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Albemarle County / Charlottesville City 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Protecting Water Quality	Farmer and landowner education, Healthy Lawns & Healthy Landscapes programs, Well Water Testing Clinics
Reduce misuse & overuse of pesticides and fertilizers	Private and Commercial Pesticide Applicator Courses, Horticulture Help Desk, Healthy Lawns & Healthy Landscapes Programs
Controlling Invasive Plants	MG Plant Natives program, Farmer and land owner education
Youth Education/Engagement	4-H Community clubs and in-school programming, Teen club, Camp
Food Security & Ag Education	SNAP Ed and FCS programming (relating to food safety and food preservation), Gardening Basics classes, Farm to School program/ Partnering with schools to offer more ag education



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Introduction

The Albemarle County / City of Charlottesville office of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducted a comprehensive situational analysis during 2023. 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 112,395 for the county and 46,553 for the city.

The percentage of the population that falls below the poverty line, is 8.4% for the county and 23.6% for the city. The national average is 11.5%. According to a 2022 local study, “14 percent of families in our area, do not make enough money to afford the essentials of life—food, shelter, clothing and utilities—and the added costs associated with working—childcare and transportation.” (<https://www.pvcc.edu/community-business/network2work/orangedot-report-50>). The median household income in Albemarle is higher than the state (\$97,708 vs. \$80,615) and lower in Charlottesville (\$67,177).

Albemarle County has a percentage of adults, age 65 and over, greater than the national average (20.8% vs. 16.8%), where as in the City of Charlottesville the percentage is less than the national average (12.6%). 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 decreased, and the number of acres that are farmed within the county increased, from 2012 to 2017 (3% decrease in the number of farms and 8% 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, hay land, vegetable and field crops. In addition, Albemarle County is home to the third largest population of horses in the state.

Community and Resident Perspectives

125 responses were gathered from our community needs survey, where we opted to use the same template as the state-wide Extension Needs Survey. The top issues were as follows:

Top 10 Issues respondents selected as needing very high or high effort:

Protecting water quality	86.4%
Reducing misuse & overuse of pesticides & fertilizers	81.6%
Controlling Invasive Pests (Plants, animals, insects)	76%
Protecting Air Quality	76%
Protecting fresh water resources	75.2%
Managing natural habitats & Resources	75.2%
Promoting Agriculture, Natural Resources & Environmental Literacy	72.8%
Preserving Farm & Forest land	69.6%
Strengthening local food system	68%
Protecting the marine environment	68%

Open Ended Response Needs Categorized:

- Youth related (36)
- Invasive species, Natives, Natural Resources (36)
- Agriculture (24)
- Food Issues (20)
- Climate Change, Water Quality (13)
- Infrastructure (Transportation, bikes, greenways) (7)
- Home and Community Gardens (6)
- Affordable Housing (6)
- Public Health (6)
- Limiting Growth (4)
- Racism (2)

Qualitative Analysis of Question 11:

1. Youth Education and Engagement:

- *Concerns:* Limited opportunities for youth to learn about agriculture, insufficient access to programs within the public school system, lack of diversity in 4-H, and the need for more inclusive and accessible educational resources.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "Limited opportunities for youth to learn about agriculture," "Inner city youth are extremely underrepresented in central Virginia 4-H," and "Education and awareness of the importance of a strong and thriving agricultural presence."

2. Food Insecurity and Agriculture Education:

- *Concerns:* Insufficient access to quality food, the decline of agriculture in the area, a need to support local farmers, and addressing 'food deserts' within the community.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "Too many people in Charlottesville and the county don't have access to enough food," "Supporting local farmers!! Giving them the resources they need," and "Addressing the issue of 'food deserts' in our community."

3. Access to Education and Resources:

- *Concerns:* Limited opportunities for youth education in agriculture, language barriers for non-English speaking parents, and the necessity for information in Spanish.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "My son is interested in FFA or taking agriculture classes," "We need more information in Spanish," and "Empowering youth with equitable resource that includes access to technology."

4. Public Health and Basic Needs:

- *Concerns:* Students not having their basic needs met, reliance on schools for food and hygiene, and the general improvement of public health.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "School students are not getting basic needs met," "Empowering youth with equitable resources," and "Improving public health - I'm a school teacher."

5. Affordable Housing and Community Engagement:

- *Concerns:* Affordable housing crisis, limited activities for children, and the need for more nature exposure and community engagement.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "Affordable housing is a long-standing issue," "Everything is super expensive," and "Young kids need things to do here."

6. Digital Divide and Internet Access:

- *Concerns:* Lack of high-speed internet and cell service, the impact of the digital divide on work and education, and the need for technological equity.
- *Supporting Quotes:* "Lack of great high-speed internet wifi," "Improving the internet for work, school, events advertising, knowledge, health," and "New construction should automatically be outfitted with solar panels."

These qualitative analyses indicate a diverse range of concerns related to education, food security, public health, affordability, community engagement, and technological access. Community members express a need for comprehensive, inclusive, and equitable solutions to address these challenges and enhance the overall well-being of the Charlottesville-Albemarle community.

Our results were similar to state-wide survey results, but there was an even greater focus on the environment and preserving natural resources. This comes as no surprise to those of us who have lived and worked in Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville. Open ended responses provided key information on community member concerns, allowing them the ability to be very specific about where they saw the greatest needs in our community.

Community Issues

Our top priority issues include continued efforts to educate the community about ways we can protect natural resources and the environment, expanding opportunities for youth engagement and leadership across the county, and helping to address food security and agriculture education.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Our extremely active Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers are key partners in our efforts to provide education on natural resources and the environment. Our Horticulture Help Desk, Healthy Lawns and Healthy Landscapes programs, the Garden Shed newsletter, and other Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs are clearly needed and should continue. Farmer education through programming and one-on-one visits, pesticide applicator courses and Well Water testing clinics are also key to addressing these issues. Expanded and more diverse youth programming is needed and we hope to increase local funding to support a second full-time 4-H position that will help to accomplish this goal. Another key barrier for our local office, identified by staff and volunteers, is the lack of available meeting space and facilities. We will be addressing these needs with our County and City partners. Our vacant SNAP Ed program assistant position will be important to assist the FCS and SNAP Ed Agent in Food and Nutrition related education. We see a huge opportunity to collaborate across program areas (and with community partners) in addressing the need for county-wide youth education on agriculture and where food comes from.

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