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Pulaski County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Introduction

Virginia Cooperative Extension conducts Situation Analysis in each locality every five years. Pulaski County most recently conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the calendar year 2018. The situation analysis process was led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) with input from three subject matter advisory groups. A Pulaski County Unit Profile was developed with community and resident perspectives compiled on county issues and problems. Data and information from these activities were analyzed by the ELC with priority issues identified.

An initial situation analysis plan was developed that included tasks and timelines for ELC members and VCE staff. Based on this, the unit profile was developed using the data set from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website and other Pulaski demographics data. This information was compiled by VCE staff and reviewed by ELC members and local community leaders.

A needs assessment survey was mailed out to over 8,000 county residents and businesses through the Pulaski County PSA in January 2023. 152 responses were received. Those results were compiled and used as a baseline for Extension staff, community leaders, stakeholders, and advisory groups to prioritize and identify the top needs.

Unit Profile

Pulaski County is a rural county in Virginia's New River Valley. Pulaski is part of the Blacksburg/Christiansburg-Radford Metropolitan Statistical Area. It is located on Interstate 81 about an hour southwest of Roanoke. According to the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Pulaski County has a population of 33,759.

In Pulaski County, **22% of the residents are age 65 or older**, compared to 15% for the state of Virginia. Additionally, 15% are 55-64. These percentages lead to further questions about available housing, health care facilities and senior recreation activities in the county.

The **number of uninsured people** in Pulaski is 8%, one percent less than the state average.

The **racial composition** of Pulaski County is 90% White, 5% Black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native.

In 2021, 89% of the Pulaski County population attained a high school diploma or higher, as compared with 91% in Virginia.

2021 data shows that those 25 years and over who have completed a **bachelor's degree or higher**, is 11.6% in Pulaski County, compared to 23.5% in Virginia.

The **median household income** in Pulaski County is \$53,100, as compared to \$80,900 for Virginia in 2023. The percentage of children **living in poverty** in Pulaski County is 20%, compared to 13% in Virginia.

The 2023 **unemployment rate** in Pulaski was 4.0% compared to 3.0% in Virginia and 5.4% nationally.

Premature death (measured as years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population) was calculated 9,500 in Pulaski County compared to 6,700 in Virginia in 2023.

Adult obesity in Pulaski County was 33% compared with 32% in Virginia and nationally in 2023.

Data on **teen birth rate** indicated that Pulaski County was 33 individuals (per 1,000 females ages 15-19) with 15 in Virginia and 19 nationally in 2023.

In Pulaski County, 20% of **children live in poverty** as compared with 14% in Virginia in 2016.

Data on **adult smoking** indicated that 20% of the Pulaski County population smoked compared to 14% in Virginia and 16% nationally in 2023.

Physical inactivity in Pulaski County was 24% compared to 20% in Virginia and 22% nationally in 2023.

Data indicated that children in **single-parent households** in Pulaski County was 27% compared to 24% in Virginia and 25% nationally in 2023.

Infant death rate was 3.0 in Pulaski County, as compared to 5.8 in Virginia in 2016.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Profile

Based on the Pulaski Situation Analysis Survey in 2023 and ag producer interviews, the top 5 agriculture and natural resource issues in Pulaski County are Water Quality, Local Food, Natural Resources, Environmental Protection/Land Use, and Agriculture Profitability. Other important issues concerning producers in the county are as follows: Public Awareness of Agriculture, Field Crops and Pasture, and Livestock Production.

According to the 2017 USDA Ag Census, the total number of farms in Pulaski County is 394, an 11% decrease from 2012. The amount of farmland also decreased by 20%, with an average farm size of 197 acres, a 9% decrease, but still higher than the statewide average of 180. Agricultural land use in the county consists of 51% pasture, 31% crops, and 18% woodlands and other.

Of the 640 agricultural producers in Pulaski County, 65% are male and 35% female. 56% are between the ages of 35-64, while 34% are 65 or older. There are 157 new and beginning farmers in Pulaski County. 96% of farms are family owned and operated.

In 2017, livestock sales were responsible for 64% (\$21,149,000) of the market value of all agricultural products sold, while crops made up the remaining 36% (\$11,865,000). Cattle and calves are the top livestock entity in the county by far, ranking 18th in the state. They are responsible for 62% of the market value of livestock products sold. Forages and hay production make up the vast majority of crop production and acreage. Compared to Virginia, Pulaski has a smaller proportion of cropland and woodland, while utilizing significantly more of its available land for pasture.

Youth and Educational Profile

Based on the 2023 Virginia Cooperative Extension - Pulaski Office Situation Analysis, Extension Leadership Council and Pulaski County Board of Supervisors, the top youth related concerns to Pulaski County residents were as followed: (1) Life-Skills for Youth, (2) Career & Workforce Development, (3) Child Development/Care, (4) Leadership, (5) Youth and Teen Activities, (6) After-School Care and (7) Family Activities.

According to 2021 Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Data, there were 6,102 youth (ages 0-17) in the community. For 2023-2024 school year, there were 4,345 Pre-K – 12th graders enrolled in Pulaski County Public School (PCPS) programs. The breakdown of youth is as follows: 144 of youth in Pre-School, 468 youth in kindergarten, 2,267 youth in grades 1st – 8th and 1,177 of youth in grades 9th – 12th. In the 2023-2024 school year, roughly 2,555 (58.8%) youth were receiving free and reduced lunch. There are five elementary schools, one middle school and one high school located in Pulaski County. Outside of PCPS, Pulaski County Head Start has 51 youth in Pre-School and Building Bridges has 10 youth in Pre-School. According to VDH data, there was a total of 281 youth enrolled in Pre-School programs.

From the population of 25 years and over, 89.42% (up from 85.4% in 2018) have attained a high school degree or higher. 19.65% (up from 18.5% in 2018) have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. As of the 2021 data results, 1,301 residents were enrolled in college or graduate school.

Family and Consumer Sciences Profile

Based on the 2023 Pulaski County Situation Analysis results, the top 5 Family and Consumer Science (FCS) needs include: Health and Wellness, Nutrition/Obesity, Food Safety, Chronic Diseases and Aging Population/Long Term Care.

The issues of Health and Wellness are related and include topics such as eating balanced meals, exercising, getting enough sleep, and stress management. In 2020, 33% of Pulaski County had a BMI of 30 or greater. Several obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and preventable death. FCS will promote nutrition and overall health education to all age groups in Pulaski County. This will also encompass part of the Aging Population/Long Term Care need, as health education and resources can aid in the transition to older adulthood.

The topics of Chronic Disease and Food Safety are opportunities to invest in the community. Providing educational programs that help individuals understand risk factors and healthy habits are key pieces to enhancing health status and reducing the risk of foodborne illness. Pulaski County had a reported life expectancy of 75.56 compared to the state (79.18) and national (78.96) averages. Pulaski County also had a reported rate of 7.7% for individuals under age 65 without health insurance.

Collaborative Opioid Prevention Education Program Profile

The most recent data is from the VA Department of Health for Pulaski County for the year 2021. In general Pulaski County and most of far SWVA rank second highest rate in VA for substance abuse and misuse. Drug overdoses overall have seen a dramatic increase from 2018 to 2021 as reported by VDH. Pulaski County's number of drug deaths were double Virginia's over-all death rate. In SWVA, only Dickenson and Tazewell counties were higher. Emergency room visits from drug overdose were the highest in 2019 and the next highest was in 2021. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) are babies born with a dependence to drugs or who died as a result of the mother's addiction when born. Pulaski County's statistic was 7.6 while the average for the state of VA was 5.7. The highest growth rate of suicide in the US is for children ages 10 to 14 and adults over the age of 70.

Pulaski County school system reports that they have many students with one or both parents that are incarcerated due to crimes associated with substance abuse. Parents in the NRV Regional Jail have few healthy parenting skills. All of their children have suffered significant trauma, if only from the fact of a parent being incarcerated.

Rural communities are disproportionately affected by substance abuse. One of the main reasons being manufacturing occupations in Pulaski County that require labor that often leads to injuries which then lead to prescription drug abuse. A related point is Virginia farmers rates of suicide and drug overdoses are very high due to accidents involved in farming.

Cooperative Extension substance abuse program is well positioned in addressing these issues through evidenced based programming and a collective impact approach.

Community and Resident Perspectives

To access community needs to be addressed by the Pulaski Extension Unit, there were surveys generated to over 5,000 households, input collected from the three subject matter advisory groups, our local ELC and a focus group comprised of the Board of Supervisors and ELC members.

In May 2018, approximately 5,000 surveys were distributed to Pulaski County residents with their water/utility bills. Surveys were also distributed to Extension Group Listservs including 4-H In-School, 4-H After School, 4-H Advisory Council, 4-H All Stars & Alumni, along with 4-H Projects Clubs. Surveys were also shared with associates/partners of New River Valley Community Services. The Pulaski Extension staff collected demographic

data in May 2018 using numerous resources and databases suggested by Virginia Tech. The collected material, along with the survey results were reviewed by the ELC and Extension staff.

The Unit Staff met with key members from advisory committees and previous surveys to receive input on which issues the Extension office can and cannot realistically address. The group reviewed and analyzed the survey data and developed a top 10 list of issues in Pulaski County. From this list, 6 priority issues were selected based on their level of need and Extension's ability to address them.

Community Issues

Top 10 Issues

1. Water Quality
2. Aging Population/Long Term Care
3. Life Skills for Youth
4. Natural Resources
5. Health & Wellness
6. Local Food
7. Employment Options
8. Career & Workforce Development
9. Child Development/Care
10. Environmental Protection/Land Us

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile, department profiles, and resident perspective data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for the Pulaski County Extension Office.

Issue 1: Youth Life Skills and Development

On a daily basis, Extension and 4-H programs teach life-skills development. Currently, this is being done through 64 4-H In-School Clubs and Project Clubs. Along with these clubs, our Extension Office also works to this focus through interdisciplinary programs like 4-H Embryology Project, 4-H Junior Hokie Showcase (4th Grade Agriculture & Natural Resource Day at Virginia Tech), 5th Grade Agriculture & Natural Resource Day, 4-H Camp, and 4-H Realty Store. Career & Workforce Development Skills are also honed through 4-H Realty Store for all PCPS 8th Graders, 4-H Camp, 4-H Teens In Action!, our leadership and service learning club, 4-H Livestock Club and our 4-H Shooting Education Club. In addition, opportunities exist to conduct 4-H After-School Clubs at the elementary schools in the following program areas: Arts & Crafts, Gardening and Sewing. Furthermore, we can also offer cooking programs like Kids in the Kitchen, Let's Make a Pizza, Let's Make Cinnamon Rolls and Chef in Training. These programs are designed to educate older youth on healthy food choices, budgeting, menu planning, shopping, and making healthy meal choices for their home and family.

Pulaski County 4-H Youth Development programs are rich with learning experiences where young people partner with caring adults and volunteers in a fellowship unlike any other program available to youth today. Through 4-H, young people are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities that emphasize 4-H's "learning by doing" philosophy of youth development. The 4-H Youth Development program in Pulaski provides countless opportunities for youth, ages 5-18 (roughly 1,200+/- youth and 25% of the total student body; 200+/- teen and adult volunteers), to be engaged in dynamic, innovative, and exciting programs. Pulaski 4-Hers learn life skills, have fun, make new friends, solve problems, earn awards and recognition, practice citizenship, develop leadership abilities, and make a difference in their communities.

Issue 2: Farm Profitability and Marketing

Livestock are the leading agriculture commodity for Pulaski County. Producers face a multitude of challenges finding reliable labor, accessing land, dealing with government regulations, and identifying the best markets and managing input costs. With projected profit margins for agriculture much tighter than they have been in some time, finding ways to add value to their products and maximize their returns is essential to profitability. Extension can provide research-based information to help producers to better understand these challenges and make the best decision for their operation. This information will be delivered through Pulaski Ag Extension Producer Programs,

field days, regional conferences, educational newsletters, and coordination of added-value marketing programs such as the Virginia Quality Assured feeder cattle program.

Issue 3: Health & Wellness

Pulaski County Cooperative Extension supports the needs of health and wellness through a multidimensional approach, addressing physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual well-being. Extension integrates mindful approaches in all programming to be conscious and open to meet all individuals where they are in their needs. Programs like Kids in the Kitchen target children to learn basic cooking, food safety, and physical activity skills to set themselves up for healthy living and reduce the risk of disease. Senior Center programming supports the aging population in identifying risk factors for disease and enhancing quality of life. Extension can work with the community to teach food safety education classes and home food preservation skills through canning, fermenting, dehydrating and freezing classes.

Issue 4: Nutrition & Obesity

Pulaski County Cooperative Extension strives to promote health and well-being through the function of food. It is inevitable that everyone must eat to survive, so providing positive mindsets and attitudes towards food and its function is key in educating and opening doors for positive changes. Extension is focusing on reaching out to all audiences to provide meaningful education tailored to the needs of the individuals, which could include their disease state, budget, allergens, food availability, and time constraints. We offer one-on-one meetings based on individual needs, Kids in the Kitchen programs to target children, after school cooking programs, informative lessons at the Senior Center, as well as highlighting exposure of healthy eating to preschoolers in the county through hands-on learning.

Issue 5: Drug Abuse/Prevention

Rural Communities in SWVA are disproportionately affected by prescription opioid misuse and abuse. Pulaski County is no exception. Most occupations in Pulaski County require hard labor that lead to chronic pain, and poor access to healthcare. The Virginia Senate characterized rural VA as the perfect storm due to a large supply of prescription opioid drugs and limited access to treatment. The Extension grant from the Opioid Abatement Authority offers a program regional coordinator within Pulaski County to distribute evidenced based training, materials and programming. The coordinator works with local organizations to deliver a suite of Botvin Life Skills programs to school systems, Botvin Parenting programs, Al's Pals and Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid. The programming reaches across the spectrum of rural residents from pre-school to adult. Botvin Life Skills is utilized in schools in VA to teach student social emotional skills for good decision making. The program has successfully built a network between Extension and organizations, regional jails, social services, schools, faith-based organizations and VCE clients. The Extension regional coordinator offers grant writing expertise to their coalitions, recovery support coalitions and programs under the guidelines of Cooperative Extension.

Issue 6: Local Food

Demand for local and regional foods continues to grow in Virginia and across the United States. It has also generated economic and social opportunities for agricultural producers, entrepreneurs, and communities. Many residents of Pulaski County lack availability and budget to purchase high quality, nutritious food. VCE is working to emphasize marketing programs like farmer's markets, pick-your-own, agritourism, and other direct sale opportunities. These marketing strategies can help producers and consumers alike get the most for their money, choose a healthy meal, and support their community through the process. Extension can also make efforts to teach the community more about home gardening and fruits/vegetables best grown and suited to our climate, including plants for the different seasons.

References

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“Pulaski County Profile.” n.d. Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Virginia/cp51155.pdf.

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2024

VCE-596-83NP (VCE-1175-83NP)

Appendices

Community and Resident Perspectives Survey



2023 Pulaski County Extension Office Needs Assessment

Please rate the importance of the following issues in Pulaski County

| | Unimportant | Somewhat Important | Very Important | No Opinion |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| After-School Care | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Aging Population/ Long Term Care | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agriculture Profitability/Sustainability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agricultural Marketing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agritourism | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Beginning/Small Farmers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Career and Workforce Development | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Child Development/Care | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Chronic Disease | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Community Outreach | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Community Planning | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Community Services | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Consumer Issues | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dependent Care | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employment Options | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Environmental Protection/Land Use | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Family Activities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Farm Transition | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Field Crops/Pasture | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Finances/Financial Management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Food Safety/Home Food Preservation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Health and Wellness | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Home Lawn/Garden | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Household/ Backyard Pets | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Housing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Leadership | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Life Skills for Youth | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Livestock Production | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Local Food | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Natural Resources | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Nutrition/Obesity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Parenting and Grandparenting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pest Management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Public Awareness of Agriculture | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Small Business/Entrepreneurism | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Water Quality | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Youth and Teen Activities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

1. For the issues you rated Very important, **please select the top five** and provide additional information on the lines below on why you feel they are important for Pulaski County and what you think might be done to address them. *If an important issue was missed on the list, please include here.

Issue 1: _____

Issue 2: _____

Issue 3: _____

Issue 4: _____

Issue 5: _____

2. Please provide any information on what direction you believe Extension or community programs should take in Pulaski County.

3. How familiar are you with Virginia Cooperative Extension (with programs in 4-H, Family and Consumer Sciences and Agriculture & Natural Resources?)

- Not familiar at all
- Somewhat familiar
- Familiar
- Very familiar

4. Have you ever participated in educational programs offered by Virginia Cooperative Extension? No Yes

5. If you answered Yes to the above question, which VCE educational program(s) did you participate in and what was the value to you? _____

Please tell us about yourself. These items are voluntary to complete.

6. What is your gender?

- Female Male Other/unidentified

7. Which of the following describes your highest level of education?

- Less than high school
- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college
- College graduate
- Some graduate work
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

8. In which category is your current age?

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-64
- 65+

Which category best describes your race(s)?

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other _____

9. Which of the following categories best represents your gross total family income during the last year?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$69,999
- \$70,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000-\$89,999
- \$90,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000 or more