



## Greene County 2023 Situation Analysis Report



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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

<b>Priority Issue</b>	<b>Planned Unit Response</b>
Protecting Water Quality/Protecting Freshwater sources	Hosting yearly well water testing clinics, working with Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District to promote cost share programs for
Strengthening the Local Food System	Work with community partners, assist new and beginning growers in production
Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, And Other Life Skills	Work with the local community, community partners, school system, and more to develop a well rounded, robust youth development program
Preserving Farm and Forest Land	Host farm transition workshops, host workshops to encourage farm businesses

# Introduction

The Greene Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE-Greene) conducted a situational analysis for Greene County, which included a unit profile and major statistical changes within the county over the past five years. Extension Staff had a series of discussions with Extension Leadership Council members as well as interviews and discussions with stakeholders throughout the community. A survey instrument developed by Virginia Cooperative Extension's state office in Blacksburg was sent to over 500 clients and posted on multiple Facebook pages and groups, posted on the county website, and our unit website. Once this information was collected and the data was analyzed, the information was shared with our Extension Leadership Council members (ELC). Staff and ELC members worked together to decide the top priorities that VCE-Greene could effectively address for the community.

While this official analysis was done in 2023, VCE staff is performing constant analysis of the needs of the community. The county is changing rapidly, and staff members hear from members of the public, program participants, yearly surveys, and more to fine tune the recommendations from the previous situational analysis.

# Unit Profile

Greene County is located in both the Piedmont and Blue Ridge regions of Virginia, approximately 90 miles east of Richmond, 100 miles southwest of Washington, D.C., and 20 miles north of downtown Charlottesville. Geographically, Greene ranks as the sixth smallest county in Virginia with 156.25 square miles.

According to Census.gov, Greene county has a population of 21,107 as of July of 2022. This is an increase of 2.7% based on the increase from April of 2020. 86.2% of the residents identify as white alone, 7.6% identify as black or African American alone, 0.5% identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.4% identify as Asian, 0.1% identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 3.1% identify as two or more races, and 7.4% identify as Hispanic. There are 131.8 people per square mile, which is an increase from 2010 when there were 117.8 people per square mile.

The median household income is \$81,338. 7.8% of the population in the county lives in poverty, and 12% of children live in poverty. The unemployment rate is 3.0%. There are currently 1680 people that live in households that experience food insecurity. 39.8% of the population is employed, but are income constrained and asset limited.

The top ten largest employers in the county are the Greene County School Board, Walmart, the County of Greene, Lowes Home Centers, Blue Ridge School, Food Lion, Insurance Institute for H Inc., McDonald's, New System Linen Service, Inc., and Renaissance Assisted Living.

There are 3,712 children enrolled in K-12 education within the county. In the county, there are two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and a satellite campus of a local community college. There are also two private schools, one K-12 and one secondary, and a newly formed homeschool co-op.

As far as agriculture, while the number of farms has decreased from 2012 (216) to 2017 (214), the average farm size has increased from 2012 (126 acres) to 2017 (133 acres). As part of this, there are 100% more small farms 9 acres and under in 2017 (14) than there were in 2012 (7). However, the number of farms that range in size from 50-179 acres has decreased, from 95 farms in 2012 to 77 farms in 2017.

As a note, the results from the 2022 Agriculture Census will be released in early 2024, and that new data will be closely analyzed and compared with the data from 2017. That data will also be a big determining factor in the agricultural programming that will be offered in Greene County for the next 5 years. Based on anecdotal experiences from Agriculture Extension Agent Sarah Sharpe, the number of small farms will more than likely continue to increase, which will present unique and different programming opportunities to fit the needs for those small farmers.

The health of the community has improved compared with data sets from 2021. In 2023, 14% of people indicated that they were in poor or fair health compared with 18% in 2021; 3.1% indicated they had poor physical health days and 4.6% indicated that they were experiencing poor mental health days- compared with 4.2% and 4.7% in 2021.

There is a health issue with the lack of primary care physicians within the county- in 2023 there was a ratio of 5,031 individuals per one primary care physicians. This is almost 4 times above the state rate. There are two hospitals within a 30-minute drive from Greene, but for the individuals where transportation is an issue, the primary care physician shortage can be a huge barrier for those needing medical care.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

The electronic survey that was distributed asked the residents and stakeholders to rate a variety of topics for what their perceived level of importance to Greene County were. 50% of the respondents indicated that they had used Extension services, while the other half either had not or were unsure if they had. Also, important to note was that the distinction was made that these were issues that they felt that the VCE-Greene unit could impact or change.

The top ten issues that VCE-Greene should be focusing on were:

- Protecting Water Quality
- Strengthening the local food system
- Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills
- Protecting freshwater resources (lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands)
- Preserving farm and forest land
- Ensure safe, high quality foods
- Assisting government and businesses with land use decisions
- Teaching healthy relationship skills to teens
- Controlling Invasive Pests
- Managing natural habitats and ecosystems
- The bottom ten issues that residents deemed the least important for the VCE-Greene unit to focus on were:
- Strengthening couple or marital relationships
- Teaching people to protect themselves from identify theft, frauds, and scams
- Addressing alcohol abuse
- Addressing prescription drug abuse
- Addressing poverty
- Strengthening parenting skills
- Strengthening dependent care
- Teaching people to manage their money
- Preventing youth violence
- Addressing adult and youth mental health

Some of the open comments that were shared include:

“I believe the pandemic has cast a light on the importance of being healthy in order to weather such events as a pandemic. I am director of a local food pantry and see the emphasis being put on healthy food, fresh produce, health education, and awareness that is taking place across our state. We are already working with you to provide health and nutrition classes to our clients, with the focus being on families with children. We cannot be a strong community if we’re in poor health. Children as well as adults thrive and are more productive citizens if we are healthier and livelier.”

“Landscape and garden. The majority of residents are non-farm but have larger than suburban sized properties. The need for information for best weed control and easy care, native, landscape plantings would be beneficial to all the county residents.”

“Empowering youth. Our youth are the future of this county. Besides sports there is not a whole lot to do in Greene County. VCE and 4-H give kids a variety of programs to get involved with.”

Gardening and food preservation are big issues here. Our population is not wealthy. The current food prices make it challenging for families to feed themselves. If people could learn inexpensive ways to handle home gardening and food preservation that does not require expensive equipment or extensive training, that would help supplement. Also, more about how to use that produce in healthy eating.”

VCE-Greene priorities aligned with approximately half of the top ten state priorities, with protecting water quality, ensuring safe, high quality foods, and strengthening the local food system all in the top 10 in both Greene and statewide results. Greene citizens ranked preserving farm land higher which makes sense when looking at development within the county and the desire of many citizens to keep Greene’s rural nature.

## **Community Issues**

The Greene County ELC members and staff met in October 2023 to discuss the results from the situational analysis survey. During this meeting, four main issues were identified.

- Protecting Water Quality and Protecting Freshwater Resources
- Strengthening the Local Food System
- Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and other life skills
- Preserving Farm and Forest Land

## **Future Programming to Address Community Issues**

### **1.) Addressing the issue of Protecting Water Quality and Protecting Freshwater Resources**

VCE staff currently works in many different areas, and will continue to do so, to help educate community members on water quality and how to best protect our water resources. Ag Agent Sarah Sharpe currently sits on the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District board as the appointed extension director and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. In that partnership, the CSWCD staff and Sharpe partner together on programming such as encouraging soil sample testing and offering help with results interpretation.

Sharpe has also implemented an incredibly successful soil sample mailing program that she plans to continue into the future. This program encourages people to do soil samples by offering a mailing service for them- once a month VCE-Greene mails all samples to Blacksburg at no charge to the residents. We also plan to increase our participation in the residential well water testing program from every other year to every year as the demand for participation in that clinic has increased.

There are also two subdivisions that drain into large lakes in Greene County as well as a major river and tributary to the Rappahannock River, draining into the Chesapeake Bay. Programming and participation in programs will educate citizens so that they realize what they are doing has a direct impact on the bay.

Expected outcomes will be that the number of soil samples sent in by Greene residents continues to increase, the number of well water tests that are submitted continues to increase, and new partnerships with local homeowners' associations are created. Follow up surveys will also be conducted to see if residents are following the recommendations on their soil test results.

## **2.) Strengthening the Local Food System**

Strengthening the local food system requires a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approach for all program areas. As a unit, we will continue to work together to encourage programming that will allow for this across the spectrum. This can include programming from ANR on growing produce or meat, introducing techniques that allow for growing under a longer time frame, and encouraging new foods or growing methods that may work in this area. 4-H will focus on the youth, encouraging them to also grow for their own families, but then also instruct them on how to preserve food. FCS will focus on the food business aspect of this- how to process food for sale, how to safely preserve, and how to be profitable.

Community partners will also be a big part of this, including the Feeding Greene food pantry, working with the Greene Farmers Market through the Greene Commons group, and Parks and Rec who has also indicated a need for educational programming.

There have been discussions on starting community gardens to better teach residents how to grow food. With the increase in houses that are set to be built in the next 5 years and the desire of many of those homeowners to grow their own food, this will be a high priority for all staff in the office.

Expected outcomes will be a wide variety of programming that addresses the desires of community members to be able to grow, preserve, and sell (if desired) their own food.

## **3.) Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills**

A robust, well-rounded 4-H program will meet many of these needs, through a variety of delivery methods, including clubs, in school enrichment programs, workshops and 4-H Camp. 4-H in Greene County will be in a unique position in the next 5 years as a new 4-H agent will come on board as current 4-H Agent Kathy Alstat plans to retire in June of 2024. This new agent will be able to develop relationships with current 4-H volunteers and community partners to determine what programming best fits the county and their interests.

Interdisciplinary programming will be important here to help the new agent find their footing within the county and also to help with programming in the areas that are relevant to each agent. There has also been a request from county leadership to see more partnerships with VCE-Greene and the Parks and Recreation department. Other opportunities for partnership include Greene Public Schools, home school associations and the Youth Development Council of Greene County. These partnerships will enable the 4-H program to continue to grow and meet the needs of all youth, including low income and underserved groups.

## **4.) Preserving Farm and Forest Land**

As Greene County continues to look at the fine balance between development and keeping the county rural, this will require an interdisciplinary approach as well. Farm Transition workshops will be vital to help landowners and farmers develop a plan for them to keep their land in agriculture use forever by placing it in an easement, helping the landowner determine who will be the next owner of the land, and overall helping them develop a plan for what will happen to their land and/or farm business in the future. Programming for forest owners will also be prioritized.

FCS programming on creating successful businesses, developing new enterprises, business planning, and more can help create sustainable agriculture businesses that are more likely to stay in agriculture.

ANR programming that helps create a welcoming, inclusive culture for all individuals involved in agriculture can help be the positive support that is needed when times get tough for farmers and landowners.

Partnerships with Greene County will also be important here to make sure that citizen's concerns on keeping the county rural are adequately addressed.

Expected outcomes will be a wide variety of programs including: writing agriculture business plans, farm transition programs, beef cattle producer meetings, how to start a farm, and more.

## Conclusion

While this will not be all of the programming that is offered in Greene County for the next five years, this plan does give us a good starting point so that we can continue to develop programs that meet many of these needs. There will always be new issues that arise, and one of Extension's strengths is the ability to meet those challenges head on. The majority of issues that were identified are ones that will continue to be concerns for citizens for many years into the future. As VCE staff, we look forward to being able to meet these needs head on to continue to enhance the lives of the citizens in Greene County.

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