Coal County
Listening Session Report

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

October 22, 2002
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.
Thirty-two (32) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Coal 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 Coal 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 Coal 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 web site 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 Coal 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?
The following five interest areas encompass the concerns, needs, and issues cited most frequently by Listening Session participants in their large group discussion:

- **Improve county/community infrastructure**
  - Sewage treatment and availability
  - Better roads
  - State highways and bridges
  - Recycling programs
  - Secure long-term, reliable source of drinking water

- **More jobs**
  - High paying jobs with benefits
  - Industry incentives and recruitment
  - Ag product market development and further processing

- **Better education**
  - Self-esteem for welfare recipients
  - School children and day-care centers including after-school programs
  - Loss of family living classes in the schools
  - Post-secondary preparation

- **Elder care**
  - Affordable health care
  - Meals on Wheels

- **Drug problem**
  - Address demand
In addition to the interest areas identified in the large group discussion, the following are issues that were also discussed in the small breakout group sessions:

- **Improve county/community infrastructure**
  - Sewage treatment and availability
  - Better roads
  - State highways and bridges
  - Recycling programs
  - Secure long-term, reliable source of drinking water
- **More jobs: immediately**
  - High paying/with benefits
  - Industry incentives and recruitment
  - Ag product market development and further processing
- **Better education**
  - Self-esteem for welfare recipients
  - School children and day-care centers including after-school programs
  - Loss of family living classes in the schools
  - Post-secondary preparation
- **Elder care**
  - Affordable health care
  - Meals on Wheels
- **Drug problem**
  - Address demand
- **Increase environmental awareness**
  - Clean watersheds
  - Improve native species management for flora and fauna
- **Create 911 system**
  - Addressing and signage
  - Improve overall safety of community
- **Improve affordable housing for owner tenants**
- **Seek grants, community improvements**
Small Group Discussions

- Make our own communities more attractive
  - Community pride
- More parent-child involvement
  - Community programs
  - Projects for youth and adults
- Expand and improve to ensure reliable source and supply
  - Quality treatable water
  - Rural water development
  - Wastewater treatment
- Rural Development
  - Public relations to improve communication
  - Expand infrastructure
  - Tourism
  - Community pride
- Affordable medical insurance
  - Self-employed
  - Small businesses
- Placement of rural resources
  - Better jobs with health benefits
  - Industrial development
- Process and marketing of ag products
- Improve educational system
  - Prepare youth for college

In the months following the Listening Session, Coal 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 Coal 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.
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. Please contact us if you see information that needs to be updated.

◆ **History**

Coal County, formerly a part of Tobucksy County, Choctaw Nation, was created at statehood and named for the primary economic product of the region.

Coal mining was once the major industry of the county, but has been dormant since 1958. Mementos of this era may be found in the Coal County Historical and Miners Museum in Coalgate.

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**Facts About Coal County**

- Located in the southeastern region
- County population is 6,031
- Labor force within 30 miles is 55,300

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1 County statistics revised May, 2000, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management
Industry
While agriculture is now considered to be the primary economic mainstay of the county, businesses such as the Mary Hurley Hospital also contribute to the economy.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Coal County had 586 farms (averaging 466 acres). Average gate receipts were $30,477 in 1997 and the county had eight farms with gate receipts in excess of $500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (96 percent) and crops (4 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts increased 23 percent, and the average farm size decreased 6 percent.

Profile
Coal County is located in southeastern Oklahoma. The county is comprised of 521 square miles of flat plains and has three river systems. 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 Coalgate had a population of 2,005 residents. The city is located 115 miles southeast of Oklahoma City.

Population Characteristics
The population density of the county is 11.2 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 38.1 years of age.
Facts About Coal County

◆ County Population - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Population</td>
<td>6,031</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Population</td>
<td>2,959</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Population</td>
<td>3,072</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 84 years</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

◆ Households
Coal County had 2,373 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are presented in tabular form on the final page of this report.

◆ Poverty
The poverty status in Coal County decreased for individuals by 12.2 percent. In 1990, there were 1,556 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 1,366 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 12.1 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, there were 214 such families, but in 2000, the number decreased to 188 families. Female households with no husband present and with her own children under 18 years of age living below the poverty
level numbered 94 in 1990. These households declined 35.1 percent to 61 by the year 2000.

◆ **Labor Force**  
The Coal County labor force was 2,349 in 2000. Participation rate in the county labor force constituted 47.44 percent of males and 40.95 percent of females. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 5.29 percent in 2000, and the per capita personal income for the county was $14,494 in 2000.

◆ **Housing**  
The county has 2,373 housing units and 75.1 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 $33,800. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is $70,700. The median housing rental contract is $287 per month in Coal County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is $456 per month.

◆ **Tax Structure**  
The county tax rate in Coal County is 1 percent and generated $175,559 in Fiscal Year 2000 – 2001. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent and local sales tax for cities in the county varies. However, the city sales tax rates and revenues for three population centers are: in Coalgate, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates $424,002; in Lehigh, a 4 percent sales tax rate generates $8,157; and in Tupelo, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates $23,340. The ad valorem average mill levy for Coal County is 84.89 mills, which generated $2,531,333 in 2001-
Facts About Coal County

2002. Also, Coal County received $1,268,245 from the state for the county’s proceeds from the gas, diesel, and special fuel tax; the gross production tax; and motor vehicle collections.


◆ Education

In Coal County, 68.6 percent of persons over 25 years of age have a high school diploma, and 12.40 percent are college graduates. Statewide, high school graduates in the same age range total 74.6 percent, and the percent of college graduates over 25 years of age is 17.8 percent.
## Facts About Coal County

### Primary Employers in the Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Employers</th>
<th>Products/Services</th>
<th>Number Employed</th>
<th>City/Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrangler</td>
<td>Men’s Jeans</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>Coalgate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurley Manor and Hospital</td>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Coalgate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalgate Public Schools</td>
<td>Education Services</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Coalgate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First National Bank</td>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Coalgate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Facts About Coal County

#### County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>5,780</td>
<td>6,031</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino population</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>230.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White population</td>
<td>4,757</td>
<td>4,534</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American population</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native population</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian population</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>850.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of all persons in the county</td>
<td>36.41</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
<td>2,481</td>
<td>2,349</td>
<td>-5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual unemployment rate</td>
<td>11.67%</td>
<td>5.29%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County per capita income</td>
<td>10,109</td>
<td>14,494</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with related children under age 18</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>-12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - individuals</td>
<td>1,556</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>-12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>1,335</td>
<td>1,467</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>60.40%</td>
<td>68.60%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a college degree</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 25 with at least a Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - family household with own children under age 18</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - married couple family with own children under age 18</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County housing units</td>
<td>2,725</td>
<td>2,744</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>1,783</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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