



***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.***



# LeFlore County Listening Session

**T**wenty-eight (28) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the LeFlore 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 LeFlore 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 LeFlore 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 LeFlore 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?**

# Large Group Discussion

The following five interest areas encompass the concerns, needs, and issues cited most frequently by Listening Session participants in their large group discussion:

- **Improve quality of education at all levels**
  - Improve teacher quality
  - Expand school facilities
  - Examine restructuring
  - Adequate funding
  - Expand accessibility of four-year degree
- **Decrease drug usage**
  - Education (youth and adult)
  - Rehabilitation center
  - Address meth issues
- **Improved county-wide infrastructure**
  - Roads and bridges
  - Rural water system
  - Public transportation
  - Telecommunications
  - New jail, crime prevention, and proper sentencing
- **Create quality jobs**
  - Support state infrastructure for recruiting industry (water, sewer, and roads)
  - Develop sustainable criteria for recruiting industry
  - Financial help for small businesses, including attracting investors to the area
  - Safe small town environment
- **Instill pride in community and state**
  - Beautification and litter education
  - Clean up abandoned property
  - Promotion of tourism county and statewide
  - Lake Wister golf course

# Small Group Discussions

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 access to locate state and federal resources
- Associate road construction with performance bonds; road crew completion accountability
- Improve infrastructure: highways, waterways, utilities, and water systems
- Adequate educational funding: expansion of school facilities
- Add economic stability to agricultural community: improve markets
- Improve tourism awareness: develop downtown, county-wide/ state, and representation with tourism department on state level
- Improve health care programs and make more accessible: veterans
- Decrease drug problems
- Education: expand accessibility of a four-year degree, better background check for new educators
- Leadership training for individuals, elected officials, and civic leaders; regional and community networking to achieve economic development
- New jail: crime prevention and proper sentencing, improve drug prevention awareness for youth, crack down on manufacturing of drugs
- Create quality jobs: support state, infrastructure for recruiting industry (water, sewer, roads), development of sustainable criteria for recruiting industry, more financial help for small businesses, attract investors to the area

# Small Group Discussions

- Revitalize downtown; courthouse renovation
- Instill pride in community and state: beautification and litter education, clean up abandoned property, promotion of tourism county and statewide, and Lake Wister golf course
- Decrease meth usage: education, rehabilitation center
- Improved county-wide infrastructure: roads and bridges, rural water system, public transportation, telecommunications, new jail
- Improve quality of education at all levels: improve teacher quality, examine restructuring, adequate funding
- Improve rural law enforcement
- Bring more jobs to the community (safe small town environment)

In the months to follow the Listening Session, LeFlore 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 LeFlore 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 the concerns in their community and also forge new partnerships with other groups to address these concerns.

# Facts About LeFlore 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.<sup>1</sup> Please contact us if you see information that needs to be updated.

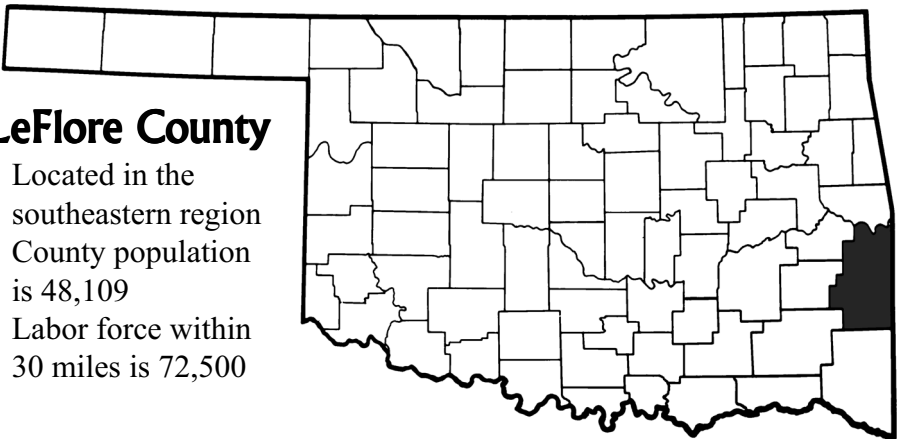
## ◆ History

Once part of the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, LeFlore County is diverse in its topography. With rugged hills, narrow valleys, and productive farmland, there is a gentle blending of modern days and old ways. Many of the towns were established as a result of railroad expansion.

Poteau, the county seat, was home to late Senator Robert S. Kerr. Tourism is an important aspect of LeFlore County. The Heavener Runestone and Spiro Mounds offer historic interest and are well known. They are also stops on the old Butterfield Trail, hailed as the first transcontinental link between East and West. The Quachita National Forest, including the Talimena Scenic Drive dominates the southern half of the county.

## LeFlore County

- Located in the southeastern region
- County population is 48,109
- Labor force within 30 miles is 72,500



<sup>1</sup> County statistics revised May, 2000, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management



# Facts About LeFlore County

## ◆ Industry

There are two hospitals, seven libraries, a two-year college, three vocational schools, five newspapers, a veteran's center, and numerous clinics in the country. Manufacturing produces such items as refrigerator parts, instrument panels, crackers, and cattle feed. Carl Albert State College offers courses to more than 2,000 full and part-time students annually.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, LeFlore County had 1,744 farms (averaging 234 acres). Average gate receipts were \$68,066 in 1997 and the county had 67 farms with gate receipts in excess of \$500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (93 percent) and crops (7 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts increased 50 percent, and the average farm size decreased by 10 percent.

## ◆ Profile

LeFlore County is located in southeastern Oklahoma adjacent to the Arkansas border. The county is comprised of 1,607 square miles of rugged hills, narrow valleys, and productive farmland. The average annual rainfall is 62.3 inches. Average temperatures range from 42.0 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 79.1 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 Census, the county seat of Poteau had a population of 7,939 residents. The city is located 135 miles southeast of Tulsa.

## ◆ Population Characteristics

The population density of the county is 27.3 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 36.1 years of age.

# Facts About LeFlore County

## ◆ County Population - 2000

	<b>2000</b>	<b>Percent</b>
County Population	48,109	100%
Male Population	23,968	48.2%
Female Population	24,141	51.8%
<i>Under 5 years</i>	3,294	6.8%
<i>5 to 9 years</i>	3,462	7.2%
<i>10 to 14 years</i>	3,572	7.4%
<i>15 to 19 years</i>	3,812	7.9%
<i>20 to 24 years</i>	3,127	6.5%
<i>25 to 34 years</i>	6,051	12.6%
<i>35 to 44 years</i>	6,945	14.4%
<i>45 to 54 years</i>	6,335	13.2%
<i>55 to 59 years</i>	2,641	5.5%
<i>60 to 64 years</i>	2,255	4.7%
<i>65 to 74 years</i>	3,516	7.3%
<i>75 to 84 years</i>	2,232	4.6%
<i>85 years and over</i>	867	1.8%

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

## ◆ Households

LeFlore County had 17,861 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are presented in tabular form on the final page of this report.

## ◆ Poverty

The poverty status in LeFlore County decreased for individuals by 6.3 percent. In 1990, there were 9,448 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 8,857 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 5.9 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, there were 1,572 such families, but in 2000, the number decreased to 1,480 families. Female households with no husband present and with her own children under 18 years of age living below

# Facts About LeFlore County

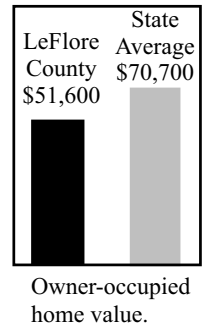
the poverty level numbered 700 in 1990. These households declined 9.3 percent to 635 by the year 2000.

## ◆ Labor Force

The LeFlore County labor force was 18,891 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 4.43 percent in 2000, and the per capita personal income for the county was \$17,534 in 2000.

## ◆ Housing

The county has 17,861 housing units, and 75.2 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 \$51,600. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is \$70,700. The median housing rental contract is \$372 per month in LeFlore county. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is \$456 per month.



## ◆ Tax Structure

The county tax rate in LeFlore County is 0.50 percent and generated \$1,204,962 in Fiscal Year 2000 – 2001. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent, and local sales tax for cities in the county varies. City sales tax rates and revenues for 14 population centers are: in Arkoma, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$87,017; in Bokoshe, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$53,241; in Fanshawe, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$5,824; in Heavener, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$596,980; in Howe, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$40,761; in LeFlore, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$90,162; in

# Facts About LeFlore County

Panama, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$169,799; in Pocola, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$420,863; in Poteau, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$4,034,372; in Shady Point, a 3.5 percent sales tax rate generates \$84,938; in Shamrock, a 4 percent sales tax rate generates \$5,401; in Spiro, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$436,270; in Talihina, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$333,194; and in Wister, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$11,695. The ad valorem average mill levy for LeFlore County is 81.63 mills, which generated \$13,208,224 in 2001-2002. Also, LeFlore County received \$4,187,115 from the state for the county's proceeds from the gas, diesel, and special fuel tax; the gross production tax; and motor vehicle collections.

*Source: OTC State Payments to Local Governments FY 2000-2001 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

The county is home to Carl Albert Junior College. In LeFlore County, 70.4 percent of persons over 25 years of age have a high school diploma, and 11.3 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 LeFlore County

## ◆ Primary Employers in the Area

Major Employers	Products/ Services	Number Employed	City/ Town
Wortz Company	Cookies & Crackers	424	Poteau
OK Industries	Kill Plant	287	Poteau
OK Foods-Heavener	Processed Chicken	272	Heavener
OK Foods	Deboning	257	Heavener
Talihina Indian Hospital	Health Services	214	Talihina
Talihina Veteran's Center	Health Services	213	Talihina
Encor, Arundale Inc.	Plastic Molding	200	Poteau
Sierra Corp.	Sporting Goods	156	Poteau
Spiro Public Schools	Education Services	143	Spiro
AES-Poteau	Cogeneration	103	Poteau
Superior Home Health	Health Service	100	Talihina
Johnson Controls, Inc.	Control Panels	110	Poteau
Kansas City Southern	Railroad	105	Heavener
Caughern Construction	Construction	100	Heavener
Kenco Products	Plastic Molding	95	Poteau
Talihina Public Schools	Education Services	89	Talihina
Marvin's IGA	Retail Grocery	62	Spiro
Spiro Nursing Home	Health Services	60	Spiro
OK Farms	Poultry Hatchery	50	Heavener
First American Home Health	Health Service	37	Talihina
Medical Home Health	Health Service	31	Talihina
U.S. Forest Service	Forest Service	30	Talihina
Davis Poultry Loading	Catching Services	25	Poteau
OK Farms, Inc.	Hatchery	25	Poteau

# Facts About LeFlore County

## ◆ County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>
County population	43,270	48,109	11.2%
Hispanic/Latino population	419	1,849	341.3%
White population	36,907	38,657	4.7%
Black or African American population	1,030	1,065	3.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native population	5,112	5,157	0.9%
Asian population	78	103	32.1%
Median age of all persons in the county	34.25	36.1	5.4%
Labor force	18,555	18,891	1.8%
Average annual unemployment rate	10.01%	4.43%	—
County per capita income	11,950	17,534	46.7%
Poverty - families with related children under age 18	1,572	1,480	-5.9%
Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present	700	635	-9.3%
Poverty - individuals	9,448	8,857	-6.3%
Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma	7,995	10,857	35.8%
Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma	61.20%	70.40%	15.0%
Persons over age 25 with a college degree	2,645	3,512	32.8%
Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor's Degree	9.60%	11.30%	17.7%
Households - family household with own children under age 18	5,856	5,968	1.9%
Households - married couple family with own children under age 18	4,696	4,493	-4.3%
Households - female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present	944	1,071	13.5%
County housing units	18,029	20,142	11.7%
Owner-occupied housing units	12,001	13,439	12.0%

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

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