



## Buckingham County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

### Unit Extension Staff

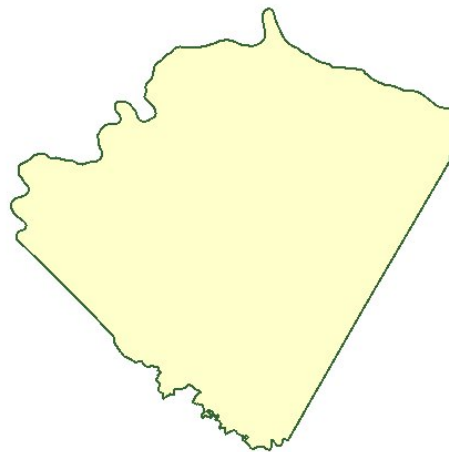
Rochelle Clabough, Unit Administrative Assistant  
Jennifer Ligon, Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Katerina Thomas, 4-H Program Assistant  
Ruth Wallace, Senior Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development, & Unit Coordinator

### Unit Extension Leadership Council

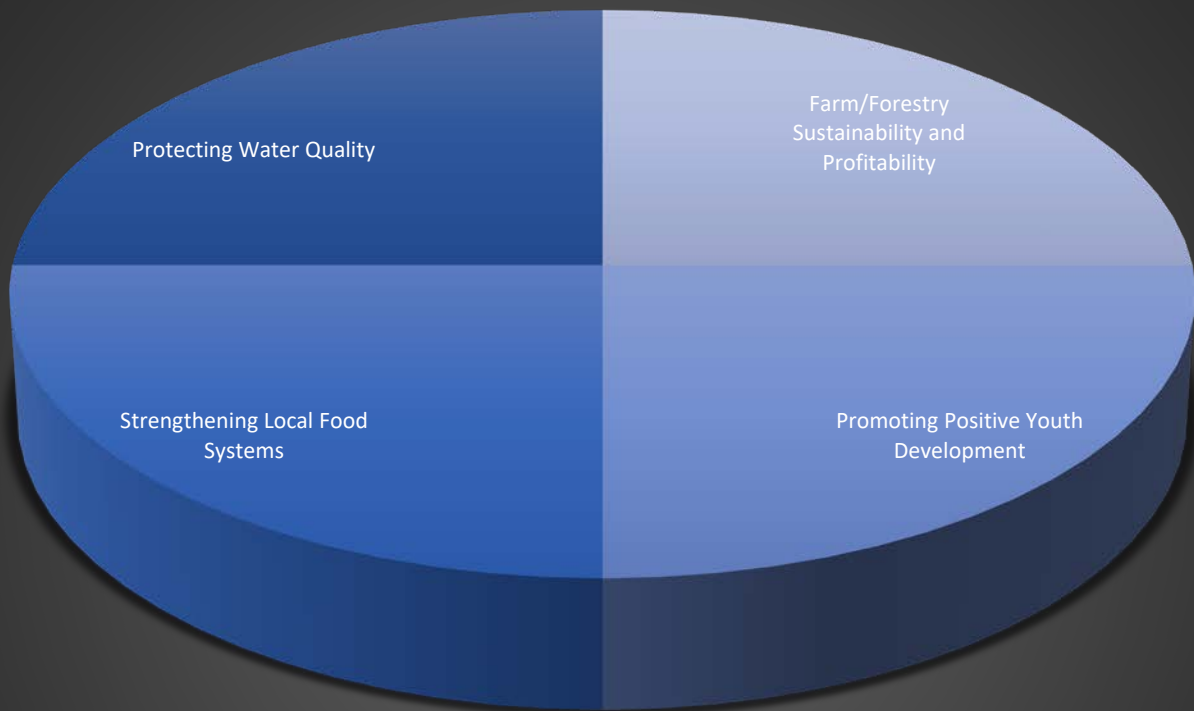
Leslie Davis  
Joyce Gooden  
Brenda Jones  
Don Matthews

Donna McRae-Jones  
Angela Patterson-Jones  
Sherry Ragland  
Adam Reams

Cherrelle Saulsbury  
Kelly Snoddy  
Barbara Teeple  
Suzanne Vandergrift



## Community Issues of Focus



- Farm/Forestry Sustainability and Profitability
- Promoting Positive Youth Development
- Strengthening Local Food Systems
- Protecting Water Quality

## Introduction

The Buckingham Extension Leadership Council conducted a comprehensive situation analysis throughout 2023 by communicating directly with knowledgeable community representatives, using a community survey administered through Qualtrics, holding open-house style conversations, and including discussion points at community events. This effort involved members of the Extension Leadership Council (ELC), Extension staff, staff from other agencies serving the public, community organizations, and Buckingham County residents. The ELC and Extension Staff analyzed the information collected, determined what issues fit with the goals and mission of Virginia Cooperative Extension, and prioritized these issues. Information for the unit profile was a combination of data from the VCE Data Commons website, the U.S. Census Bureau, statistics provided by partnering agencies, and the most recent Buckingham County Community Profile.

## Unit Profile

### Demographics

Buckingham County is a large, sparsely populated rural Piedmont county in the geographic center of Virginia. Population estimates for 2022 were 17,146 (including the 2,073 institutionalized populations) dispersed over 582 square miles. The population grew steadily from the 1990 through the 2010 census but experienced a small (1.93%) decline between 2010 and 2020. According to data from the US Census Bureau, it has been growing since 2020 at approximately 4.6%. Eighteen percent of the County's residents are under the age of 18, while 20% are senior citizens ages 65 and older. Approximately one-third of households in Buckingham (31%) are without internet access. Most of these are in the county's southwest corner, where internet lines are either full with a waiting list or have not yet been run.

The population is approximately 64% white and 33% Black or African American, with 2% representing two or more races and the remaining 1% representing other races. The population is 2.6% Hispanic or Latino.

### Income

Median household income in Buckingham has been rising and is currently \$49,841. This is approximately 38% less than the \$80,615 state median income. Seventeen percent of Buckingham County residents live below the poverty level (which is a decrease of 4% since 2012). The public school system is a community eligibility provision school, which means the system falls into the category of the nation's highest-poverty schools and districts. Accordingly, all youth in every public school in Buckingham County receive free breakfast and lunch.

### Education

The Buckingham County Public School system currently has 1,992 students enrolled. Of those, 1.7% (33) have limited English proficiency (LEP). Just over 15% (307) of students are classified with some disability. Thirty percent of students are listed as chronically absent (missed more than 10% of instructional days). The dropout rate is 8.1%, with 2.7% of those completing a GED. There are 86 homeschooled students in the county. The county has five private schools, with 174 youth enrolled in traditional schooling (three schools) and 70 enrolled in residential wilderness schooling for at-risk youth (two schools). A small number of youth attend school outside of the county. Eighty-one percent of the population age 25 or older has a high school diploma, with 11.8% receiving a bachelor's degree or higher.

### Employment

The major employers in Buckingham are the public schools and the correctional facilities. According to the Virginia Employment Commission, 5,614 commuters live in Buckingham but work outside of the county. Those who both live in and work in Buckingham total 1,425. Another 1,742 work in Buckingham but live in surrounding counties (as of October 2023). The unemployment rate is 3.7% compared to 3.1% in Virginia.

## Family

From 2017-2021, there were 5,724 households in Buckingham, with an average of 2.59 persons in each household. The official percentage of children raised by grandparents is 1.82, but estimates from Social Services and the public school system are higher. The number of youth in foster care over the last three years has ranged from 5 to 14. Of those, between three and five per year have had a goal of time-limited reunification, with some meeting that goal, some placed in relative care, and some entering foster care when reunification was not achieved. The number of child protective service referrals has grown recently from 166 in 2020 and 2021 to 231 in 2023.

## Agriculture

According to the US Census of Agriculture, in 2017 (most recent data available), there were 408 farms with a total acreage in farmland of 79,245. This represents a 4% increase from the number of farms in 2012 but a 6% decrease in the overall amount of acreage. The average size of farms decreased by 10 acres, with the current average resting at 194 acres. The market value of products sold has steadily increased for years and is currently at \$43,445,000, a 9% increase from 2012. Most of these sales come from livestock and poultry (84%), with the remainder from crops, primarily hay, haylage, and silage. The sale of agricultural products is very important to the County because it provides a large inflow of money into the local economy. The total economic impact (direct and indirect) of agriculture in Buckingham 2015 (the most recent year for which county data was analyzed) was 15 million (Weldon and Cooper Economic Impact study, 2017).

## Forestry

Forestry is also an important segment of the economy in Buckingham County. As reported in 2017 by Dean Cumbia of the Virginia Department of Forestry, timberland in the county encompasses approximately 322,000 acres, with 95% being in private ownership and the rest held by the state. There are more than 500 employees involved in wood-related activities in the county. In 2020, the value of timber harvested in Buckingham was \$14.3 million, and in 2021 was \$12.8 million. The total economic impact (direct and indirect) is more than \$26 million. These figures also represent the most recent data according to the Virginia Department of Forestry.

## Health

There are three medical facilities and two dental offices in the county. To receive care from a specialist, residents must travel outside of Buckingham. The Health Resources and Services Administration shows Buckingham as a moderately medically underserved area (MUA) with a score of 49.8 out of 100, with one being the highest need and 100 being the lowest. This MUA shows a shortage of primary care health services within a geographic area or for a specific population subset within the geographic area. According to [countyhealthrankings.org](http://countyhealthrankings.org), Buckingham has a poor health score of 119, with 133 being the worst in Virginia and one being the best. This ranking provides a measure of the current overall health and predicts the future overall health of the community in terms of quality of life (health-related) and life expectancy. The score factors in health behaviors, access to and quality of care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. Ten and a half percent of the population under age 65 is not covered by health insurance.

In 2022, there were 33 reported overdoses in Buckingham County, five of which were deadly. According to the sheriff's office, this represents an upward trend in not just overdoses but in drug possession, use, and sales.

According to the Harvard School of Public Health's most recent data for 2017, 42.4% of adults in the county were considered obese, with 35% reporting no leisure-time physical activity. This same data set reflects that 10.4% of the adult population over age 19 has diabetes.

Buckingham County is listed at the highest level of social vulnerability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Social vulnerability considers 15 social factors, including poverty, lack of access to transportation, and crowded housing, and it indicates a community's ability to prevent human suffering and financial loss in a disaster, whether natural or man-made.

Mental health care, especially for youth, is especially lacking in Buckingham County, with existing providers (one within the county and several in neighboring counties) either closing or at full capacity. Youth needing mental health services can only be seen through the schools at this time, and there is a significant need for more youth and adult providers.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

The 2023 situation analysis involved data gathering from key informant interviews, community profiles, inter-agency information sharing, and electronic surveys to county residents. An effort was made to include all community segments to understand our needs and the services available to meet those needs. The members of the Extension Leadership Council met to review data and determine priority issues.

## Community Issues

### Priority Issue #1: Farm/Forestry Sustainability and Profitability

Agriculture and forestry form the economic base of the county. Farm and forestry sustainability and profitability remain a priority need and are recognized as such by all segments of the community, not just those directly involved in the agriculture and forestry industries. Sustainability and profitability in these industries include protecting water quality, promoting agriculture, natural resources, and environmental literacy, preserving farm and forest land, and assisting farmers and forest landowners with production, profitability, and sustainable land management practices. This priority issue is interwoven with related issues (see priority issues #3 and #4), such as protecting water quality, strengthening food systems, and ensuring safe, high-quality foods and proper food handling, as identified in the community survey and through discussions with key informants.

This issue aligns with the statewide situation analysis conducted in the Spring of 2023, where assisting farmers and forest landowners in production, profitability, and sustainable management practices are issues connected to the state priority issue of environmental health and safety.

Percentage of all Buckingham County respondents selecting high or very high effort is needed for this issue.
94% Protecting Water Quality
81% Strengthening the Local Food System
75% Promoting Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Literacy
73% Preserving Farm and Forest Land
71% Ensuring Safe, High-Quality Foods
69% Assisting Farmers and Forest Landowners in Production and Profitability
62% Assisting Forest Landowners with Sustainable Management Practices

## Priority Issue #2: Preparing Youth for the Present and Future

Positive development and skill building for our county’s youth rose to the forefront with several sub-issues listed below. Virginia Cooperative Extension needs to make a concerted effort to recruit more adult volunteers to develop positive, caring relationships with youth through ongoing 4-H programming. Programs connected to positive relationships, healthy food choices, financial skills and money habits, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) emphasizing scientific inquiry, and promoting positive mental health must be prioritized, while simultaneously focusing on life skill development.

Positive youth development issues fell into the number one identified state priority issue of building healthy communities, and as such, is no surprise that it ranked so highly in Buckingham County.

Percentage of all Buckingham County respondents selecting high or very high effort is needed for this issue.
92% Life Skill Development
79% Adults Mentoring Youth
71% Healthy Relationship Skills for Teens
69% Healthy Food Choices
69% Teaching Youth Good Money Habits
64% Promoting Scientific Literacy
58% Promoting Positive Youth Mental Health

## Issue #3: Strengthening Local Food Systems and Ensuring Safe, High-Quality Foods

Strengthening the local food system emerged as an important need. Extension can address this need through focused programming and working with individuals operating small farms and home gardening. There are currently no Farmers’ Markets in Buckingham County, although they exist in nearby counties. Helping residents and agricultural producers explore options for marketing and selling their locally grown or raised products will also help address this issue. Interdisciplinary programs focused on food production, preservation, and safe food handling practices are critical in addressing this issue.

This issue matches the State Situation Analysis identified need for Environmental Health and Safety (#3 priority issue) and Health Promotion (#4 priority issue).

Percentage of all Buckingham County respondents selecting high or very high effort is needed for this issue.
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>81%</b> Strengthening the Local Food System</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>74%</b> Ensuring Safe Food Handling Practices to Prevent Foodborne Illness</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>71%</b> Ensuring Safe, High-Quality Foods</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>69%</b> Helping Consumers Make Healthy Food Choices</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>67%</b> Preserving Foods for Home Use</p>

## Issue #4: Protecting Water Quality

Buckingham County is bordered on three sides by the James River, with many smaller rivers and creeks flowing into it. The entire county is in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and the actions our citizens take (or fail to take) to protect water quality not only influence the quality of water locally but also that of all areas downstream, including the Chesapeake Bay. Protecting water quality received the highest need ranking from citizen responses to the online survey. Virginia Cooperative Extension partners heavily with the Peter Francisco Soil and Water District to educate adults and youth on water quality and conservation. Both organizations also work closely with the agricultural and forestry community to share information about best management practices and cost-share programs available through the soil and water district, the Natural Resources Conservation Services, and the Virginia Department of Forestry. This partnership will continue.

On the statewide survey conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension as part of the state situation analysis process, the top issue respondents selected as needing very high or high effort in that area was protecting water quality. It was likewise the top issue selected for Buckingham County. It is ranked fourth in priority for Buckingham, however, as there is already a high effort being taken by VCE and partnering agencies, including Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District, the James River Association, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. It is also a topic that is interwoven in priority issues one and two outlined above.

Percentage of all Buckingham County respondents selecting high or very high effort is needed for this issue.
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>94%</b> Protecting Water Quality</p>

# Future Programming to Address Community Issues

The Buckingham unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension understands the community's needs as voiced through the situation analysis data collection process and daily interaction with local community members. We will continue and expand upon, where possible, existing programming to support agriculture and forestry with a special emphasis on stewarding our natural resources, including water quality, and helping agricultural producers and forest landowners create sustainability and increased profitability.

We will continue to advance the wellbeing of Buckingham residents through robust programming in positive youth development to help them develop life skills while connecting them with caring adults, helping them explore things that spark their interests, helping them find a place of belonging where they feel safe to explore new things and gain opportunities to positively engage with others. Strong programs of this nature currently exist, but there is room for improvement in recruiting and training diverse volunteers to extend the reach of 4-H programming in various communities that may be underserved.

Strengthening local food systems and ensuring safe, high-quality foods is where increased programming efforts are needed. Although some community-level programming exists, there is an opportunity to address this need through safe food handling and food preservation classes for adults and increased attention to promoting gardening and small farm resources and programs. There are currently food and nutrition programs and hot water bath food preservation programs for youth several times yearly. Some gardening programs are conducted in surrounding counties by local Master Gardner Associations. The Buckingham unit can better promote them and perhaps partner with these groups to bring programs to Buckingham.

The Buckingham Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension currently partners with the Virginia Cattlemen's Association, the Virginia Beef Industry Council, the Virginia Forage and Grasslands Council, Buckingham Cattlemen's Association, Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Soil and Water Conservation Service, the James River Association, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Buckingham County Farm Bureau, Buckingham Department of Social Services, Buckingham County Public Schools, and Central Virginia Christian School. Additionally, an average of 100 volunteers annually invests time and energy into helping extend the reach of Virginia Cooperative Extension programming in the community. Looking toward the future, we will continue existing partnerships and seek out new ones where we can support each other.

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

2024

VCE-596-16NP (VCE-596-16NP)