

Atoka County Listening Session Report

<http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/>



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The mission of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service is to disseminate information to the people of Oklahoma and encourage the adoption of research-based knowledge relating to agriculture, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development.



Atoka County Listening Session

Forty-six (46) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Atoka County Listening Session. The Listening Session was an effort to get a broad base of citizen input to identify local issues so a plan can be developed to create a better economic,



environmental, and social situation for Atoka County. Participants from across the county provided input and identified, discussed, and defined their community's needs and opportunities, while building on the assets that presently exist.

The purpose of this report is to share publicly the process and the information that was collected from the Atoka County Listening Session. The report lists the needs and concerns of the county as identified during the open forum process. This report also will be used as a starting point for the upcoming *Focus Forum*, in which an assembled group of stakeholders will define, discuss, and begin to address the needs and concerns identified in the Listening Session. Many of the needs and concerns of Oklahoma can be addressed through partnerships with other groups and organizations. The report can be found on the Oklahoma Community Listening Session website at <http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/>.

The Listening Session revolved around a single, key question: **“Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?”** The needs and issues identified by participants clustered around several broad areas of interest. Available data do not show that any one area is more significant than another, but they do show that all these issues are vitally important to the people of Atoka County.

The Listening Session Process

Listening Session participants were divided into small groups, usually not more than 12-15 participants. Small group participants considered the guiding question (see below) and suggested issues they felt were of most importance to their families and community. With the assistance of a group facilitator, each small group discussed its chosen issues, combined similar issues, and then voted to determine its top five issues.

Following the small group sessions, participants came together in a large group setting to discuss the results of the small group sessions, combine similar and overlapping issues, and vote to determine the top issues for the county.

Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?

Small Group Discussions

The following issues were discussed in one or more of the small group sessions.

- Economic development
 - Create new industry and retain existing industry
 - Capitalize on tourism attractions
 - Develop farmers' market
- Education
 - Be aware of current services
 - Streamlining – give students an opportunity to start earlier in career tech programs such as health care services
 - Jobs and job training
 - Good paying jobs
 - Job ethics training
- Infrastructure
 - Lower speed limit through town
 - Keep roads going through Atoka, not around it
 - Roads, water, natural gas
 - Adequate water supply
 - Improve access to highway
 - Continue to access technology (DSL, fiber optics)
 - Provide education for natural resource management – oil, gas, and minerals
- Decrease crime
 - Stricter punishment for juvenile crimes
 - Stop drug trafficking
- Complete community center
 - Walking track
 - Swimming pool
 - Develop youth and adult recreation centers
- Open communication between state and local agencies
 - Pull together for the same goals
- Health care
 - Expanded or new choices for funding of new hospital

Small Group Discussions

- Put a cap on cost of prescription drugs
- Need for nursing home care
- Eliminate food tax
- Education
 - More parental involvement
 - More community involvement
 - Positive curriculum in schools
- Replace the “good old boy” system
- Environment
 - Soil erosion caused by logging
 - Insect control
- Need for recreational activities/facilities
- Economic development
 - New industry
 - More jobs for young people
 - Other funding ideas for youth to raise money
 - Affordable, decent housing
 - Better laws to protect landlords
- Create business opportunities and create jobs
 - Attract industry to create more jobs
 - Develop jobs in rural communities that pay more than minimum wage (not just labor jobs)
 - Improve growth in city and county
 - Work force training
 - Work together to attract businesses downtown, not just on Highways 69/75
- Educate the public about abuse (for example, child abuse)
 - Empower the victims
 - Educate about substance abuse and effects on families
 - Establish or improve resources for families (preventive counseling)
- Develop local entertainment
 - Keep youth in town rather than on the highway going to another town

Small Group Discussions

- Establish more activities for children and youth
- Build an indoor pool to teach children to swim and to provide physical therapy for anyone
- Increase funding to schools to keep teachers from having to buy their own supplies
- Provide support services for elderly who are still in their homes
 - Reopen nursing home with proper management and care
- Education
 - Develop funding
 - Parenting education
 - Improve teacher pay to keep teachers in the community
 - Adult literacy
 - Drug education
- Economic development
 - Tourism
 - Industrial development
 - More small businesses
 - Business diversity
- Support existing businesses
 - Small business mentoring
 - Better information for people running small farms
- Health care
 - Better health care facilities
 - Nursing homes
 - Support for children
- Develop community
 - Preservation of historic buildings
 - Social facilities
 - Rejuvenate Lake Atoka
 - Local shopping
 - Public transportation to serve local areas

Large Group Discussion

The large group addressed the ideas that were generated during the small group discussions. Those ideas were then used as the basis for defining the five issues of most importance to Atoka County.

➤ **Education**

- Being aware of current services
- Streamlining – give students an opportunity to start earlier in career tech programs such as health care services
- Jobs and job training
- Good paying jobs
- Job ethics training
- Teacher retention and pay increase
- Community/parental involvement
- Adult literacy
- Positive curriculum (basics)
- Increase funding to schools for teaching supplies

➤ **Develop community**

- Preserve historic buildings
- Social facilities
- Rejuvenate Lake Atoka
- Local shopping
- Public transportation to serve local areas
- Infrastructure
- Lower speed limit through town
- Keep roads going through Atoka, not around it
- Roads, water, natural gas
- Adequate water supply
- Improve access to highway
- Continue to access technology (DSL, fiber optics),
- Provide education for natural resource management – oil, gas, and minerals
- Need for recreational activities/facilities
- Complete community center, walking track, swimming pool
- Youth and adult recreation center

Large Group Discussion

- **Health care**
 - Expanded or new choices for funding of new hospital
 - Put a cap on cost of prescription drugs
 - Nursing home care
 - Medical support for children
 - In-home care for elderly
- **Economic development**
 - New industry – more jobs for young people
 - Other funding ideas for youth to raise money
 - Affordable, decent housing
 - Better laws to protect landlords
 - Better information for people running small farms
 - Tourism
 - Farmers' market
 - Business diversity
 - Retention of small business
- **Educate the public about abuse (for example, child abuse)**
 - Empower the victims
 - Educate about substance abuse and effects on families
 - Establish or improve resources for families (preventive counseling)
 - Drug education

In the months following the Listening Session, Atoka County Extension Educators will invite community leaders and representatives from organizations and agencies to a *Focus Forum* to consider what the people are saying and further define priority needs in Atoka County. As Extension begins its long-range strategic planning process, the involvement of citizens in identifying needs and opportunities in the county and community will be extremely valuable. Through the upcoming *Focus Forums*, education and service providers will learn more about community concerns while forging new partnerships with other groups to address identified issues.

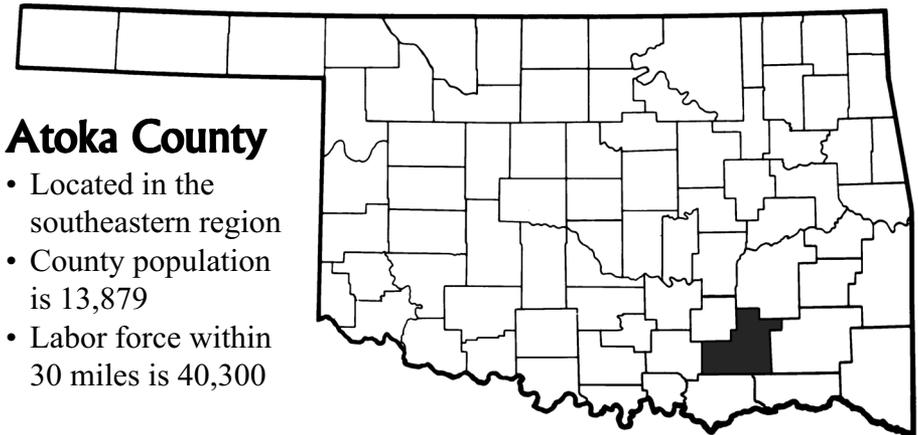
Facts About Atoka County

The intent of these data is to provide local perspective and context for discussion. Local circumstances can change the demographic and economic data; the following is the most up-to-date information that is currently available.¹

◆ History

Settled in the mid-1800s, Atoka County was first called Shappaway, with the county seat located at the Choctaw Court on the banks of the Muddy Boggy River. The name was later changed to Atoka in honor of Captain Atoka, a noted Choctaw who led a band of his people to this area during the removal.

Atoka, the county seat, was a stop on the Butterfield Overland Stage Road, a route which developed when mail service began between Missouri and San Francisco in 1857. Boggy Depot, located in the western part of the county, served as an important trading post during early years and is now historic Boggy Depot State Park.



¹ County statistics revised May, 2000, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management

Facts About Atoka County

The county claims many firsts, including Oklahoma's first Masonic Lodge, first chapter of Eastern Star, and first Catholic Church in Indian Territory. Also, country music entertainer Reba McEntire is from Atoka County.

◆ Industry

Atoka County is well-known for its hunting and fishing. Half of its area is forested and contains several mountain streams and man-made lakes. It is the site of Oklahoma's largest rock quarry, which is located at Stringtown.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Atoka County had 1,087 farms (averaging 387 acres). Average gate receipts were \$18,808 in 1997, and the county had five farms with gate receipts in excess of \$500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (92 percent) and crops (8 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts in 1997 increased 4 percent, from \$18,050 to \$18,808; the average farm size increased 1 percent.

◆ Profile

Atoka County is located in southeastern Oklahoma. The county is comprised of 990 square miles, of which half is forested; the county contains several mountain streams and man-made lakes. The average annual rainfall is 45.8 inches. Average temperatures range from 42.4 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 80.6 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 Census, the county seat of Atoka had a population of 2,988. The city is located 129 miles southeast of Oklahoma City and 140 miles south of Tulsa.

Facts About Atoka County

◆ County Population - 2000

	<i>2000</i>	<i>Percent</i>
County population	13,879	100
Male population	7,506	54.1
Female population	6,373	45.9
Under 5 years	817	5.9
5 to 9 years	893	6.4
10 to 14 years	956	6.9
15 to 19 years	943	6.8
20 to 24 years	806	5.8
25 to 34 years	1,817	13.1
35 to 44 years	2,218	16.0
45 to 54 years	1,915	13.8
55 to 59 years	779	5.6
60 to 64 years	685	4.9
65 to 74 years	1,089	7.8
75 to 84 years	703	5.1
85 years and over	258	1.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000

◆ Population Characteristics

The population density of the county is 13.1 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 38.3 years.

◆ Households

Atoka County had 4,964 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are presented in tabular form on the final page of this report.

◆ Poverty

Poverty in Atoka County decreased for individuals by 33 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 3,622 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 2,426 by the year

Facts About Atoka County

2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 40.5 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 634 such families, but in 2000 the number had declined to 377 families. Poverty-level households headed by women having no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 231 in 1990. By 2000 such households declined to 158, a decrease of 31.6 percent.

◆ Labor Force

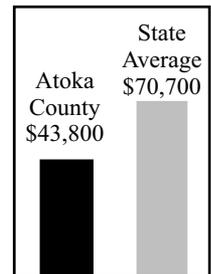
The Atoka County labor force was 4,888 in 2000, with 53.9 percent of males and 44.7 percent of females employed. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 2.8 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was \$15,169.

◆ Tourism and Points of Interest

The major waterways in Atoka County are the Muddy Boggy and Clear Boggy rivers. Boggy Depot State Park and McGee Creek State Park provide opportunities for fishing, boating, and hiking. The Confederate Memorial Museum, at Atoka, is the site of the state's only Confederate cemetery.

◆ Housing

The county has 5,673 housing units, and 87.5 percent of these are occupied by owners. Statewide, 68.4 percent of housing units are occupied by owners. The median owner-occupied home value in the county is \$43,800. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is \$70,700. The median housing rental contract is \$327 per month in Atoka County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is \$456 per month.



Owner-occupied home value

Facts About Atoka County

◆ Tax Structure

The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Atoka County is 74.85 mills. It generated \$2,980,630 in 2001-2002. Also, Atoka County received \$2,119,872 from the state for the county's proceeds from the gas, diesel, and special fuel tax, as well as from the gross production tax and motor vehicle collections.

Atoka County collects sales tax at three levels: state, county, and local. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent; the county rate is 1.0 percent, generating \$654,708 in 2000-2001. The local sales tax rate varies from city to city, as shown below.

City	Sales Tax Rate (%)	Revenue (\$)
Atoka	2.50	1,312,664
Caney	2.00	14,873
Stringtown	3.00	70,252
Tushka	2.00	15,717

Source: OTC State Payments to Local Governments FY2000-2001 and "Oklahoma Ad Valorem Mill Levies, Fiscal Year 2002," by Notie H. Lansford, Jr., and Dondee Payne, Department of Agricultural Economics, July 2002, AE 02136

◆ Education

There are 69.4 percent of Atoka County residents over 25 years of age who are high school graduates, compared to 74.6 percent statewide. College graduates 25 years and older number 10.1 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.

Facts About Atoka County

◆ Primary Employers in the Area

Major Employers	Products/ Services	Number Employed	City/ Town
Mack Alford Correction Center	correctional facility	225	Stringtown
Ethan Allen, Inc.	furniture	215	Atoka
Howard McLeod Correctional Center	correctional facility	140	Atoka
Atoka I-15 School District	education services	130	Atoka
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	retail services	83	Atoka
Diamond Welding and Manufacturing	Caterpillar attachments accessories	40	Atoka
Kenco Manufacturing Company	heavy equipment attachments	30	Atoka
Amis Materials Company	asphalt, crushed stone	20	Stringtown
Atoka Trailer Manufacturing	heavy equipment trailers	20	Tushka

Source: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000

Facts About Atoka County

◆ County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>
County population	12,778	13,879	8.6
Hispanic/Latino population	118	196	66.1
White population	10,365	10,528	1.6
Black or African American population	760	814	7.1
American Indian and Alaska Native population	1,587	1,578	-0.6
Asian population	11	32	190.9
Median age of all persons in the county	34.77	38.3	10.2
Labor force	4,788	4,888	2.1
Average annual unemployment rate	8.28%	2.83%	---
County per capita income	9,312	15,169	62.9
Poverty - families with related children under age 18	634	377	-40.5
Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present	231	158	-31.6
Poverty - individuals	3,622	2,426	-33.0
Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma	2,712	3,742	38.0
Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma	59.8%	69.4%	16.1
Persons over age 25 with a college degree	854	947	10.9
Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor's Degree	10.2%	10.1%	-1.0
Households - family household with own children under age 18	1,598	1,552	-2.9
Households - married couple family with own children under age 18	1,255	1,171	-6.7
Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present	268	284	6.0
County housing units	5,110	5,673	11.0
Owner-occupied housing units	3,373	3,784	12.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000

Notes

Notes

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

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**Atoka County Extension Office
P.O. Box 1080, Courthouse
Atoka, OK 74525-1080
Phone: 580-889-7337
Fax: 580-889-7338**



**Division of Agricultural Sciences
and Natural Resources
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Oklahoma State University
139 Agricultural Hall
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-6019
Phone: 405-744-5398
Fax: 405-744-5339
www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/**