Cotton County
Listening Session Report

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

November 7, 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-seven (37) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Cotton 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 Cotton 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 Cotton 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 Cotton 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 issues were discussed in one or more of the small group sessions.

- **Economic development**
  - Increase number of professional jobs
  - New means of revenue to keep young people
  - Lack of industry
  - Develop small business and industry
  - Increase and broaden tax base
  - Affordable high-speed internet access
  - Compensation for taxes lost to schools and Native American land
  - Increase population
  - Keep the pressure on politicians
  - High-tech jobs
  - Establish a group or forum for political involvement on state level
  - Keep in touch with Southwestern Bell
  - Educate youth on voting and elections
  - Organize a summer program for youth over 12 years of age
  - Need restaurants, family-type eating establishments
  - Motel
  - Entertainment facilities
  - Rural water and electricity concerns
  - Funding for local roads

- **Provide quality schools using existing tax base**
  - Prevent loss of rural schools
  - Better teacher salaries
  - More money for education

- **Support local businesses**
  - Encourage merchants to understand needs of residents

- **Support law enforcement**
  - Make drug control a priority (methamphetamine)
Small Group Discussions

- Add chemical to anhydrous ammonia to prevent methamphetamine production
- Eliminate out-of-state auto tags

- Improve county infrastructure
  - Rural water concerns
  - Improve roads and bridges

- Create jobs
  - Need high-tech jobs for youth and adults

- Develop portfolio for Cotton County
  - Emphasize jobs, commerce, new businesses
  - Educate people on local history
  - Be a cheerleader for Cotton County and Oklahoma

- Promote farming in Cotton County
  - Teach farming skills to youth
  - Conservation education programs for youth and adults
  - Educate farmers on how to do more with less

- New county courthouse
  - Safety concerns
  - Improve accessibility

- Clean up community

- Drug programs/enforcement
  - Alternative sentencing in lieu of prison

- Educational programs for senior citizens
  - Adult day care
  - Senior citizens as volunteers and resource people

- Affordable health care
  - Doctors
  - Facilities
  - Ambulance service
Small Group Discussions

- Education on child abuse
- Education on values of HCE
- Pride in local community and county
- Additional ways to fund county government
- Grocery store in Temple
- More local events
- Positive activities for youth
- Increase tourism in Cotton County communities
- Health care transportation for elderly
- Cost of prescription drugs
- More government assisted housing
The following five interest areas encompass the concerns, needs, and issues cited most frequently by Listening Session participants in the large group discussion:

**Economic development**
- Increase professional jobs
- New means of revenue to keep young people in Cotton County
- Lack of industry
- Develop small business and industry
- Increase and broaden tax base
- Affordable high-speed internet access
- Compensation for taxes lost to schools and Native American land
- Increase population
- Keep pressure on politicians
- High-tech jobs
- Establish a group or forum to encourage political involvement on state level
- Keep in touch with Southwestern Bell
- Educate youth on voting and elections
- Organize a summer program for youth over 12 years of age

**Provide quality schools using existing tax base**
- Prevent loss of rural schools
- Better teacher salaries
- More money for education

**Support local businesses**
- Encourage merchants to understand needs of residents

**Support law enforcement**
- Priority drug control (methamphetamine)
- Add chemicals to anhydrous ammonia to prevent methamphetamine production
- Eliminate out-of-state auto tags
Large Group Discussion

- Improve county infrastructure
  - Rural water concerns
  - Improve roads and bridges

In the months following the Listening Session, Cotton 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 Cotton 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.¹

**History**

Cotton County is composed of land belonging at one time to Quapaws, Choctaws, and Chickasaws; the Comanche Reservation; and the Big Pasture. Part of the county was created from the southern portion of Comanche County and was formed as a result of a vote by its residents on August 22, 1912.

Walters, the county seat, is the home of the Cotton County Electric Cooperative, the largest rural electric cooperative in Oklahoma.

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1 County statistics revised May, 2000, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management
Industry
Oil and gas production began in 1917 and rose to nearly 800 producing wells by 1952, when Cotton County ranked ninth in the state in oil production.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Cotton County had 512 farms (averaging 684 acres). Average gate receipts were $71,092 in 1997, and the county had 14 farms with gate receipts in excess of $500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (70 percent) and crops (30 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts increased 27 percent, from $55,875 to $71,092; the average farm size increased 3 percent.

Profile
Cotton County is located in southwestern Oklahoma adjacent to the Texas border. The county is comprised of 642 square miles of level plains and rolling hills. The average annual rainfall is 36 inches. Average temperatures range from 41.8 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 81.1 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 Census, the county seat of Walters had a population of 2,687 residents. The city is located 113 miles southwest of Oklahoma City.

Population Characteristics
The population density of the county is 10.4 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 38.6 years.

Households
Cotton County had 2,614 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are presented in tabular form on the final page of this report.
Facts About Cotton County

◆ County Population - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>6,614</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male population</td>
<td>3,283</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female population</td>
<td>3,331</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 84 years</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

◆ Poverty

Poverty in Cotton County decreased by 14.4 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 1,363 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 1,167 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 13.7 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, there were 226 such families, but in 2000 the number declined to 195 families. Poverty-level households headed by women having no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 57 in 1990. By 2000 such households had risen sharply to 100, an increase of 75.4 percent.

◆ Labor Force

The Cotton County labor force numbered 2,132 in 2000, with 66.6 percent of males and 42.1 percent of females employed. The county
recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 4 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was $19,164.

◆ Housing
The county has 3,085 housing units, and 84.7 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 $47,200. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is $70,700. The median housing rental contract is $328 per month in Cotton County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is $456 per month.

◆ Tourism and Points of Interest
The major waterways in Cotton County are Cache Creek, Beaver Creek, and minor tributaries of the Red River. Also located in Cotton County are the Walters Museum and the newly-remodeled Walters Depot. The annual Comanche Nation Homecoming is held in Walters.

◆ Tax Structure
The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Cotton County is 78.3 mills. It generated $2,785,670 in 2001-2002. Also, Cotton County received $1,508,154 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.

Cotton County collects sales tax at three levels: state, county, and local. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent; the county rate is 1.25 percent, generating $201,449 in 2000-2001. The local sales tax rate is shown on the following page.
Facts About Cotton County

Sales Tax Rates and Revenue, 2001-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sales Tax Rate (%</th>
<th>Revenue ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>116,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walters</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>353,102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


◆ Education
There are 77 percent of Cotton 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 14 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.

◆ Primary Employers in the Area
There are no primary employers other than those businesses that constitute the normal infrastructure support of the area. The land is used for agriculture as well as for gas and oil production.
## Facts About Cotton County

### County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>6,651</td>
<td>6,614</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino population</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White population</td>
<td>5,813</td>
<td>5,602</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American population</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native population</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>-6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian population</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of all persons in the county</td>
<td>37.12</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>-25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual unemployment rate</td>
<td>11.23%</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County per capita income</td>
<td>15,176</td>
<td>19,164</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with related children under age 18</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>-13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - individuals</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>1,167</td>
<td>-14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>1,740</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a college degree</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - family household with own children under age 18</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - married couple family with own children under age 18</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>-12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County housing units</td>
<td>3,152</td>
<td>3,085</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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