



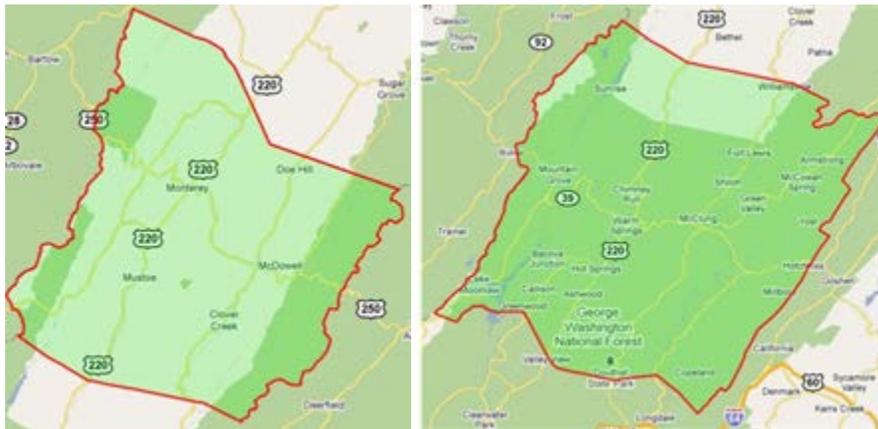
Bath & Highland County 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
<p>Strengthening Community Through Health Bodies and Minds</p>	<p>Extension Agents in Agriculture (ANR), 4-H Youth Development (4-H) and Family and Consumer Science (FCS) have specialized areas of educational programming for each specific audience: from youth to adults, Extension programming covers a vast number of topics for skill building, individual empowerment and overall mental and physical wellbeing.</p>
<p>Economic Growth and Viability Concerns</p>	<p>Highland and Bath have had little economic growth since the 1970's - 80's when the last influx of jobs occurred around the construction of the Dominion Energy Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Station on the Bath/Highland border. No other large industry has found a home in Highland or Bath since. VCE will continue to provide entrepreneurial skills development for the community in the form of workshops across multiple areas of education.</p>
<p>Extension and the Community - Promotion and Stewardship of Local Resources</p>	<p>Highland and Bath have numerous resources to offer residents and visitors to the area. From scenic views, dark skies and off-the-grid retreats, visitors enjoy all that nature has to offer for weekend getaways and family vacations. Extension is a critical partner and supporter of community activities. From service hours during Maple Festival and county fairs, to training and educational support of youth, families and farmers, VCE is present in the local economy as an arm of educational support for youth development, healthy living, and land and water stewardship.</p>

Introduction

Bath and Highland Units of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducted their five-year Situation Analysis needs assessment of Bath & Highland Counties. The study consisted of Extension Agents and staff reviewing the latest county demographic profiles and examining major statistical changes over the last five to ten years.

VCE Highland and Bath Extension Agents and Staff used a QUALTRICS online survey instrument distributed and advertised through email, mailed newsletter, community flyers and social media posts to community members and extension stakeholders in the counties to assist in identifying the level of effort at which Extension should put toward particular programming areas.

From the survey, a list of top ten results was identified and compiled into three main priority issues to be addressed by local and regional Extension Agents and support staff through Extension education initiatives in the next five years.

Bath Profile

Bath County is located in Virginia's West Central Highlands with neighboring Virginia counties of Augusta and Rockbridge to the east, Allegheny to the south, Greenbrier County, West Virginia and Pocahontas County, West Virginia to the west, and Highland County, Virginia to the north. Bath County encompasses 529.2 square miles of mostly forested mountain terrain with Warm Springs serving as the County Seat. According to the 2020 Census, Bath County had a population of 4,209. A 2022 census population estimate of 4,049 reflected a 3.7% decrease in population.

Population has fluctuated over the last 40 years. Bath had an influx of population between 1970 and 1980 due largely to the multi-year construction project of Virginia Power's hydroelectric facility, located in the northwest part of the county, bordering Bath and Highland counties on Back Creek. Data retrieved in 1990 reversed that trend with a 15.5% decline in population, which is attributed to the completion of the Virginia Power Project by 1985.

The median age of Bath residents has increased significantly in the last 40 years. In 1980, the median age was 33 and decreased to 29 in 1990, again due to the demographics attracted to the area from the Virginia Power project. Age rose to 42 in 2000 and to 50 again in 2010. For the 2020 Census, the median age was reported as 48.9 years. Youth ages 5 to 19 years of age decreased slightly between 2018 and 2021. Despite the decline in population, youth remained 12.6% of the population while individuals age 20 to 34 decreased to 14.2%. Adults age 35 to 49 were 14.9% (a decrease) and adults age 50 to 64 were 24.8% (a slight increase). The majority of the population, 28.8% remained in the 65 and older category in 2021.

In Bath, the racial composition has seen little change. The percentage of White/Caucasian residents holds at 91% of the population. Between 2018 and 2021, the Hispanic/Latino community grew the most, to 2.5% of the population. The Black/African American resident population decreased the most, dropping to 3.7% from 4.3% in 2018.

The average household income was \$55,807 in 2021, an increase from the 2019 household income of \$49,738. Bath's unemployment rate in 2013 was 5.4%. In 2022, the largest percentage of jobs in Bath were in the accommodation and food services sector with OMNI Homestead being the largest employer. Tourism is the largest industry in Bath with direct visitor spending at \$51 million in lodging and \$16.4 million in food & beverage in 2021. The total spending across all categories was \$80.9 million.

According to data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the number of Bath County farms have declined while acres dedicated to farmland activity are on the rise. From 2012 - 2017, land engaged in farming increased by 6,522 acres, increasing the average farm size by over 20% from 356 acres to 435 acres. Of the farmland in Bath, most of it is utilized as woodland and cropland. Bath's top crop is forages, including hay and haylage, to make up 25% of all agricultural sales. Cattle inventory has increased, with 75% of combined sales from livestock, poultry, and livestock products. 89% of farms in Bath are family-owned farms; 1% of those farms produce organic products, creating unique agricultural opportunities in our region.

Table 1. Bath Agricultural Profile

Bath County	Total Farms	Acres of Farmland	Average Size in Acres	Market Value of Products Sold (Per Farm Average)
2007	120	38,412	320	\$32,242
2012	116	41,332	356	\$52,215
2017	110	47,854	435	\$61,338
Change, last 10 yrs.	-8.7%	+21.9%	+30.5%	+62.2%

Cattle & Calves	Head	Sales (\$1,000's)	Rank in VA (in sales)
2012	5,707	3,119	49th
2017	6,147	3,167	46th
Change, last 5 yrs.	+7.7%	+1.5%	↑ 3

Sheep & Lamb	Bath County (as of 12/31/17)	Sales (\$1,000's) (sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk)	Rank in VA (in sales)
2012	280	20	69th
2017	288	44	51st
Change, last 5 yrs.	+2.9%	+120%	↑ 4

Farms by Value of Sales	2007	2012	2017
>\$2,500	43	42	25
\$2,500 - \$9,999	32	22	27
\$10,000 - \$24,999	16	20	26
\$25,000 - \$49,999	13	11	10
\$50,000 - \$99,999	9	6	9
\$100,000+	7	15	13

Highland Profile

Highland is known as “Virginia’s Little Switzerland”, with the highest mean elevation east of the Mississippi River. It is also the least populated county in Virginia. The county is bordered by Pocahontas County, West Virginia to the west, Pendleton County, West Virginia, to the north, Augusta County, Virginia to the east and to the south by Bath County, Virginia. Highland County encompasses 415.2 square miles of mostly mountainous terrain with Monterey serving as the County Seat. According to the 2020 Census, Highland County had a population of 2,232. A 2022 census population estimate of 2,301 reflected a 3% increase since 2020.

Highland had a significant increase in population between 1970 and 1980, due to the influx of employed individuals in the construction of Virginia Power’s hydroelectric facility. The population has seen a steady decline since 1985, when the project was completed. Over the past few years, rural counties such as Highland have seen population increases due to ever-improving broadband internet infrastructure, making remote work a more feasible possibility, with the biggest influx of remotely employed individuals since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

Highland’s population is trending older; residents age 65 and older were the fastest growing group. Between 2018 and 2021, this demographic has increased nearly 6%. Adults age 50 to 64 have dropped 8% during the same time period. The youth population has increased in the last five years. In 2018, there were 215 youth age 5 to 19, making up 10% of the population. In 2021, the number increased 1% to 235 youth.

In Highland, the racial composition has had little change. In 2018, 97% of Highland citizens identified as White/Caucasian. The Asian population in Highland increased the most in 2021, up to 1%. The Hispanic/Latino and Asian population both grew by 10 citizens from 2018 to 2021.

The average household income in Highland was \$62,330 in 2021. This is a slight decrease from 2019 where the average was \$63,998. Highland unemployment rate in 2018 was 4%. In 2022, the largest percentage of jobs in Highland were in local government with the Highland County School Board recognized as the largest employer.

According to data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture, trends over the past decade (2007-2017) show the number of farms and acres devoted to farmland increasing. The number of farms has increased by 5% while the average size of farms has decreased by 5%. In 2017, 42% of farmland was for pasture use and 38% was woodland. Cattle inventory decreased slightly while corn bushels harvested increased. Of the 275 farms, 97% are family-owned, 25% of which hire farm labor. Turkeys, cattle and calves made up most of the livestock inventory for the county and over 90% of sales are that of livestock, poultry, and products thereof. Forage such as hay and haylage was the top crop in acres but made up less than 10% of sales, due to personal use by the producer.

Table 2. Highland Agricultural Profile

	Total Farms	Acres of Farmland	Average Size (Acres)	Market Value of Products Sold (Per Farm Average)
2007	239	76,764	321	\$54,921
2012	261	93,080	357	\$115,200
2017	275	92,950	338	\$94,981
Change, last 10 yrs.	+14%	+19.1%	+5.2%	+53.4%

Cattle & Calves	Head	Value of Sales (\$1,000’s)	Rank in VA (in sales)
2012	14,665	12,528	19th
2017	14,584	11,090	20th
Change, last 5 yrs.	-0.6%	-11.5%	↓1

Turkeys	Head	Value of Sales (\$1,000’s) (poultry & eggs)	Rank in VA
2012	152,165	15,353	10th
2017	241,399	12,416	12th
Change, last 5 yrs.	+92.9%	-19.1%	↓2

Farms by Value of Sales	2007	2012	2017
>\$2,500	67	42	25
\$2,500 - \$9,999	39	22	27
\$10,000 - \$24,999	44	20	26
\$25,000 - \$49,999	43	11	10
\$50,000 - \$99,999	25	6	9
\$100,000+	21	15	13

Community Perspectives: Extension’s Level of Effort for Area Programming

To gather local data, a web based Qualtrics survey was adapted for local use from the Virginia Statewide Situation Analysis needs assessment sent earlier in 2023. The statewide analysis was sent to a select group of stakeholders. The Highland and Bath survey was shared via email to all Bath and Highland email groups currently on file at the Extension offices (4-H, ANR, FCS, Community) as well as shared with local government employees, both in person and via email blast. Survey information was shared on the local WVMR radio stations and as a public service announcement in The Recorder newspaper. Infographics were created and shared on Bath and Highland VCE Facebook pages. The survey was uploaded to touchscreen tablets provided by the district office so the survey could be disseminated during in-person Extension and community programs agents and staff coordinated.

The survey was formatted in “level of effort” ranking style around Extension program areas of youth development, agriculture, family and community. Examples questions include the following:

How much effort should local Extension put towards the following programming areas:

Teaching Youth Good Money Habits

Community Perspectives: Results

The 2023 Bath-Highland Situation Analysis survey received 50 responses. A summary of respondent demographics is below:

	Bath	Highland
Respondents	25	22
Gender	M = 3; F = 22	M = 8; F = 13; Other - 1
Age	25-34 4 35-44 1 45-54 10 55-64 4 65-74 5 75-84 1 <i>No respondents age 18-24 or 85+</i>	25-34 1 35-44 5 45-54 3 55-64 7 65-74 4 75-84 2 <i>No respondents age 18-24 or 85+</i>
Years Lived in VA	< 1 year 0 1-4 years 4 5-9 years 1 10-19 years 3 >20 years 17	1-4 years 7 5-9 years 2 10-19 years 4 >20 years 9 <i>No respondents <1 year</i>

Figure 1. Survey results.

Examples of comments received from respondents were:

1. Preserving natural resources for the next generation and working with youth to grow their interest in strengthening the local food supply.
2. By supporting agriculture, you strengthen the food supply, improve public health by helping residents access healthy food, and empower youth to use the land to prepare for the future and understand how to be good stewards of their natural resources. Supporting agriculture covers all of the other choices.
3. Building relationships through the school system and creating more of an interest within them. I'm also not sure if you already do this. But it would be interesting to have a well-established 4-H with live animals.
4. Gardening information to the community. I'd love to figure out how we could do a community garden.
5. Youth development. Programs for Youth. Empowering youth; they are the future of our counties.
6. Improving public health.

Table 3. Overarching Comment Themes were:

Theme	Number
Land/Nature Stewardship	10
Community Viability	9
Youth Development	9
Agriculture (Animal, Fiber)	8
Health (Mind and Food)	5
Economics (Cost of Living)	4

The VCE Program and Employee Development unit summarized responses for the combined survey into top and bottom 10 lists. The **top 10** issues noted with “Very High” or “High” level of effort needed were:

Table 4. Top 10 and Bottom 10 issues from survey results. (n=49)

Issue	Very high effort	High effort	% respondents
Strengthening the local food system	23	18	83.7%
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	24	17	83.7%
Assisting farmers and forest landowners in production and profitability	21	19	81.6%
Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects)	23	16	79.6%
Promoting agricultural, natural resources, and environmental literacy	20	18	77.6%
Protecting water quality	17	20	75.5%
Helping communities improve their quality of life	18	19	75.5%
Teaching healthy relationship skills to teens	14	23	75.5%
Protecting freshwater resources (lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands)	20	17	75.5%
Ensuring safe food handling practice to prevent foodborne illness	16	20	73.5%

The **bottom 10** issues noted as “Low” or “Very Low” level of effort needed were:

Table 5. Bottom 10 issues from survey results. (n=49)

Issue	No Effort	Low Effort	% respondents
Strengthening couple and/or marital relationships	1	14	30.6%
Protecting the coastal environment	4	9	26.5%
Addressing before and after school challenges	0	11	22.4%
Teaching people to protect themselves from identity theft, frauds, and scams	2	8	20.4%
Strengthening dependent care	3	7	20.4%
Providing physical fitness education	3	6	18.4%
Addressing substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc.)	1	6	14.3%
Facilitating civic engagement	0	7	14.3%
Teaching youth good money habits	2	5	14.3%
Preventing youth violence	1	6	14.3%

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

How will Bath and Highland address the issues found by the stakeholder survey, you ask? Here are our plans for the next five years:

Strengthening Community Through Healthy Bodies and Minds

Citizens, young and young-at-heart, are affected by health issues and concerns – mental or physical – and look to locality leadership and governance for solutions. From drug addiction to obesity, cancer, heart and mental health to access to fresh food year-round, these issues affect everyone in either a direct or indirect way. Citizenry benefits from opportunities provided by Virginia Cooperative Extension to address multiple health-related issues through cooperative education efforts across Extension Agent specialties, community organizations and partners in areas of nutrition, production, preparation and preservation of healthy food, physical activity and other attributes of a healthy lifestyle.

Extension Agents in Agriculture (ANR), 4-H Youth Development (4-H) and Family and Consumer Science (FCS) have specialized areas of educational programming for each specific audience: from youth to adults, Extension programming covers a vast number of topics for skill building, individual empowerment and overall mental and physical wellbeing.

Agriculture – Supporting Land and Producer: ANR programs support learning through youth and adult geared programs that address home gardening, proper pesticide uses and application, animal and plant production systems as well as land management techniques for new and generational landowners. ANR programming benefits farmers, landowners, their families, and employees through training in identifying and addressing farm stress as well as tools for farm and forest transition as well as development of farm finance and business plans. Through farm visits, radio programs, public service announcements in local papers and email blasts, evening and weekend seminars and workshops, local Agents and university specialists deliver and assist with agriculture education for community members and provide a safe space to engage with peers and experts to improve physical and mental health.

Youth Development through Healthy Food, and Competition: The local 4-H program assumes a pivotal role in strengthening the community by championing the pursuit of well-being, both in body and mind, through an array of initiatives and activities. The life skills cultivated within the framework of all 4-H programs, such as goal setting, problem-solving, and critical thinking, have enduring relevance in guiding individuals toward sound, health-focused decisions across their lifetimes. Cloverbud programs, community 4-H clubs, in-school 4-H enrichment, Junior 4-H camp, and a plethora of other offerings, jointly present opportunities for youth to hone leadership, citizenship, and other life skills. These experiences encompass a wide spectrum of activities and projects that foster holistic development. Specialized 4-H programs like the Culinary Club and 4-H Food Challenge competition foster the development of leadership skills and serve as valuable platforms for understanding healthy living. Youth and family members learn about proper nutrition, cooking skills and food safety which in turn encourages healthier living habits. Additionally, Bath and Highland 4-H work to incorporate agricultural and nutritional awareness through Cloverbud and in-school enrichment programs. Exposing youth to different foods and educating them on the health benefits of these foods, as well as helping youth to understand these products' role in Virginia's economy all contribute to promoting healthy youth development in the community. A holistic approach that emphasizes both physical health and mental well-being, 4-H plays a significant role in enhancing the overall health and vitality of the community. Benefits are acknowledged during the current generation but also cultivates well-being for future generations, contributing to overall resiliency of the community.

Encouraging Youth Leadership & Mentorship: Bath and Highland 4-H offer targeted initiatives centered on fostering leadership skills, character development, and personal growth. The journey begins with modeled leadership through the facilitation of Cloverbud programs, introducing the younger members of the community to the 4-H initiative. Within these programs, 4-H staff and volunteers guide youth in exploring the world through hands-on educational activities and mentorship from adults. As the young participants grow older and mature,

they have the opportunity to assume leadership roles through participation and engagement with community clubs. These programs open doors for youth to take on responsibilities as club officers, honing their leadership abilities through the planning and facilitation of various club programs. Additionally, Junior 4-H camp offers opportunities for youth leadership and mentorship for both campers and teen counselors. Campers have multiple opportunities for personal development through participation in team building activities, teen and adult-led classes and exercising personal responsibility in an away-from-home atmosphere with peers. Campers can challenge themselves, learn from others, and build lifelong connections with friends and mentors. Teen counselors shoulder many camp related responsibilities such as supervision and mentoring younger campers; this instills attributes of responsibility and accountability. Teen interactions with campers, staff, and peers enhance communication skills required for future leadership roles as well as development of teamwork and conflict resolution skillsets. Serving as positive role models for younger campers is fundamental to the teen role, fostering character development, responsibility, and leadership skills. Teen and mentor participation in events such as Virginia 4-H State Congress broadens horizons on leadership, mentorship, and personal development. Teens learn from and engage with experts in their respective fields of study as well as peers from diverse backgrounds and regions of the state, resulting in invaluable leadership skill-building experiences. Exposure to diversity at statewide events encourages networking and social skill building for future leadership and career paths.

Fostering Healthy Families: Family and Consumer Science (FCS) offers food safety training through ServSafe Manager Classes, Food Handler Classes, Cooking for Crowds programs and provides general safe food handling information through community outreach, social media and radio programs. Dial gauge pressure canner testing and food preservation information is shared annually during summer gardening months when the abundance of fresh food can be preserved for enjoyment and health benefits in the off season. FCS continues to provide programs on healthy eating and chronic disease prevention and management such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Economic Growth and Viability Concerns

Highland and Bath have had little economic growth since the 1970's - 80's when the last influx of jobs occurred around the construction of the Dominion Energy Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Station on the Bath/Highland border. No other large industry has found a home in Highland or Bath since. Wind power and gas pipeline projects have been rejected by residents due concerns of disturbing one of Virginia's last rural retreats. Due to the lack of tax base, there is no land use tax exemption for farmers and ranchers in Highland County. In 2018, Bath County welcomed Speyside Bourbon Stave Mill to Millboro, hiring 40+ positions over two shifts, but since establishment, there have been environmental concerns raised by neighboring landowners and further expansion is not in its future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Highland and Bath became destinations for employees able to work remotely due to extensive work and grant funding in the counties to expand rural broadband; this initiative made remote working feasible, assisting in the sale of previously vacant properties and growth of the short-term stay/Airbnb industry. Since 2021, Highland has become home to a growing Amish community including an Amish-owned general store, greenhouse business, blacksmith, cabinet maker, metal and roof work and fence building enterprises. An increasing number of hair sheep have also been raised and sold locally by this community and fellow farmers through the reopening of Monterey Stockyard LLC, reducing the need for farmers to travel outside the county to sell livestock. The OMNI hotel in Bath remains a large employer of both local and transient employees and recently underwent a \$150 million renovation.

VCE will continue to provide entrepreneurial skills development for the community in the form of workshops across multiple areas of education. FCS Agents serving the area are equipped to train residents in ServSafe and food preservation for enhanced food safety as well as the Master Financial Volunteer program to improve financial literacy and enhance entrepreneurial efforts for small business startups in the food sector. 4-H Youth Development continues to provide hands-on learning in the form of workshops and partnerships with ANR and FCS agents to teach entrepreneurial skills for workplace readiness. Lessons in introductory finance through school partnerships, "grow your own" gardening and livestock projects and entrepreneurial workshops in starting a business are a few of the programs provided by both 4-H and FCS, including teacher and community partners. ANR agents and specialists provide seminars and workshops around pesticide application certification, livestock

management systems, gardening and horticulture enterprises as well as marketing and sales education of value-added agricultural products.

4-H programs in Bath and Highland strive to create opportunities to help youth and volunteer improve their quality of life. Local 4-H clubs, in-school 4-H enrichment, Junior 4-H camp and Virginia 4-H State Congress enhance skill building in youth leadership development, community service, civic engagement, healthy living initiatives, agricultural and STEM education and more. These programs provide a range of educational and community engagement opportunities that empower 4-H members to make a positive impact in their communities, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for residents. 4-H programs nurture future leaders and foster a sense of responsibility, civic engagement, and well-being, creating more vibrant and resilient communities.

Extension and the Community – Promotion and Stewardship of Local Resources

Highland and Bath have numerous resources to offer residents and visitors to the area. From scenic views, dark skies and off-the-grid retreats, visitors enjoy all that nature has to offer for weekend getaways and family vacations. Festivals, fairs and community events are planned throughout the year by the Chamber and civic organizations for economic opportunities to support local artisans and small businesses. For those wishing to live and work in the area, the expansion of reliable broadband internet makes that more of a reality as well as the improvement of local e-commerce and use of technology for business enhancement and growth.

Extension is a critical partner and supporter of community activities. From service hours during Maple Festival and county fairs, to training and educational support of youth, families and farmers, VCE is present in the local economy as an arm of educational support for youth development, healthy living, and land and water stewardship. From on-farm equipment and educational demonstrations during field days to offering farm finance and food safety training, ANR programming exposes farm and landowners to new technologies and ideas for best management practices to try and eventually implement on their own operations.

Bath and Highland's 4-H programs play a pivotal role in community resource promotion and stewardship through Extension education. Specifically, the local 4-H Youth Livestock Program serves as a key platform for agricultural education and the promotion of humane animal stewardship that takes place on local family farms. With youth front and center in these project areas caring and managing livestock, it fosters a deeper understanding of the value of livestock production within rural communities such as Bath and Highland. By actively engaging youth and community in these programs, VCE strengthens the connection between non-farm individuals to the agricultural and environmental landscape, promoting a sustainable and informed approach to food production contributing to the overall well-being and resource retention - youth, land and animal - in the local community.

Family and Consumer Science programs educate residents and business owners to understand the importance of following food safety practices in their homes, small businesses and in the community. Information is provided through community outreach events, social media, radio programs and food safety classes. Ensuring safe, local food is being grown, preserved and served enhances confidence in the local food supply, creating job and entrepreneurial opportunities for rural areas such as Bath and Highland.

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