



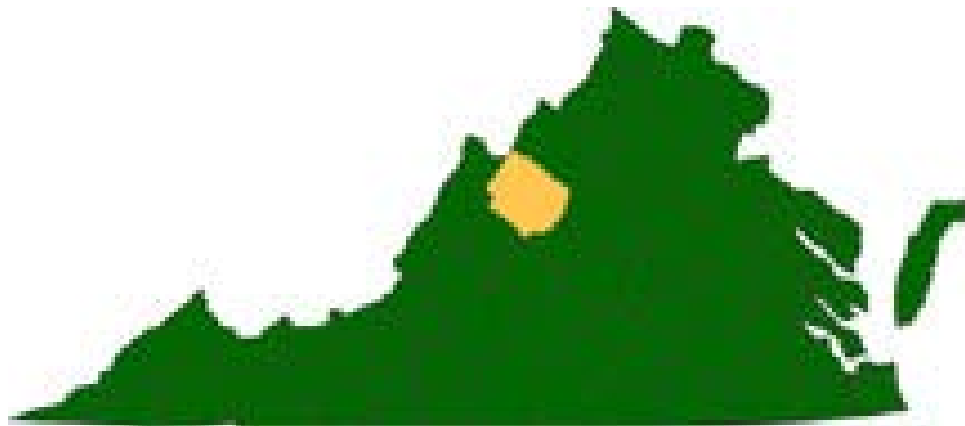
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Augusta County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Farm Profitability and Continuance	Hold biennial Farm Transition Workshops. Incorporate farm economics into all Extension production ag programs
Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills	Increase participation in 4-H Clubs, increase the number of 4-H clubs and capacity to provide learning activities at 4-H clubs. Increase in-school 4-H programming at both county and city schools in Staunton, Waynesboro and Augusta County.
Improving Access to Healthy Food	Increase size and scope of community gardens and use of produce from community gardens by area residents.
Managing Theileria in Beef Cattle	Hold beef cattle producer education workshops to increase theileria awareness and knowledge of mitigation strategies for theileria and other important beef cattle diseases that impact cattle health and profitability.

Introduction

Augusta County Extension conducted a situation analysis update during 2023. The situation analysis process assists Extension faculty and staff to make informed decisions on programming by identifying community needs and issues. Furthermore, the situation analysis review includes researching and categorizing trends in demographic, economic, agricultural/environmental, health care and education data and prioritization of trends and issues by key stakeholders. The Augusta Extension office conducted previous situation analyses in 2013 and 2018. As much has changed within Augusta County in the last 5 years, it is necessary to evaluate current needs and issues within the county. Perhaps the most significant change from 2018-2023 was the disruption to supply chains and labor markets from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The goals of the analysis are: 1. To discover major shifts in county demographics from 2018-2023. 2. To categorize and determine priority for common issues faced by county stakeholders. 3. Develop educational programming to address high priority issues within the county. A strong Extension program reflects the needs of its clientele and the community of which it serves.

Unit Profile

Demographics

Augusta County is located in the central part of the Shenandoah Valley. At 971 square miles, it is the second largest county in the state by land mass. Augusta County has two independent cities within its borders, the City of Staunton, and the City of Waynesboro which occupy 19.98 square miles and 15.11 square miles respectively. The 2021 population estimate of Augusta County is 77,563, which is a slight increase from 2018, which was estimated at 75,144. Combined with Staunton (25,750) and Waynesboro (22,196), the total population of the larger metro area is 125,433, a slight increase from the last Situation Analysis in 2018 (121,999). Augusta County and Staunton have accounted for this growth, as Waynesboro experienced a slight decrease in population. Augusta County remains predominately white (88.90%) with 4.25% Black, 0.15% American Indian, 0.60% Asian, 0.09% Pacific Islander, and 3.22% identifying as Hispanic, which is up from 2.7%. Staunton and Waynesboro, by contrast, have a greater African American and Hispanic populations. Approximately 22.3% of Augusta County's population is over the age of 65, up from 20.4% in 2017. Augusta County remains predominately rural, with a population density of 79.9 people per square mile, up slightly from 77.7 in 2018. 89% of Augusta County Residents over the age of 25 have a High School Education, with 50% estimated to have some college, and 23% having a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Augusta County remains a major geographical center for transport and commerce with the junction of Interstates 81 and 64 occurring near Staunton. According to the 2022 Augusta County Economic Development & Tourism Annual Report, Augusta County has received \$76.8 million dollars in investment in new industrial and commercial construction permits by various businesses. Most notably, Fishersville, located between Staunton and Waynesboro has become the new location for a 1 million square foot Amazon fulfillment center. The enormous facility began operations in April 2023 and will create up to 500 new jobs. Augusta County's median household income is \$68,584. The strong labor market and labor shortages that emerged from the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic no doubt have spurred much of this growth in income. As of 2022 the un-employment rate for the county is 2.6%, close to the 10 year low of 2.4% recorded in 2019. Estimates available from the Virginia Employment Commission put the work force participation at 60.5% of the population with 46,961 residents with some form of employment. Unemployment trends for the county are shown in Figure 1. The county un-employment rate surged to 8.0% in 2020 during the pandemic, before retreating to its current level.

Unemployment Rates

Trends

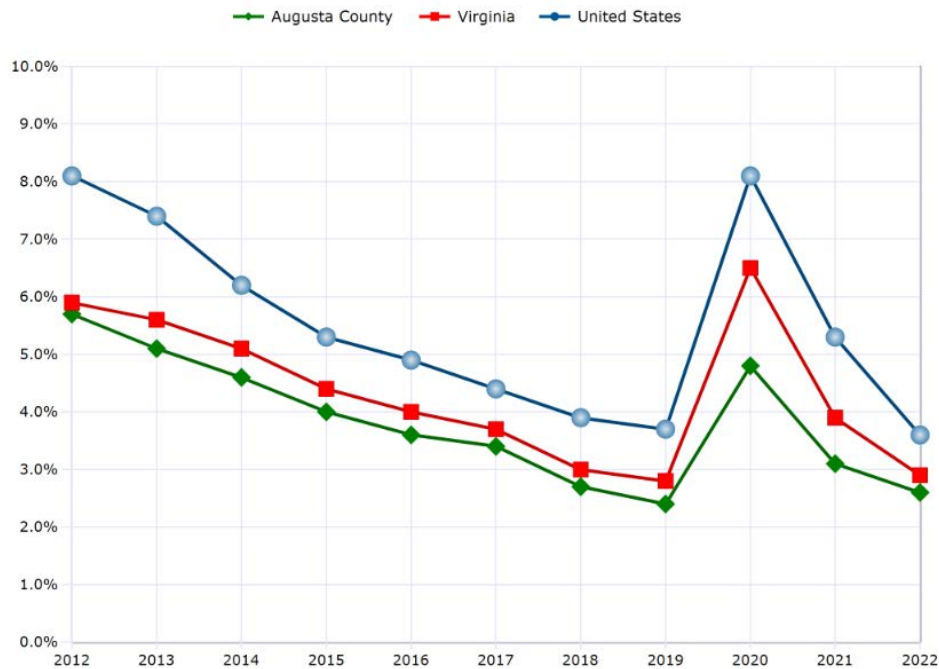


Figure 1 – Augusta County Unemployment Rates. *Courtesy of Virginia Employment Commission.*

Education

Augusta is home to Blue Ridge Community College, with Staunton home to Mary Baldwin University. Mary Baldwin has also established the Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences in Fishersville, which has degree programs in exercise science, healthcare administration and nursing. Total enrollment at Mary Baldwin is 1,489 undergraduate students and Blue Ridge Community College enrollment is at 4,099 according to US News and World Report. As it was in 2018, Augusta County Public Schools is the largest employer in the county. There are currently 18 public schools in the county. Elementary (K-5th grade) schools are: Churchville Elementary, Clymore, Craigsville, Guy K. Stump, Hugh K. Cassell, North River, Riverheads, Stuarts Draft and Wilson Elementary. Middle Schools (6th to 8th grade) include Beverley Manor Middle School, S. Gordon Stewart, Stuarts Draft Middle, and Wilson Middle School. High schools include Buffalo Gap High School, Fort Defiance, Riverheads, Stuarts Draft and Wilson High School. Additionally, Augusta County is home to the Shenandoah Valley Governor’s School and Valley Career & Technical Center. Currently, Augusta County Public Schools is building two new middle schools, Riverheads Middle School, and Buffalo Gap Middle School that will feed into Riverheads High School and Buffalo Gap High School respectively. Beverly Manor Middle School will then be closed once those schools open. This is projected to occur in 2024. Beverly Manor Elementary School, a former elementary school, was purchased in 2022 by Grace Christian School, a private school in Staunton. Grace Christian is one of two private schools located in Staunton, the other being Stuart Hall School, a private boarding school.

Employment

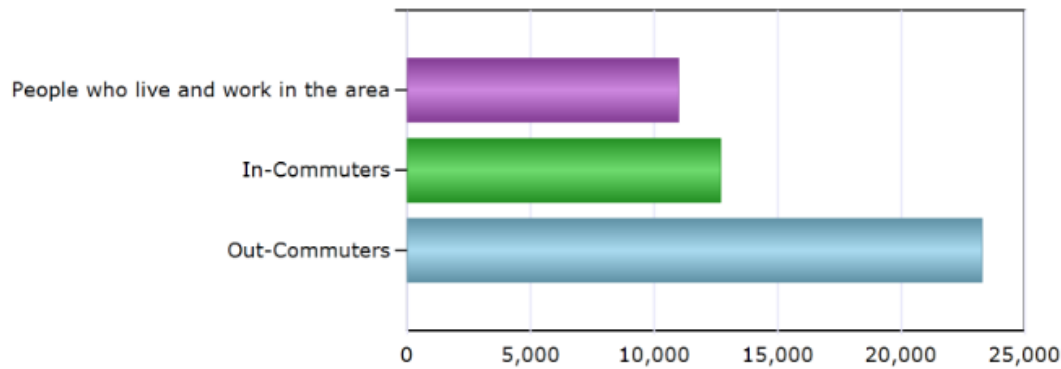
As in 2018, the largest employers in Augusta County are involved in education, healthcare and manufacturing. Augusta County continues its strong tradition of being a manufacturing base, with multiple companies having facilities in the towns of Stuarts Draft, Fishersville, Weyers Cave and Verona. Healthcare presence is showcased by Augusta Medical Center (#2), and Augusta Medical Group (#11), which is up from #17 in 2018. Manufacturing is shown by Hershey Chocolate (#3), McKee Foods (#5), AAF McQuay, Inc (#6), NIBCO (#9).

Very little change occurred in the top 5 employers from 2018, with Target Corporation moving up from #5 to #4, swapping with McKee Foods.

Top 10 Employers in Augusta County	
1. Augusta County School Board	6. AAF McQuay
2. Augusta Medical Center	7. Hollister, Inc.
3. Hershey Chocolate of Virginia	8. County of Augusta
4. Target Corp.	9. NIBCO of Virginia
5. McKee Foods Corporation	10. U.P.S

Perhaps due to an increase in online purchases during the pandemic, United Parcel Service registers at #10, and FedEx Ground at #29. Transportation, public sector, service industry and vehicle sales represent large sections of employment. Combined, manufacturing remains the largest employment source with over 6,000 jobs. Despite its strong manufacturing base, Augusta County remains a net out commuter society, with 23,283 people (49% of the workforce), commuting outside of the county to work. Though these “out”-commuters include folks “commuting” to Staunton or Waynesboro, the data also includes folks who commute outside of the county to work, most often to Rockingham County/Harrisonburg or Charlottesville. The University of Virginia & Health system (UVA) remains a large pull for employment in eastern Augusta County, while various industries in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County remain a large source of employment for Augusta County Residents.

Commuting Patterns



Commuting Patterns	
People who live and work in the area	10,987
In-Commuters	12,691
Out-Commuters	23,283
Net In-Commuters (In-Commuters minus Out-Commuters)	-10,592

Figure 2 – Commuting Patterns for Augusta County Residents. Source, Virginia Employment Commission; U.S. Census Bureau.

Agriculture

Agriculture, along with Manufacturing, remains one of Augusta’s top industries with over 1,665 farms and 290,911 acres in farms. 116,776 of those acres are in cropland with hay and corn the largest crops by acreage. Average market value of farm products sold per farm was \$175,704 with net cash farm income estimated at

\$45,914. Farm gate sales, as estimated by the 2017 Census of Agriculture; 87% of sales were related to livestock or poultry, and 13% as cash grain or crops. Poultry production remains the largest economic driver of agriculture in the area, with beef cattle 2nd, dairy production 3rd, and grains, oilseeds and beans 4th. In addition, vegetable, nursery, and greenhouse crops contribute to the agriculture economy. Finally, sheep and goats, though a small percentage of total sales, still have an important role within Augusta County. Augusta remains the top county in terms of sheep and goat inventory and total sales within Virginia. Poultry sales remain greater by a factor of 3 over beef cattle.

The 2017 Census of Agriculture states that there are 2,841 farmers in Augusta County, 1,805 are male, 1,036 are female. A slight majority of farmers are between the ages of 25-64 (1,534). 1,008 farmers are estimated to be over the age of 65. Less than 300 farmers are under the age of 35. This statistic bears that educational programs for agriculture should have some focus on farm safety and health, as well as farm transition.

Community and Resident Perspectives

To conduct a needs assessment for the County and identify areas of programming emphasis for Augusta County Residents, the Augusta Extension Office utilized the statewide Virginia Cooperative Extension needs assessment survey, IRB approval #23-027, modified slightly to for the Augusta audience, and the Spanish version of the survey. Survey responses were collected and analyzed to identify key issues. The survey was distributed by email listing for agricultural producers, extension program participants and 4-H Volunteers. In addition, the survey was shared via 4-H Online email listing and the Augusta County 4-H Facebook page. With the help of an interpreter, the Spanish version of the survey was also distributed at a health clinic for workers at the Embrace Community Garden in Waynesboro, VA. Finally, the survey was also distributed at the local Verona Community Food Pantry in Verona VA on four different occasions. In total, there were 92 survey respondents. 13 responses were collected with the Spanish version of the survey, as well as several responses from the English version collected from Spanish speakers with the aid of a translator. In total we estimate the survey reached 1000 individuals, putting the response rate at 9.2% In addition, data from the 2017 Ag Census was used to further identify issues.

Needs Assessment Survey Demographics

Survey takers were asked to categorically describe their age with categories of 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 65-74, and 75-84 years of age. Respondents as a percentage of the total are shown in Table 1 with the most responses coming from 35-44-year old's, followed by 25-34-year old's. 58% of respondents were female, 41% were male with 1.25 % of respondents preferring not to reveal their gender.

Table 1 – Age Group Category of Needs Assessment Survey Respondents

Age group category (years)	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84
Percent of respondents	3.80%	20.25%	25.32%	13.92%	11.39%	18.99%	6.33%

95% of survey respondents indicated having a high school education or further post-secondary education. 38% of respondents indicated they held bachelor's degrees, while 29% stated they held master's degrees, with only 4% holding a professional or doctorate degree. 8% of respondents stated that they had some college, but had not received a degree. Only 4% of respondents indicated they had not finished high school. 55% of survey respondents indicated that they were employed full time, 9% were employed part time, 18% were retired, 8% were farming full or part time, 3.8% were unemployed and 1.25% were full time students. Approximately 87% of survey takers identified as white, with 1% identifying as African American, 2% identifying as Asian, 1% as Native American, and 2% as one or more race.

Needs Assessment Survey

Needs Assessment Survey results are shared for selected issues in the below tables. Issues were grouped by general category; Agriculture and Natural Resources Issues, Community and Food Issues, and Family and Youth Issues. Issues described in the tables represent responses of selected questions from the survey.

Agriculture and Natural Resource Issues

Table 2 - Selected Agriculture & Natural Resources High Priority Issues as Determined by Survey Responses on VCE Programming Effort

% Survey Response	Preserving farm & forestland	Protecting water quality	Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability	Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers	Promoting alternative agriculture	Controlling invasive pests	Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy
No effort	1%	0%	3%	1%	5%	1%	1%
Low effort	0%	4%	1%	3%	11%	3%	1%
Moderate effort	14%	23%	15%	34%	30%	22%	16%
High effort	34%	38%	30%	33%	33%	38%	34%
Very high effort	51%	35%	51%	28%	20%	37%	46%

Survey respondents stated that their view of Virginia Cooperative Extension’s highest programming efforts should be focused on Preserving Farm and Forest Land (51%=Very High Effort), and Assisting Farmers and Forest Landowners in Production and Profitability (51%=Very High Effort). These two issues generated the highest response for Very High Effort of all 53 issues questioned on the survey. Additionally, Promoting Agricultural, Natural Resources and Environmental Literacy was also rated by survey respondents as a “Very High Effort” issue (46%) as well as Controlling Invasive Species (37%). results were similar to the 2018 Augusta County Situation Analysis which found that Conserving Farmland & Open Space (62%), Ag & Natural Resources Production and Profitability (54%), Agriculture & Food Production Literacy (53%), and Management of Invasive Species (53%) as “Very Important” topics for Extension to focus programming on. One issue not asked on the 2023 Needs Assessment Survey but was identified as “Very Important” topic on the 2018 survey was Farm Transition/Aging Farmers with 51% of 2018 survey responses identifying the issue as “Very Important” as well as Developing Markets for Local Grown Products (45%).

Other Agricultural and Natural Resources Issues that did generate a higher response for the 2023 survey as “Very High Effort” included Supporting Businesses which Engage in Agritourism (24%) and Conservation and Utilization of Forest Resources (29%).

Community, Nutrition and Food Issues

Much of the Needs Assessment Survey focused on issues surrounding community wellbeing, and nutrition and food (Table 3). Ensuring Safe Food Handling to Prevent Foodborne Illness, Strengthening the Local Food

System, Ensuring Safe High-Quality Foods and Building Capacity for Farm to School Programming received the highest responses for “Very High Effort”

Table 3 - Selected Community, Nutrition and Food High Priority Issues as Determined by Survey Responses on VCE Programming Effort

% Survey Responses	Ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illness	Strengthening the local food system	Ensuring safe, high quality foods	Preserving foods for home use (canning, dehydrating, fermenting, freezing)	Helping consumers make healthy food choices	Addressing hunger issues	Building capacity for farm to school programming
No effort	0%	1%	34%	1%	3%	4%	3%
Low effort	5%	3%	4%	8%	14%	16%	5%
Moderate effort	30%	22%	37%	33%	32%	32%	22%
High effort	32%	41%	25%	35%	29%	25%	32%
Very high effort	33%	34%	37%	23%	23%	23%	39%

Strengthening the Local Food System had the highest combined “High Effort” (41%) and Very High Effort (34%) survey responses. Building Capacity for Farm to School Programming, with an “Very High Effort” rating of 39% by survey respondents is an issue similar to the 2018 Needs Assessment Survey topic of Developing Markets for Local Grown Products (45%). These responses demonstrate the importance of locally grown products being available to consumers. Ensuring Safe High-Quality Foods had the greatest response for “Very High Effort” (37%) for Virginia Cooperative Extension Programming.

Family and Youth Issues

Needs Assessment Survey responses to selected Family and Youth Issues are displayed in Table 4. Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills generated the greatest response by survey takers as a “Very High Effort” priority issue with 49%. This survey result is similar to the 2018 Needs Assessment Survey in which 63% of respondents indicated Team Leadership Opportunities/Decision Making Skills for Youth were “Very Important”. The 2018 Needs Assessment Survey also found that Workforce Prep & Job Skills were ranked as “Very Important” by 67% of respondents. The 2023 Needs Assessment Survey found that 24% of respondents felt that Strengthening Workforce Readiness was a “Very High Effort” priority issue, and 30% viewed it as a “High Effort” priority issue.

The importance of Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship and Other Life Skills was also evidenced by the fact that no survey taker (0%) stated that the issue was a “No Effort” priority. Other high priority issues indicated by the survey as “Very High Effort” for Family and Youth Extension programming included Getting More Adults Involved in Mentoring Youth (27%), Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health (29%), Teaching Youth Good Money Habits (23%) and Helping Communities Improve Quality of Life (23%).

Table 4 - Selected Family and Youth High Priority Issues as Determined by Survey Responses on VCE Programming Effort

% Survey Responses	Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship,	Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth	Teaching youth good money habits	Addressing adult and youth mental health	Building healthy families	Helping communities improve their quality of life	Strengthening workforce readiness

	and other life skills						
No effort	0%	1%	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%
Low effort	1%	1%	11%	18%	13%	11%	15%
Moderate effort	18%	30%	32%	32%	32%	32%	27%
High effort	32%	41%	30%	15%	30%	30%	30%
Very high effort	49%	27%	23%	29%	20%	23%	24%

Spanish Speaking Needs Assessment Survey

The Spanish version of the Needs Assessment Survey was analyzed independently, in order to better understand the specific needs of Spanish speakers. Though our overall response numbers for the survey were low (n=15), we do feel that responses were representative and informative of the needs of the community. Age demographic information of Spanish version respondents is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 – Age Group Category of Spanish Version Needs Assessment Survey Respondents

Age group category (years)	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84
Percent of respondents	11%	33%	44%	11%	NR	NR	NR

67% of respondents identified as female, while 33% identified as male. 100% of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino. 44% identified as white, 11% as Black or African American, 11% as Asian, and 33% as some other race. 25% of respondents indicated they had a high school degree or equivalent, while 12.5% stated they had some college credits, but no degree. Another 12.5% stated they had their Bachelor’s degree, with yet another 12.5% indicating they held a Master’s degree. 37.5% of respondents stated they had not finished high school.

Responses to the Spanish Version were numerically, rather than categorically, with the integer 1=no effort, 2=low effort, 3=moderate effort, 4= high effort, 5=very high effort. Responses to each issue were averaged, then reported as the best categorical response. All decimals were rounded down. For instance, a 4.125 or 4.25 average response was reported as a “High Effort”, a 3.65 average response would be recorded as “Moderate Effort”. Selected Average responses are displayed in Table 6. Areas of emphasis for programming identified Strengthening Local Food System, Ensuring Safe, High Quality Foods, and Building Health Families, among others, as “High Effort” program areas.

Table 6 – Selected High Priority Issues as Determined by Spanish Version of the Needs Assessment Survey

Selected Issues	Preserving farm and forest land	Protecting Water Quality	Ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illness	Strengthening local food system	Helping consumers make healthy food choices	Ensuring safe, high quality foods	Building healthy families
Average Categorical Response	Moderate effort	High effort	High effort	High effort	High effort	High effort	High effort

The survey asked respondents to provide a qualitative response to the question “What do you believe is the most pressing community issue for VCE to address?” Responses included education around mental health, affordable housing, and English language education.

Community Issues

Priority Issues for the Augusta County Extension Office

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Theileria in Beef Cattle – *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda is a tickborne protozoa that can cause infectious bovine anemia. Symptoms can include severe anemia in cows and calves and mortality in stressed animals. It is spread by the Asian Longhorn Tick. Both organisms were first noticed in Augusta County in 2018, and have infected various herds in Augusta County and surrounding areas. Various educational efforts have been already made regarding Theileria, including a producer meeting in March 2022. Further efforts and additional producer education must be made to help producers mitigate the disease and avoid negative animal health impacts and economic impacts. Recently Theileria received recognition as a claimable mortality for USDA Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). LIP payments are equal to 75% of the average fair market value of the livestock. It is expected that many herds in Augusta County may have had exposure to Theileria by 2023.

Farm Profitability – Both the 2018 and the 2023 Needs Assessment Surveys identified agriculture and forestry production and profitability as a high priority issue. Keeping farms profitable and in business can also preserve farm and forest land from development and urban/suburban sprawl, also identified as a priority issue. Extension has a key role in delivering research based agricultural production information to farmers in Augusta County. This information can not only help farmers be more profitable, but can also help farmers reduce costly inputs, improve animal husbandry and environmental conservation. Farm transition programs are also critical to farm continuance and future profitability. According to the 2017 Ag census, the age of Augusta County Farmers has increased with nearly half of farmers being near the age of 65 years old or older.

Family and Youth Issues

Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills – Development of decision making and life skills, leadership and citizenship has been identified as priority issue area for VCE to address in both the 2018 and 2023 Situation Analysis Surveys. Improving workforce readiness, a related topic, also was identified as a priority issue. VCE provides families an outlet in which youth can develop skills through participating in various 4-H clubs, contests, and other youth activities.

Community, Nutrition and Food

Strengthening the Local Food System – Improving the local food system was demonstrated to be a high priority in both the English and Spanish 2023 Needs Assessment Surveys. Local food systems allow for residents of communities to have access to fresher, often more health foods at affordable prices. Robust local food systems often improve community health outcomes, and mitigate the impacts of food deserts. Community gardens located near facilities that serve as resource centers for residents can be an effective tool for improving local food systems. These resource centers can also serve as an educational hub for residents to learn food handling techniques to improve food safety.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Farm Transition Workshops

Agriculture is a high investment, high capital, low margin business. These factors can make it challenging for a family operation to transition ownership and management from one generation to the next. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of a farmer in Virginia is 58.5 years old. Only 8.5% of farmers in Virginia are under 35 years old. Transitioning the farm business to the next generation is critical for the future of agriculture in Augusta County. To address this need, Farm Transition workshops will be routinely planned for Augusta County and surrounding areas to help facilitate family farm transitions to the next generation of farmers. These workshops will be planned biennially, to avoid oversaturation of the topic, but frequently enough for farmers to take advantage of them.

Herd Health Management Education for Cattle Producers

The discovery of the Asian Longhorn Tick, *Haemaphysalis longicornis* and the protozoon disease Theileria, *Theileria Orientalis* Ikeda in Augusta County in 2018 has presented yet another herd health related challenge to cattle producers. Beef cattle herd health management also includes prevention education for Blackleg causing organisms and Bovine Respiratory Disease, among others. Herd health topics are the cornerstone of many Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) programs. 102 beef producers in Augusta County are BQA certified. BQA programs will be offered on a biennial or every third-year basis. Additionally, a cow-calf production focused meeting will be offered on a biennial basis to provide information on current cattle profitability issues. Emerging pests and diseases, such as the Asian Longhorn Tick and Theileria will be a focus at this meeting as well as other programs.

Positive Youth Development through 4-H Clubs

Leadership, citizenship, decision making and life skills are routinely identified as a community need that VCE can meet through youth participation in 4-H clubs. 4-H club participation helps educate members on parliamentary procedure, leadership, character training and communication and social skills. Currently there are 18 4-H clubs in Augusta County, with focus areas including livestock production, horses, dogs, archery, leadership and computer coding. Augusta County 4-H club numbers and club participation have grown in recent years, due to greater volunteer and parent engagement. 4-H club participation is a requirement for various popular projects, including the Augusta County 4-H/FFA Market Animal Show which has over 150 exhibitors annually.

Improving Access to Healthy Food

A 2014 report by the Virginia Cooperative Extension Food Desert Task Force found that 13% of Augusta County residents lack access to fresh food. These statistics are expected to be repeated in the nearby cities of Staunton and Waynesboro. The VCE Family Nutrition Program provides education on improving dietary choices, meal selection and preparation, and encourages residents to make healthy food choices. Embrace Community Center and Garden in Waynesboro provides healthy food access through its community garden for over 350 local residents. The community garden is expanding, with additional crops planned for 2024 and refrigerator storage in the community center to extend the shelf life for perishable produce.

Positive Youth Development through 4-H In-School Programming

In school programming is an increasingly important delivery mode for 4-H programs. With youth and families increasingly busy in the evening hours after school, many students do not have the opportunity to experience traditional 4-H clubs or teams. Augusta County 4-H has increased in school 4-H program delivery to encompass one Staunton city school, two Waynesboro city schools, four Augusta county schools and one specialized day school in the city of Staunton. Plans are underway to expand 4-H in school programming to more students in both cities and the county in the coming years.

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2024

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