

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.



Washita County Listening Session

Thirty-five (35) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Washita 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 Washita 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 Washita 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 reflect 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 Washita 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 that 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. They combined similar and overlapping issues and voted 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.

- Coordinate development efforts area-wide
 - Ethnic
 - Employment
 - Economic
- Follow through with community issues
- Coordinate school activities in the county
 - Educational efforts
 - Youth court
 - Out-of-school youth activities
- Improve government attention to western Oklahoma
 - Public services
 - Housing
 - Law enforcement
- Investigate agriculture diversification – value-added products
- Reinvent rural community and strengthen its political clout
 - How we think about the rural community
 - Structure of government
 - Economy
 - Demographics
 - Value added
 - Develop resource directory
 - Senior citizen retention
 - Health care
 - Affordable housing
 - Access to affordable health insurance
 - Reawaken the frontier spirit of self-efficiency
- Protect our natural resources
 - Safe drinking water
 - Improve solid waste/recycling management

Small Group Discussions

- Sustain and improve soil health
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Improve and maintain public schools
 - Access to technology
 - Political clout
 - Funding
 - Teacher salaries
 - Retention of quality teachers
 - Adult education
- Stop out-migration
 - Create better jobs
 - Keep young people and senior citizens in the county
 - Develop leadership programs
 - Increase farm income
- Maintain and expand infrastructure
 - Roads
 - All basic utilities
 - Communications
 - Public schools
 - Health care
 - Resource directory
- Increased activities for youth and experienced people
 - Develop a plan to coordinate all activities
 - Rotate activities to different communities
 - Take programs for senior citizens to them
- Affordable health care plans in county
 - Business
 - Personal
- Work with state legislators to minimize funding cuts
 - Increase school funding
- Good jobs that encourage young people to stay in the county
 - Recruit industries

Small Group Discussions

- Counseling to show young people opportunities after high school
- Stricter drug laws and enforcement
 - Methamphetamine labs
 - Bring back the D.A.R.E. program

Other priorities identified by Washita County Listening Session participants include:

- Improve city streets
- Address issues affecting population loss
- Address law enforcement in small communities
- Economic development to increase employment opportunities
- Address housing availability
- Address public services funding
- Lack of senior care
- Address ethnic diversity mind-set
- Follow through with community issues
- Improve efficiency of use of local resources
- Promote local entrepreneurs
- Higher pay scale and better paying jobs
- Keep young people in the community after college
- Youth community and drug awareness
- Access to financial capital
- Increase farm income
- Need for lodging
- Access to technology
- Leadership development
- Enhance survival chances of small communities
- Rotate countywide activities to different communities
- Counseling to show young people opportunities after high school
- More high tech communications in rural areas
- Develop local and county plan for spaceport
- Increase diversification in agriculture
- Develop a marketing plan to promote quality of life in county

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 Washita County.

- **Stop out-migration**
 - Create better jobs
 - Keep young people and senior citizens in the county
 - Develop leadership programs
 - Increase farm income
 - Career counseling
 - Attract industries

- **Improve government attention to western Oklahoma**
 - Public services
 - Minimize funding cuts
 - Housing
 - Law enforcement
 - Teachers' salaries
 - Public education
 - Increase school funding

- **Reinvent rural community and strengthen political clout**
 - How we think about the rural community
 - Structure of government
 - Economy
 - Demographics
 - Develop resource directory
 - Senior citizen retention and services
 - Health care
 - Affordable housing
 - Access to affordable health insurance
 - Reawaken the frontier spirit of self-efficiency

Large Group Discussion

- **County schools coordinate with each other**
 - Educational efforts
 - Youth court
 - Out-of-school youth activities
 - Adult education

- **Infrastructure — maintain and expand**
 - Roads
 - All basic utilities
 - Communications
 - Public schools
 - Health care
 - Resource directory

In the months following the Listening Session, Washita 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 to devise action plans for Washita 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.

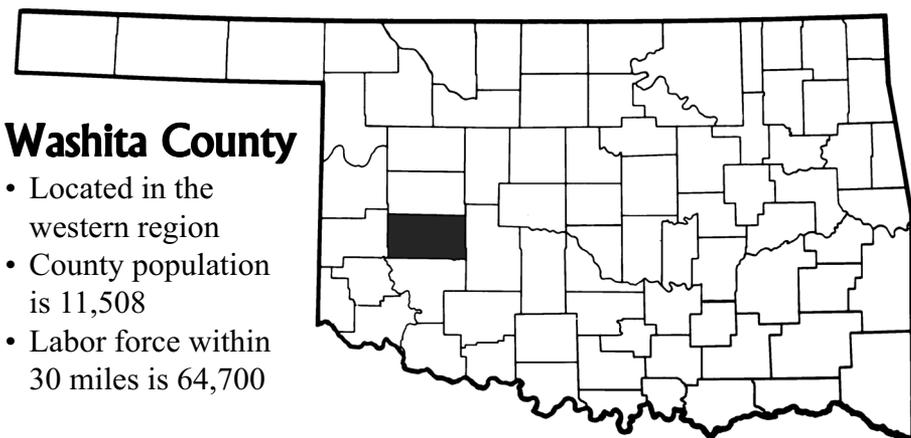
Facts About Washita County

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

Washita County was formed from part of the Cheyenne-Arapaho lands opened to settlement in the Land Run of April 19, 1892. Designated as County “H,” Washita County was named after the Washita River. The word Washita is derived from two Choctaw words meaning “big hunt.” In 1886 John M. Seger and 500 Indians left the old Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency at Darlington (near El Reno) and established a colony on the banks of Cobb Creek. This settlement was on the site of present-day Colony.

During World War II, a U.S. Naval Air Station was established at Burns Flat. Closed after the war, the base was reopened in 1959 as the Clinton-Sherman Air Force Base. Many of its squadrons flew



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

Facts About Washita County

missions over Vietnam in the 1960s before the base was closed on December 31, 1969. It has since become the Clinton-Sherman Airport and is used by planes from Altus AFB for practice takeoffs and landings.

◆ **Industry**

Washita County ranks as one of Oklahoma's leading agricultural counties. The Anadarko Basin more recently has made the county famous for oil and gas production.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Washita County had 994 farms (averaging 589 acres). Average gate receipts were \$69,161 in 1997, and the county had 21 farms with gate receipts in excess of \$500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (64 percent) and crops (36 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts in 1997 decreased slightly, from \$69,364 in 1992 to \$69,161; the average farm size increased 2 percent.

◆ **Profile**

Washita County is located in western Oklahoma. The county is comprised of 1,009 square miles of level plains and rolling hills. The average annual rainfall is 30.6 inches. Average temperatures range from 41.4 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 80.2 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 census, the county seat, Cordell, had a population of 2,867 residents. The city is located 93 miles southwest of Oklahoma City.

◆ **Households**

Washita County had 4,506 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are included in the table on the final page of this report.

Facts About Washita County

◆ Population Characteristics

The population density of the county is 11.4 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 39.2 years.

◆ County Population - 2000

	<i>2000</i>	<i>Percent</i>
County population	11,508	100
Male population	5,572	48.4
Female population	5,936	51.6
<i>Under 5 years</i>	704	6.1
<i>5 to 9 years</i>	759	6.6
<i>10 to 14 years</i>	936	8.1
<i>15 to 19 years</i>	945	8.2
<i>20 to 24 years</i>	552	4.8
<i>25 to 34 years</i>	1,180	10.3
<i>35 to 44 years</i>	1,721	15.0
<i>45 to 54 years</i>	1,418	12.3
<i>55 to 59 years</i>	606	5.3
<i>60 to 64 years</i>	527	4.6
<i>65 to 74 years</i>	1,026	8.9
<i>75 to 84 years</i>	807	7.0
<i>85 years and over</i>	327	2.8

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

◆ Poverty

Poverty in Washita County decreased by 24.3 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 2,302 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 1,743 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 2.1 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 331 such families, but by the year 2000 the number had declined to 324 families. Poverty in households headed by women having no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 91 in 1990. By 2000 such households had risen to 164, an increase of 80.2 percent.

Facts About Washita County

◆ Labor Force

The Washita County labor force numbered 4,817 in 2000, with 47.4 percent of males and 41 percent of females employed. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 2.5 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was \$15,502.

◆ Tourism and Points of Interest

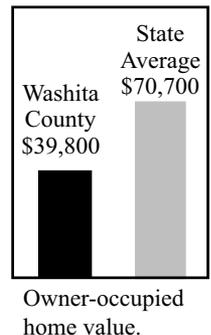
The major waterways in Washita County are the Washita River and tributaries to the North Fork of the Red River.

Points of interest include the Washita County Courthouse, designed by State Capitol architect Solomon Andrew Layton, the historic Washita Theater, Centennial Park, and the Washita County Museum.

Events in Washita County include the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Celebration on April 16 every five years, the Cordell Arts and Crafts Show in September, and the Cordell Pumpkin Festival in October.

◆ Housing

The county has 4,506 housing units, and 74.7 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 \$39,800. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is \$70,700. The median housing rental contract is \$373 per month in Washita County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is \$456 per month.



◆ Tax Structure

The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Washita County is 81.68 mills. It generated \$5,187,162 in 2001-2002. Also, Washita County received \$4,780,197 from the state for the county's proceeds

Facts About Washita County

from the gas, diesel, and special fuel tax, as well as from the gross production tax and motor vehicle collections.

Washita County collects sales tax at three levels: state, county, and local. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent; the county rate is 0.625 percent, generating \$431,095 in 2000-2001. The local sales tax rate varies from city to city, as shown below.

Sales Tax Rates and Revenue, 2001-2002

City	Sales Tax Rate (%)	Revenue (\$)
Bessie	2.00	12,236
Burns Flat	4.00	190,236
Canute	3.00	80,295
Colon	2.00	7,072
Cordell	3.00	584,287
Corn	2.00	24,708
Dill City	2.00	18,731
Foss	3.00	9,663
Rocky	3.00	20,812
Sentinel	3.00	98,345

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 the Western Technology Center. There are 79.7 percent of Washita 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 15.1 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.

Facts About Washita County

◆ Primary Employers in the Area

Major Employers	Products/ Services	Number Employed	City/ Town
Washita County	government services	95	Cordell
Cordell Public Schools	education services	90	Cordell
Cordell Christian Home*	nursing home	80	Cordell
Robertson Factories	curtains and drapes	34	Cordell

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

**Destroyed by tornado, October 9, 2001*

Facts About Washita County

◆ County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>
County population	11,441	11,508	0.6
Hispanic/Latino population	406	516	27.1
White population	10,958	10,623	-3.1
Black or African American population	20	50	150.0
American Indian and Alaska Native population	260	342	31.5
Asian population	26	30	15.4
Median age of all persons in the county	36.8	39.2	6.5
Labor force	5,149	4,817	-6.4
Average annual unemployment rate	5.76%	2.53%	----
County per capita income	13,893	15,502	11.6
Poverty - families with related children under age 18	331	324	-2.1
Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present	91	164	80.2
Poverty - individuals	2,302	1,743	-24.3
Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma	2,764	2,973	7.6
Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma	66.6%	79.7%	19.7
Persons over age 25 with a college degree	841	1,148	36.5
Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor's degree	11.0%	15.1%	37.3
Households - family household with own children under age 18	1,485	1,513	1.9
Households - married couple family with own children under age 18	1,268	1,187	-6.4
Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present	170	248	45.9
County housing units	6,101	5,452	-10.6
Owner-occupied housing units	3,384	3,366	-0.5

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

Notes

Notes

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