Jackson County
Listening Session Report

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

November 15, 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.
Forty-six (46) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Jackson 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 Jackson 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 Jackson 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 Jackson 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.

- Address rural community deterioration
  - Population
  - Facilities
- Funding for school facilities
  - Public education
- Healthy lifestyle education
  - Health issues
  - Parenting
- Coordinate and promote relations between the community and Altus Air Force Base
- Need for community volunteers
  - Schools
  - Hospitals
  - RSVP
- Look to agriculture for non-traditional jobs and diversity
  - Truck farming
- Attract and create jobs to retain youth and adults in area
- Develop a business-friendly economy
  - Tax code
  - Workers compensation
  - Economic development
- Increase quality of life
  - Restaurants
  - Recreation
- Stop migration from rural areas
- Develop and enforce county and city codes (building codes); increase beautification
Small Group Discussions

• Create an environment of economic opportunity
  o Address need for growing a diverse economy
  o Insure stability of existing local industry
  o Jobs competitive with those in other states
  o Stabilize and improve economy
  o Reinforce educational efforts by recruiting industry in local communities for young people
  o Small, locally owned manufacturing business

• Reinforce community’s commitment to Altus Air Force Base and prepare a plan for loss or downsizing of base

• Create effective family programs to address child/adult issues
  o Encourage married couples to stay together
  o Parenting

• Build and support a strong educational system that includes all educational agencies to ensure literacy and life-long learning

• Create an investment pool for economic development

• Create a positive working attitude between city and county government
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 Jackson County.

- **Create an environment of economic opportunity**
  - Address the need for a growing and diverse economy
  - Insure stability of existing local industry
  - Jobs competitive with those in other states
  - Stabilize and improve economy
  - Reinforce educational efforts by recruiting industry in local communities for young people
  - Small, locally owned manufacturing business

- **Develop a business-friendly economy**
  - Tax code
  - Workers compensation
  - Economic development

- **Create effective family programs to address child/adult issues**
  - Encourage married couples to stay together
  - Parenting

- **Public education**
  - Funding for school facilities

- **Address rural community deterioration**
  - Population
  - Facilities

In the months following the Listening Session, Jackson 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 Jackson 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**

Jackson County was part of old Greer County, which was claimed by Texas. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled that Greer County was part of Indian Territory, and when Oklahoma became a state in 1907, Jackson County was formed. The county was named for Confederate general Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. Altus, the county seat, lies in the heart of irrigation country.

**Industry**

Altus Air Force Base is the largest industry in the county. The agricultural industry is also an important component to Jackson County’s economy. Primary crops are cotton, wheat, and grain sorghum. Cattle and greyhounds are bred and raised in this area.

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¹ County statistics from Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000
According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Jackson County had 723 farms (averaging 659 acres). Average gate receipts were $95,000 in 1997, and the county had 38 farms with gate receipts in excess of $500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (39 percent) and crops (61 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts in 1997 increased 20 percent, from $79,014 in 1992 to $95,000 in 1997; the average farm size decreased 11 percent.

◆ **Profile**
Jackson County borders the Texas state line in southwestern Oklahoma. The county is comprised of 804 square miles of rolling hills and plains. 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, Altus, had a population of 21,447 residents. The city is located 149 miles southwest of Oklahoma City.

◆ **Households**
Jackson County had 10,590 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are included in the table on the final page of this report.

◆ **Population Characteristics**
The population density of the county is 35.8 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 33 years.

◆ **Poverty**
Poverty in Jackson County decreased by 11.7 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 5,074 individuals living below the
poverty level. This number decreased to 4,478 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 4.5 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 905 such families, but by the year 2000 the number had declined to 864 families. Poverty in households headed by women having no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 499 in 1990. By the year 2000 such households had declined to 424, a decrease of 15 percent.

◆ **Labor Force**

The Jackson County labor force numbered 13,169 in 2000, with 76.2 percent of males and 52.5 percent of females employed. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 2.6 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was $21,180.
Facts About Jackson County

◆ Tourism and Points of Interest
The major waterways in Jackson County are the North Fork, Salt Fork, and Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. Local historical societies include Jackson County Historical Society and Western Trails Historical Society.

The Museum of the Western prairie shows life in early southwest Oklahoma. Other history and genealogical collections are preserved at the Altus Public Library, headquarters of the Southern Prairie Library System. The Shortgrass Arts and Humanities Council sponsors numerous cultural activities, including an annual arts festival in the fall. Annual events include the Great Plains Stampede Rodeo during the first weekend after Labor Day, the Hot Rod Car Show in April, and the Boll Weevil Festival in July/August. Recreational opportunities are available north of Altus at Quartz Mountain State Park, which includes Lake Altus.

◆ Housing
The county has 12,377 housing units, and 85.6 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 $59,600. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is $70,700. The median housing rental contract is $429 per month in Jackson County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is $456 per month.

◆ Tax Structure
The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Jackson County is 80.65 mills. It generated $8,434,248 in 2001-2002. Also, Jackson County received $2,218,726 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.

Jackson County collects sales tax at two levels: state and local. There is no county sales tax. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent. The local sales tax rate varies from city to city, as shown below.

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>Altus</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6,154,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>60,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>47,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldorado</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>20,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olustee</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11,578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Education

The county is home to Western Oklahoma State College, a two-year accredited institution of higher education, and the Southwest Technology Center, both in Altus. There are 79.1 percent of Jackson 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 18.5 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.
Facts About Jackson 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>Altus Air Force Base (active duty)</td>
<td>military installation</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altus Air Force Base (civilian)</td>
<td>military installation</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altus Public Schools</td>
<td>education services</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson County Memorial Hospital</td>
<td>medical services</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar-S Foods</td>
<td>processed meats</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Altus</td>
<td>municipal services</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altus Athletic Manufacturing Company</td>
<td>leather products</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Gypsum Company</td>
<td>wallboard</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Duke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Supermarkets</td>
<td>retail grocery</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Oklahoma State College</td>
<td>education services</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Producers</td>
<td>cotton compress</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern Oklahoma Community Action</td>
<td>social services</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Altus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group, Inc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>28,764</td>
<td>28,439</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino population</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>4,446</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White population</td>
<td>23,060</td>
<td>21,654</td>
<td>-6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American population</td>
<td>2,696</td>
<td>2,285</td>
<td>-15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native population</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian population</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>-13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of all persons in the county</td>
<td>29.72</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
<td>10,810</td>
<td>12,805</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual unemployment rate</td>
<td>8.17%</td>
<td>2.73%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County per capita income</td>
<td>14,813</td>
<td>21,613</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with related children under age 18</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>-15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - individuals</td>
<td>5,074</td>
<td>4,478</td>
<td>-11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>4,644</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a college degree</td>
<td>2,786</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - family household with own children under age 18</td>
<td>4,277</td>
<td>4,031</td>
<td>-5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - married couple family with own children under age 18</td>
<td>3,385</td>
<td>2,973</td>
<td>-12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County housing units</td>
<td>12,125</td>
<td>12,377</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>6,353</td>
<td>6,374</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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