



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Situation Analysis Report

Albemarle County / City of Charlottesville

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Introduction

The Albemarle County / City of Charlottesville office of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducted a comprehensive situational analysis during 2018. The situational analysis process involved unit staff, the local Extension Leadership Council (ELC), and key stakeholders. A detailed unit profile was developed and additional data was gathered through a community needs survey. Data and information were analyzed, and priority issues were identified.

Unit Profile

Albemarle County is located in the Northern Piedmont, at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, 100 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. and 70 miles northwest of Richmond, Virginia. It is the fifth largest county in Virginia, by geographic area, encompassing approximately 726 square miles. The City of Charlottesville is located within Albemarle County, and serves as the county seat. Both locations are rich in historic and natural beauty. The population is around 107,000 for the county and 48,000 for the city.

The percentage of the population that falls below the poverty line, is 8.5% for the county and 25.9% for the city. The national average is 12.7%. According to a 2015 local study, 18% of Charlottesville and Albemarle families “make less than what it costs to survive in our area” (<https://www.pvcc.edu/sites/www.pvcc.edu/files/media/17-orange-dot-report.pdf>). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 25% of the families in Charlottesville (1,800) do not earn a wage that allows them to be self-sufficient. Over 630 families (in the City of Charlottesville) make less than \$15,000/year. The median household income in Albemarle is higher than the state (\$70,342 vs. \$66,149) and lower in Charlottesville (\$50,727).

Our area has a percentage of adults, age 65 and over, similar to the national average (15.2% vs. 15.6%). Incidence of adult obesity in Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville is lower than the national average (23% and 27% vs 28%).

Agricultural census data indicates that the number of farms and the number of acres that are farmed within the county increased from 2007 to 2012 (6% increase in the number of farms and 7% increase in the number of acres that are farmed). The majority of farmers are part-time and have off-farm employment. Albemarle County is home to a diverse agriculture community including livestock producers (beef cattle, horses, sheep, goats, chickens and swine), orchards (mostly peach and apple), vineyards, greenhouses, hayland, vegetable and field crops. In addition, Albemarle County is home to the third largest population of horses in the state.

Community and Resident Perspectives

A community needs survey was developed to help further identify issues and concerns of local citizens. Extension Agents and ELC members distributed the survey to the public and to key stakeholders and focus groups within our community. Results were analyzed and key priority issues were identified.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville.

Issue 1: Agriculture Sustainability

Agricultural Sustainability was identified as the top issue facing Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville. This issue includes agricultural production and profitability, farm business management, equine and livestock management, small and/or less traditional agriculture business opportunities, beginning farmer education, as well as pasture and hay land management. VCE addresses this issue through a variety of Agriculture and Natural Resource programs, including: Pesticide Applicator Certification, weed/insect identification and pest management recommendations, soil analysis and fertilizer recommendations, research-based and commodity specific educational programs, individual consultations and advice, as well as on-line publications and access to university specialists.

Issue 2: Environment

Environmental issues were identified as the second most pressing issue facing Albemarle and the City of Charlottesville. Specific environmental issues identified include topics related to land use and land preservation, water quality, home gardening and landscaping, energy resources and conservation, and wildlife. Within the agriculture and home gardening arena, education related to low-impact pest management and invasive species control were strong needs that were identified.

VCE addresses this issue through our agricultural education programs which highlight best management practices and organic/environmentally friendly techniques. Our Master Gardener and Master Naturalists volunteer programs provide trained volunteers and advice to the public on home gardening, landscaping, conservation and wildlife conflicts. Our 4-H program provides naturalist and school gardening clubs, educational projects, and statewide knowledge and public speaking competitions on these topics, and we collaborate with other local agencies to provide Meaningful Watershed Education Experiences for every 4th grader in both the County and City). We also have an appointed position on the local Soil and Water Conservation District Board, and collaborate with other government and non-government agencies (NRCS, DCR, DOF, PEC, VOF, etc.).

Issue 3: Local Food Systems

Local Food Systems was identified as the third most pressing issue for Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville. This issue encompasses food safety, beginning farmer education, marketing of agricultural products, home gardening and food preservation. VCE addresses this issue through GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) Training, researched-based educational programs for both beginning and experienced local farmers, Master Gardener volunteers (who provide advice and problem solving for the home gardener), food safety classes (ServSafe and Cooking for Crowds), and home canning and food preservation education.

Issue 4: Human Health and Nutrition

Human Health and Nutrition was identified as the fourth most pressing issue facing Albemarle and the City of Charlottesville. This includes concerns about obesity, physical wellness, chronic disease management, and healthy eating habits. VCE addresses this issue through both our Family and Consumer Sciences programs and our 4-H Youth Development programs (In-school and after school programs like Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, Organwise Guys, School Garden Programs with Master Gardner Volunteers, etc.).

Issue 5: Life Skills

Life skills were identified as the fifth most pressing issue facing Albemarle and the City of Charlottesville. This issue includes customer service skills, job skills development, financial management skills, critical thinking and leadership development in youth, volunteerism and community service. All of VCE's program areas touch on aspects of this issue.

