Harper County
Listening Session Report

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

September 18, 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.
Nineteen (19) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Harper 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 Harper 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 Harper 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/oclss/.

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 Harper County.
The Listening Session Process

Listening Session participants were divided into small groups. 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.

- More job opportunities
- Improve infrastructure
- Improve appearance of towns
- Need housing for everyone
- Tax revenues and tax burden equalization
- Leadership development
  - Identify and train community leaders
  - Develop and utilize senior citizens as resources
  - Increase general community involvement
- Economic development
  - Develop quality jobs
  - Tourism
  - Affordable quality housing
  - Improve community appearance
  - Promote transportation infrastructure
- Health care
  - Retain and improve health care facilities
  - Maintain EMS, hospital, and health department
  - Affordable health care across socioeconomic and multicultural groups
- Strengthen families
  - Availability of child-care providers
  - Reduce costs for child-care providers to establish business
  - Assistance to single parents
  - Aid for grandparents who are primary caregivers
Small Group Discussions

• Public education
  o Increase funding
  o Increase technology availability
  o Drug education
  o Break down multicultural language barriers
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 Harper County.

- **Economic development**
  - Provide housing
  - Quality jobs

- **Support for education**
  - Public schools
  - Continuing adult education

- **Community leadership development**

- **Health care development and retention**

- **Strengthen families**
  - Education
  - Services

In the months following the Listening Session, Harper 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 Harper 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
Part of the area opened in the Land Run of September 16, 1893, Harper County was named for Oscar G. Harper, clerk of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention. Buffalo, the county seat, is located 12 miles south of the Kansas line and approximately 30 miles from Texas on the old Military Trail between Fort Supply and Fort Dodge. With many of its original stone buildings still in use, Buffalo is the home of the State Highway Department’s Sixth Division Headquarters; modern schools; the Harper County Community Hospital, which has the latest cardiac care equipment; and an airport.

Facts About Harper County

Harper County
• Located in the northwestern region
• County population is 3,562
• Labor force within 30 miles is 11,200

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

The mainstay of the Harper County economy is agriculture, but the production of oil and gas also plays an important economic role. Cattle are important to the area. The Buffalo Feeders Feedyard has a capacity of 32,000 head of cattle. A modern veterinary medicine center with facilities for large animal surgery also is close at hand.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Harper County had 443 farms (averaging 1,308 acres). Average gate receipts were $225,782 in 1997, and the county had 18 farms with gate receipts in excess of $500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (91 percent) and crops (9 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts in 1997 increased 13 percent, from 200,093 to 225,782. The average farm size decreased slightly, from 1,377 acres in 1992 to 1,308 acres in 1997.

Profile

Harper County is located in northwestern Oklahoma adjacent to the Kansas border. The county is comprised of 1,040 square miles of prairie land with two main waterways, the Cimarron River and the North Canadian River. The average annual rainfall is 20.3 inches. Average temperatures range from 38.1 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 77.7 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 Census, the county seat of Buffalo had a population of 1,200 residents. The city is located 175 miles northwest of Oklahoma City.

Population Characteristics

The population density of the county is 3.9 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 43.1 years.
Facts About Harper County

◆ County Population - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>3,562</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male population</td>
<td>1,740</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female population</td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 84 years</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

◆ Households
Harper County had 1,509 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are presented in tabular form on the final page of this report.

◆ Poverty
Poverty in Harper County decreased by 16.2 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 426 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 357 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 10.4 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 67 such families, but by the year 2000 the number had declined to 60 families. Poverty in households headed by women having no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 26 in 1990. By 2000 such households had declined to 23, a decrease of 11.5 percent.
Facts About Harper County

◆ **Labor Force**
The Harper County labor force numbered 2,018 in 2000, with 77.2 percent of males and 47.1 percent of females employed. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 1.9 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was $18,011.

◆ **Housing**
The county has 1,863 housing units, and 79.2 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 $37,900. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is $70,700. The median housing rental contract is $315 per month in Harper County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is $456 per month.

◆ **Tax Structure**
The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Harper County is 68.66 mills. It generated $2,542,507 in 2001-2002. Also, Harper County received $2,631,966 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.

Harper County collects sales tax at three levels: state, county, and local. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent; the county rate is 2.0 percent, generating $589,661 in 2000-2001. The local sales tax rate varies from city to city, as shown in the following table.
Facts About Harper 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>Buffalo</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>184,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laverne</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>177,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1,851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


◆ Education
There are 82.1 percent of Harper 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 19.2 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.

◆ Primary Employers in the Area
There are no primary employers outside the normal infrastructure support of the area.
# Facts About Harper 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>4,063</td>
<td>3,562</td>
<td>-12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino population</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>179.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White population</td>
<td>3,972</td>
<td>3,415</td>
<td>-14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American population</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native population</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian population</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of all persons in the county</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
<td>2,029</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual unemployment rate</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County per capita income</td>
<td>18,732</td>
<td>18,011</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with related children under age 18</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - individuals</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>-16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>-17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a college degree</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - family household with own children under age 18</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>-16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - married couple family with own children under age 18</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>-22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County housing units</td>
<td>2,077</td>
<td>1,863</td>
<td>-10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,195</td>
<td>-8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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