



Eureka County Needs Assessment: TOP TEN IDENTIFIED ISSUES

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Overview of Eureka County

Eureka County was established in 1873. The largest population centers are located in the unincorporated communities of Eureka and Crescent Valley. The majority of county residents are scattered throughout the county centered around agricultural and mining hubs. There is well under one person per square mile (Eureka County, 2009). Eureka County has the second smallest population in Nevada. The Nevada State Demographer's certified estimates (Nevada Small Business Development Center , 2009) of population for 2008 are:

Eureka County	1,553
Crescent Valley	283
Eureka (town)	473

The county is 80 percent Caucasian, 13 percent Hispanic, 2.5 percent American Indian and 1.5 percent Asian. The median age of Eureka County residents is 38.3 years of age. Approximately 38 percent of the population is older than 45 years of age (Eureka County, 2009).

Eureka County encompasses 4,176 square miles. Eighty one percent of the land base is owned and administered by the United States government. The total

private land base in the County is 554,973 acres (Eureka County, 2009). The majority of private land is located in the northern half of the county.

Elevation ranges from a high of 10,461 feet down to 4,000 feet. The climate at the lower elevations is generally moderate with approximately 100-110 frost free growing days. Cool summer nights and warm days offer ideal growing conditions for dairy quality alfalfa and cool season forages. However, the potential for killing frosts, during much of the growing season limits the number of alternative crops that can be grown in the area on a consistent basis.

The county's economy is heavily dependent on the mining and agricultural sectors (Harris, Fletcher, & Riggs, 2005). Gold mining is the source of most economic activity. The three major mines located in Eureka County are owned by Newmont and Barrick. They employed 3,907 workers in 2007 (Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation, 2008). County taxes on net proceeds of minerals are annually between \$1.2 and \$ 4.4 million. Mining companies are the principal taxpayers in the county (Lumos

& Associates, Inc., 2007). Even though the mining industry is economically most important to Eureka County, it is more volatile than agriculture. Eureka County has experienced the “Boom and Bust” cycles historically associated with mining.

Agriculture employs only 12 percent of the total labor force (Nevada Agricultural Statistics Service, 2002), but is vital to the county's economy and culture. Agriculture has provided a steady source of employment and economic activity. The agricultural economy consists of four sectors: range beef cattle, alfalfa hay, timothy hay and native hay. The other major employer in Eureka County is local and state government which provides just over five percent of wage and salary jobs (Eureka County, 2009).

Needs Assessment: Methods

Extension educators develop educational programs for identified local needs. The Eureka County needs assessment considers data from surveys, focus groups, public meetings, newspapers, minutes from meetings and other published sources. Research and educational programs directed at the issues identified by local residents will be the most relevant, valued and useful to residents.

In 2008, Eureka County Extension Educator Gary McCuin participated in community meetings and met with representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, Nevada Department of Agriculture, local government officials, and individuals from throughout the county to learn about current issues.

Discussions at these meetings revealed local interest in the following topics:

- Community Development
- Crop Production
- Livestock Production
- Rangeland/Natural Resources
- Horticulture
- Youth Development

Using these topics as a guide, the extension educator developed a mail survey that addressed specific issues for each broad topic (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Survey participants were asked to rate the issues' importance from low (1) to high (5). Individual participants were anonymous, their responses confidential and participation voluntary. Participants were also asked to provide written comments for issues/concerns the survey did not address.

In October 2008 the survey was delivered to all post office boxes. Of the 924 surveys mailed, 123 were returned resulting in a response rate of 13%. This rate is acceptable for an unsolicited mail survey. The actual response rate is slightly higher due to an overlap of residential and business addresses. Responses were assigned a unique identification number, and were entered into a spreadsheet for statistical analysis.

This fact sheet reports results for the top 10 issues identified county wide. Identified needs related to crop production, community development, youth development and rangeland resources will be discussed in depth in forthcoming fact sheets.

Community Survey Results

The results are reported by the average importance rating (1-low to 5-high) for each topic. In order to focus on the most frequently identified issues, only those questions (issues) with a mean value greater than four will be discussed in this publication. None of the questions related to livestock production or horticulture rated higher than four; therefore, these program areas are not discussed any further. The data was stratified by type of employment and by geographic location. Statistical analysis did not find significant differences among groups; therefore, the results are aggregated for the entire County. County residents identified ten issues/concerns with a mean rating higher than four (Figure 1). These issues are diverse and transcend the disciplines of youth development, community development, natural resource management, and agriculture.

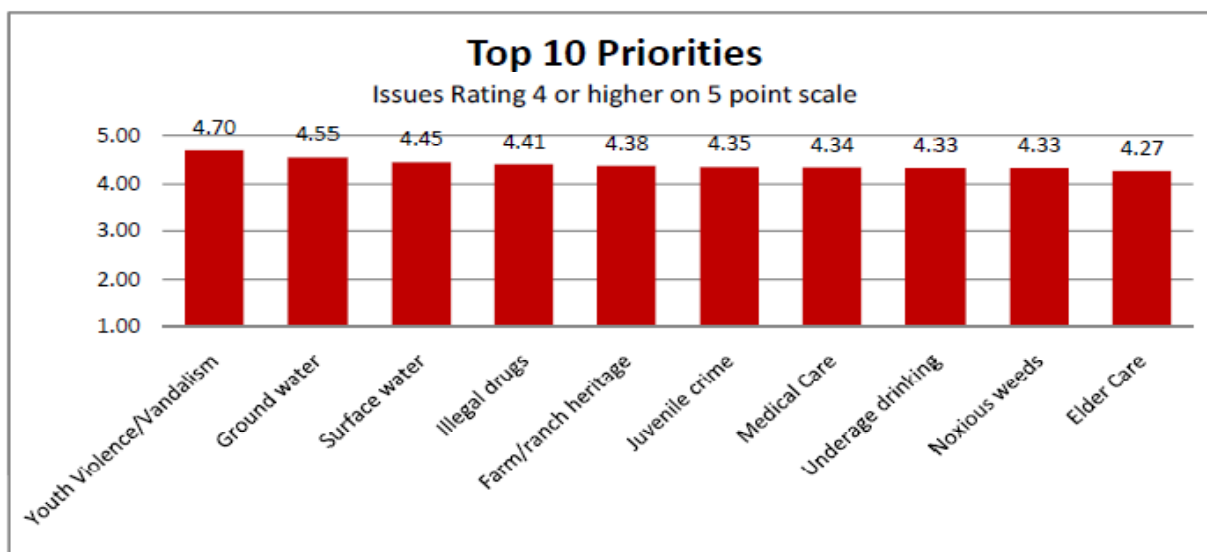
The community survey results indicate that youth violence and vandalism are the most important issues for residents in Eureka County. This result is not supported by records and observations from law enforcement and juvenile authorities. Due to inconsistencies between the community survey results and other available data related to youth violence, a modified Delphi approach was employed to assist in interpreting results of the survey (Newfields, 2002) (Roberts, 2000).

A panel of experts was convened from the six general topical areas covered by the survey and included the following representation:

- County Commission
- Sheriff's Office
- Juvenile Probation Office
- District Attorney's Office
- School Board
- Economic Development Member (business owner)

Panel of Experts

Figure 1. Top Ten Survey Priorities in Eureka County



- Farmer/Rancher
- Youth.

The panel of experts was provided the graph shown in Figure 1 and asked how the survey results compared to their experience in the community. They concurred with the identified top 10 issues. However, the panel rated the issues slightly differently as shown in Figure 2.

Discussion

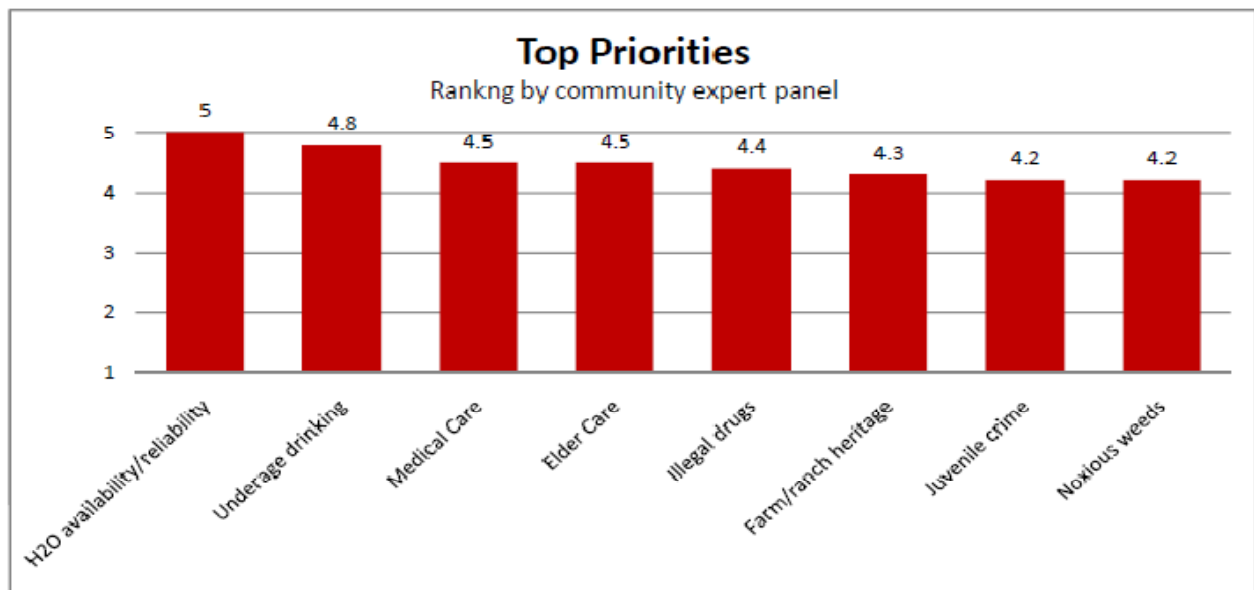
The panel and survey results indicate that water related topics are an important issue. The panel recommended combining the two categories into one issue of water availability/reliability as the highest priority. Water is a limiting factor in relation to population growth, economic stability and expansion, and quality of life. In the town of Eureka and Diamond Valley, the historic decline of ground water supplies is especially problematic. An adequate, reliable

water supply is a primary issue across the county.

The main juvenile issue identified by the panel is underage drinking. Every panelist stated that underage drinking is a serious issue throughout the county. Many panelists cited alcohol use as the predominant link in the majority of crimes committed in the county by youth and adults alike. Police reports and “Kids Count” data (Kids Count Data Center, 2008) agree that youth violence, vandalism and crime rates in Eureka County are low. Both groups acknowledge the use of illegal drugs in the county, but the panelists believe illegal drug use is largely confined to a distinct and small group of adults.

The panel concurred with survey results in recognizing both medical and elder care as major concerns. Although Eureka County funds a medical clinic in both Eureka and Crescent Valley, major medical care remains limited and cost prohibitive. Emergency care is available

Figure 2. Panel Ranking - Top Priorities



locally, but major trauma care is limited. Elder care is a potentially growing issue. Some elder care is available through the Eureka Senior Center, “Meals on Wheels” and a small amount of senior housing. The lack of major medical care, however reduces the quality of elder care compared to care in an urban setting. This fact, combined with a growing senior population creates concern for the future.

The fifth highest survey issue/concern is maintenance of the county’s farm and ranch heritage. This is consistent with data from historical economic development assessments completed in the county. Eureka County residents guard their rural, small town culture. Although many residents would like more economic activity in the county that would provide job security, increased retail services and opportunities for local youth to remain in the community, they do not want to give up their small-town atmosphere. Growth that would stress existing services and dramatically change the demographics and quality of life is undesirable to many residents.

The presence and increase of noxious weeds throughout the county is identified by the survey and recognized by the panel as an issue and concern. To a degree, this issue is being addressed. Eureka County funds a public “Weed Coordinator” position and Diamond Valley farmers have formed a weed district. Despite current efforts to address this issue, both respondent groups recognize that the problem will likely increase and additional research, education and resources will be needed to adequately address the noxious weed invasion.

Implications for Extension Educational Programs

The issues identified through the needs assessment process are as follows:

- Adequate and reliable supply of water for residents and industries
- Underage drinking
- Medical Care
- Elder Care
- Use of illegal drugs
- Retention of rural atmosphere and quality of life
- Juvenile crime (keeping incidence rates low)
- Noxious weed invasion

Cooperative Extension is positioned to address the following through educational programs:

- Water availability and reliability through educational and research efforts
- Youth crime rate by developing programs and strategies to keep youth crime rates as low as possible
- Illegal drug use through educational programs focused on families by teaching healthy family living techniques to adult members of households
- Economic development through continued research and education regarding economic opportunities that would result in minimal impact on the customs and culture of Eureka County

UNCE’s educational programs will require regular evaluation to measure their relevance and impact on important community needs.

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