look at issues from a professional standpoint and as residents of Hanover County.

Unit staff, VCE volunteers, community partners, the Hanover Extension Leadership Council, and agency representatives reviewed the data and noted trends, statistics, and anomalies that portend emerging issues for Hanover County.

The quantitative and qualitative results were then cross-referenced to produce the prominent issues currently confronting Hanover County and predict those that will emerge shortly. Issues were also reviewed for the role in which Extension can, should, or would participate with appropriate resources, personnel, and support.

## Unit Profile

Hanover County is in east-central Virginia, approximately 15 miles north of Richmond and 90 miles south of Washington, D.C. The County is situated between the Chickahominy, Pamunkey, and North Anna rivers. It is bordered by the counties of Caroline, King William, New Kent, Henrico, Goochland, and Louisa counties. When measured along its southeast-to-northwest axis, the County is nearly 40 miles in length and 471 square miles. In size, it is the largest county in the Richmond-Petersburg metropolitan area.

Hanover County is located in the outer ring of the urbanized region surrounding Richmond. The County is bisected by Interstate 95, the major north-south interstate highway serving the east coast corridor from Maine to Florida. The topography is gently rolling hills and heavily wooded forests. The population is approximately 112,938 residents.

With Interstate 295 running along its edge, the southern reaches of the county have a much more suburban and urban atmosphere. Hanover County lies both in the Coastal and Piedmont geologic areas reflected in the marked differences in soils found from east to west. The sandy soils of this eastern area lend themselves well to the operation of septic tanks. Encompassing the unincorporated but populous Mechanicsville area, it is the section closest to Richmond and is the site of most suburban and urban-style development.

The northern and western areas are much more rural and reflected in the sparse population and commercial development. The timber industry maintains a significant presence in this segment of the county. Several small quarries also operate in these quadrants.

In terms of race and ethnicity, Hanover remains predominately white-82% in 2022, though the minority population has risen from 14% to 18%. The largest minority population is still African American (9.6 %).

Though small in number, Hispanics had the largest percent increase from 2.65% in 2017 to 3.6% in 2022. Five-point five percent identified as more than one race or another race.

Historically Hanover County was primarily agricultural and rural. One of the largest agricultural producers on the East Coast, Engel Farms Inc., is based in Hanover County. In the past 25 years, Hanover County has seen a significant increase in the number of niche farms, sometimes referred to as homesteads, mini-farms, or farmsteads. These farms are typically 5 – 25 acres in size and landowners want to raise and/or are interested in obtaining educational resources about a variety of products, including cattle, horses, goats, sheep, llamas, vegetables, bees and honey, fruit trees, cane fruits, grapes, peaches, strawberries and poultry.

According to the 2023 Food and Agriculture Industries Economic Impact Study, food and agriculture impact Hanover County by providing 15,040 jobs, \$671,602,600 in total wages, and \$2,489,139,900 in total economic output. Agriculture alone provides 1,213 jobs, \$24,338,500 in wages, and \$375,066,100 in total economic output.

The Town of Ashland sits astride Interstate 95, home to Randolph-Macon College. This town of 7,750 is the only incorporated community in Hanover County.

The County is governed by a seven-member elected Board of Supervisors with four-year terms. Yearly a chair and vice chair are elected by the Board. Their responsibilities encompass decisions on zoning and land use, various board appointments, budget and tax rates, and hiring of the county administrator.

The Comprehensive Plan found that Hanover County has a high employment-to-population ratio (53%) compared to peer counties and the region. The County has experienced 1.6% average annual employment growth since 2001, which is four times the growth rate of the Richmond MSA (0.4% annually).

Growth in the industry providing mobile telephones and wireless internet has created considerable demand for new facilities and structures to ensure a cohesive telecommunications infrastructure. The majority of homes and businesses in the County have access to broadband internet service. This is because the vast majority of residents live within the Suburban Service Area. The unserved population, representing approximately 15% of residents, is in the mostly rural/agricultural areas of the County. As part of the Connect Hanover initiative, broadband services will be available (by the end of 2024) to almost 6,200 residents and businesses that do not currently have sufficient internet access.

The citizens enjoy a fairly high-level income reflecting one of the highest housing costs in the region. Residential building is robust with the Median house value being \$395,278. The median home sale price for 2023 is \$499,950, Hanover currently has 44,756 households. In 2021, the median household income in Hanover County was \$94,381, compared to a median household income of \$80,963 statewide.

Business opportunities are expanding primarily in the Suburban Services area and seven Economic Development Zones. Hanover continues to have the lowest real estate tax rate (\$0.81) in the region. Most of Hanover County citizens are financially secure with resources to weather an economic downturn. The overall good income demographics of the county dilute the needs of those in poverty.

The Economic Development Department is active in its support of the agribusiness industry; a significant change from 10 years ago. The Comprehensive Plan also highlights the importance of agriculture and rural land.

The population shift is still showing an aging citizenry. The school-age population has decreased by over 1% in the last few years. The current student population of 16,712 reveals a loss of over 1,000 students since 2018. There are 7,244 elementary, 3,863 middle, and 5,605 high school students enrolled in Hanover in 2023. There are also multiple home-schooled groups throughout the county.

There has been a 2% decrease in individuals with poor health from 2021 to 2023 according to the Department of Health. Smoking rates are the same as the state's rates. In addition, there has been a 5% increase in obesity but 4% fewer excessive drinkers. Sexually transmitted infections are also decreasing along with the teen birth rate.

GOALS	
 <b>LAND USE + GROWTH MANAGEMENT</b>	<p>Hanover County will strive to ensure the highest-quality living environment possible, through a mixture of land uses reflecting the needs and desires of local residents and how they want their community to develop. Residential growth and economic development will be primarily directed to appropriate locations within the Suburban Service Area (SSA), where utilities are planned. The majority of the County will remain rural with its agricultural, forestal, historic and natural resources being preserved for future generations.</p>
 <b>RURAL/ AGRICULTURAL</b>	<p>The rural character of the County will remain an integral and vital component to Hanover's culture and economy. Hanover County will strive to support agricultural and forestry uses and maintain the majority of the county for rural heritage. Sustaining the rural character of the County enhances and improves the quality of life for all citizens.</p>
 <b>ECONOMIC VITALITY</b>	<p>Hanover County places priority on the growth and resiliency of our economy, which contributes to the vitality and well-being of our community. Through economic development activities, the County supports entrepreneurship and the growth of existing businesses, while working to attract new investment to appropriate areas.</p>
 <b>HOUSING</b>	<p>Hanover County will work collaboratively with the private sector to create communities that offer and maintain quality housing options, enabling residents to remain in the County as their needs and circumstances change.</p>
 <b>ACTIVE LIVING</b>	<p>Hanover County will strive to create healthy neighborhoods that provide safe, convenient, and comfortable options for active living for residents of all ages and abilities.</p>
 <b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<p>Hanover County will provide an efficient, safe, and attractive multi-modal transportation network that accommodates the needs of residents, visitors, and businesses.</p>
 <b>COMMUNITY FACILITIES + UTILITIES</b>	<p>Hanover County will provide superior services in a cost-effective manner by strategically locating community facilities to most effectively serve public needs and foster a superior quality of life.</p>
 <b>HISTORY + CULTURE</b>	<p>Hanover County is a community that preserves the physical links to its past and shares the stories of its people, enhancing understanding of its multi-faceted history.</p>
 <b>ENVIRONMENT + RESILIENCY</b>	<p>Hanover County is a community that strategically preserves critical natural resources for the health and enjoyment of its current residents and future generations, creating a resilient community.</p>

Figure 1: Goals indicated by the 2023 Hanover Comprehensive Plan

# Community and Resident Perspectives

Key informant and citizen interviews were conducted to collect qualitative input. These informants were asked to look at issues from a professional standpoint and as residents of Hanover County. A situational analysis survey was distributed via local newspapers, social media, email lists, and during 2023 programming.

Top 20 issues
Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers
Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects)
Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy
Managing natural habitats and ecosystems
Protecting freshwater resources (lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands)
Assisting local government and businesses with land use decisions
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
Conservation and utilization of forest resources
Protecting the marine environment
Protecting the coastal environment
Promoting scientific literacy among youth
Building capacity for farm-to-school programming
Promoting alternative agriculture
Ensuring safe, high-quality foods
Supporting businesses that engage in agritourism
Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth
Composting, reducing, and recycling consumer goods
Preserving foods for home use (canning, dehydrating, fermenting, freezing)
Helping Virginians become more energy efficient in their homes, farms, and businesses
Helping communities improve their quality of life

Figure 2: Top 20 issue priorities of 85 people showing where they feel VCE should spend their time and effort; data gleaned from Hanover VCE Needs Assessment Survey

Four issues arose repeatedly: Preserving and promoting farm and forest lands, Protecting Natural Resources, Strengthening the local food system, and helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills to address community-identified issues.

As in previous years, preserving and promoting farm and forest lands continue to be top-level issues. Many people consider the rural nature of Hanover as the reason for moving to the county. But development threatens their perceived view of country living while at the same time, residents balk at higher taxes for services such as roads, convenience centers, schools, parks, and other amenities. Agriculture remains an important economic engine in the county, but the rural suburban interface continues to cause friction. The Chesapeake Bay Act and its requirements are an added stressor for county staff and targeted industries, especially agriculture. Agriculture in Hanover provides 1,213 jobs, \$24,338,500 in wages, and \$375,066,100 in total economic output.

Interviews and citizen surveys identified the following issues about this overarching issue:

- Needed education on agriculture for citizens to help bridge the gap between urban and rural.
- Farm transition to maintain agriculture as a viable business.
- Developing more agritourism



- Zoning restriction for farms, including small acreage ventures.
- Balancing the use of land sustainably.
- Need for better tools to prepare for adverse weather damage.
- Continued pest monitoring and ID.
- Perceived and real pesticide drift.
- Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy

Along this same preserving rural lands vein, protecting natural resources is another top issue in Hanover County. One of the top goals stated in Hanover’s Comprehensive Plan is directing residential and business growth to the “Suburban Service Area” to ensure the majority of the county remains rural to preserve our natural resources. By careful land use designations and managing urban landscapes, they aim to reduce our environmental footprint. Hanover lies in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and it is a priority of the state to ensure as many conservation practices are in place to support conservation of our natural resources. In FY 24, the Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District had over five million dollars to allocate through their cost-share programs. This huge amount of available cost share shows the state’s priority for protecting our natural resources.

Interviews and citizen surveys identified the need for the following focuses to address this issue:

1. More green space in urban areas including vegetative buffers.
2. Education about our impacts on the quality and quantity of healthy soils, water, and air.
3. The use of preservation tools such as conservation easements.
4. Resources are needed with the climate and environmental changes
5. An increase in native plants and a decrease in non-natives and invasives.
6. Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy
7. Managing natural habitats and ecosystems
8. Documenting conservation practice data not collected through other conservation cost-share programs.

The third community-perceived issue, strengthening the local food system, is complex and contains numerous interlocking issues. According to the 2023 Food and Agriculture Industries Economic Impact Study, food and agriculture impact Hanover County by providing 15,040 jobs, \$671,602,600 in total wages, and \$2,489,139,900 in total economic output. Also, when you buy local foods, you are feeding the local economy. The importance of our local food systems worldwide became apparent during the pandemic. Post-pandemic, people and businesses are more self-sufficient and seek to support the growth of the local food systems.

Supporting farms and farm families to help strengthen the local and national food supply chain by providing access to fresh foods.

- Food safety training to meet the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act and buyer requirements.
- Incorporating new technologies including training and support for using equipment.
- Education for consumers, including SNAP recipients, on how to identify and buy healthy foods.
- Safe food preservation to increase the availability of value-added products.
- Education for clients on how to grow and preserve their foods.
- Focusing on the advantages of personal health and high-quality foods.
- Better understanding of food production to better support the agricultural economy

The fourth top issue is helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills to address community-identified issues. Hanover County Public Schools and Hanover home schools, take pride in the development of our youth and communities; their testing scores and accreditations reflect this fact. 4-H is a dependable resource

that provides enriching opportunities that schools do not provide. Youth that participate in 4-H are an active group in which we can instill life skills to help address community issues already discussed.

Interviews and citizen surveys identified the need for the following focuses to address this issue:

- Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy
- Promoting scientific literacy among youth
- Utilizing past 4-Hers as an avenue for getting more adults involved in mentoring youth
- Building a volunteer base
- Improving public speaking skills and professional interactions

## Community Issues

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Four issues arose repeatedly: Preserving and promoting farm and forest lands, Protecting Natural Resources, Strengthening the local food system, and helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills to address community-identified issues.

## Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Hanover Virginia Cooperative Extension works closely with our partner agencies. The Agriculture Extension Agent partners with entities such as the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Virginia Farm Bureau (VFB), the Hanover Chamber of Commerce, the Hanover Department of Economic Development, and the Hanover-Caroline Soil Water Conservation District (SWCD) to ensure that agricultural, natural resources and conservation programs are provided to area farmers and support their needs. The 4-H Agent partners with community members, school systems, home school families, and the Hanover Department of Community Resources to provide youth enrichment programs.

The following subheadings list the four key community issues identified in Hanover followed by examples of how Hanover Extension will address these issues.

### Preserving and Promoting Farm and Forest Lands

- More legacy training for agriculture producer families
- Promote farm Land-Use and the county offering land tax reduction for under 5 acres
- Partner with National Parks, State Parks, county parks, historical societies, and American Battlefield Trusts
- Workshops on conservation programs and trusts
- Press releases sent to the county, local papers, and social media for optimal distribution

- Provide resources for risk management especially as it pertains to adverse weather
- Outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days, and seminars on identified issues such as new technologies, food safety and new policies, pest management, farm transitions, and value-added endeavors
- Establish and monitor field trials and pest occurrences
- Assist Virginia State University (VSU) Specialists and Small Farm Agents in outreach efforts and provide meaningful classroom and field seminars to historically underserved landowners
- Provide the Hanover County Planning Department with objective resources when planning future developments or considering changes to agricultural zoning or to comprehensive land use planning

## Protecting Natural Resources

- Train the trainer for water quality improvement strategies
- Workshop highlighting conservation practices
- Homeowner clinics on how to interpret fertilizer and pesticide labels.
- Incorporating Natural Resources and Conservation into our youth programs.
- Hold a well water testing and educational clinic in Hanover County for landowners, not on the municipal water system
- Promote, organize, and teach the annual Private Pesticide Applicators Recertification Classes for adults and youth;
- Support and promote a Pesticide Recycling Program for commercial farmers;
- Support Master Gardeners to provide general gardening, turf, and landscaping educational programs through a series of Spring and Fall seminars, known as the Hanover Gardening Series (HGS), Help Desk, and Speaker's Bureau

## Strengthening the local food system

- Developing an "Agricultural Resource Page" on the Hanover Website
- Provide business classes for farmers to explore new revenue options
- Canning/food preservation classes
- Incorporating the Buy Local campaign into programs
- Exploring developing meat processing facilities
- Voluntary list of direct-to-consumer producers
- Showing the need for a Family and Consumer Science (FCS) Agent
- Performing a feasibility study looking at re-opening the Cannery as a commercial kitchen
- Outreach to farmers for educational programs, field days, and seminars on identified issues such as new technologies, food safety and new policies, pest management, farm transitions, and value-added endeavors
- Sponsor and promote the Richmond Area Vegetable Growers Conference, an annual conference for local fruit and vegetable producers
- Work with the Economic Development department to promote sustainable agriculture and expand value-added products
- Provide a 50-mile meal to highlight the importance and impact of local foods to the Hanover Board of Supervisors and other lead county officials

## Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills to address community-identified issues

- Increase our youth development impact by focusing on 4H planning, program overview, youth recruitment, and open houses
- Use 4H/FFA to promote general Ag Awareness

- Support FFA and youth programs by providing ag expert
- Create a list of agribusinesses that are willing to sponsor youth to gain experience
- Public speaking and communication skills
- County-level 4-H Community Service projects
- Implement skills classes such as sewing, cooking, basic auto, finance, and budgeting
- Form a Hanover 4-H council with members from each club that meets 3-4 times a year
- Develop a youth volunteer Recruitment with programs that are in place like the Weimer scholarship
- Train youth through Junior Camp in activities and skills that enhance their appreciation and understanding of the outdoor environment.
- VCE's high level of support provides the livestock clubs with resources to build on agriculture knowledge, best practices, animal science knowledge, and entrepreneurship as they build their flocks and herds.
- Facilitating clubs to assist in their outreach of agriculture education/literacy at schools, fairs, and other venues and promotional sites.
- Use media outlets, in-school programming, collaboration with partners, and 4-H events to emphasize environmentally responsible behaviors including recycling, carpooling, and no littering campaigns.
- Collaboration on professional development classes for educators through in-service training, resource materials, and best practices recommendations
- Lead booths at Ag Day which provides agricultural literacy programming through hands-on experiences for all third graders in the county
- Collaborate on environmental education projects such as Meaningful Watershed Experiences, in-school programs, and 50-Mile Meal for the Board of Supervisors
- Continued use of Character Counts! pillars; respect for their environment, responsibility for their actions, and most importantly the Citizenship pillar.

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