

Final Report:

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Project Review:

This project was conducted following the findings from the resilience research and snapshot completed in fall 2022. In addition to this contract, Texas Center for Local Food was also funded through the Local Food Promotion Program to create an action plan, which began to pull together partners on food systems goals related to resilience. However, over the year, we have not had as much momentum on the initial priority of creating a resilience coalition, but rather, the Bastrop County local food action team has been successful in meeting and determining next steps relating to a vibrant county-wide food system, which included resilience components.

In addition to the coalition, Texas Center for Local Food also held a Local Food Leader training and a three-hour session for scenario-planning for response during disasters to create a directory for farm, food business, and responders. Scenario plan activities included two disasters: winter storm and pandemic. For each scenario, groups created plans together in response for Bastrop County, farmers market, and farm. Scenario planning and Local Food Leader training occurred simultaneous June 6-8, 2023. Notes from the scenario planning are detailed in the appendix.

Findings regarding resilience and food system development in Bastrop County .

1. **During periods of disaster response, increase messaging to encourage receptiveness to a resilience coalition among farmers.** Interest in resilience among Bastrop County and Elgin area farmers is focused primarily on disaster response and less so on other aspects of resilience including climate change, supply chain weakness, and even disaster preparedness. As shown in the scenarios in the Appendix, there is deep knowledge about what is needed. There seems to be a lack of clarity on how to meet these needs. The notion of a coalition was met with a tepid response and not illegitimate fact that, “no farmer has time”. However, during disaster responses such as the Bastrop County Complex Fire and the multiple freezes, farmers have sought relief outside the farming community. During and immediately following a disaster, awareness is heightened; during these times seeking opportunities to engage the greater community may be a path for farmers to engage more with each other.
 2. **Develop a communication mechanism connection to the Bastrop Office of Emergency Management (Bastrop OEM).** At a minimum, it seems Bastrop OEM could create a communication mechanism for farmers to get emergency support. As shown in the research completed by Iowa State University on Bastrop County Resilience, farmers during the Bastrop County Complex Fire were on their own to evacuate animals and many local ranchers with trailers stepped up to help. A more coordinated communication mechanism would help ensure that more farmers and ranchers would know where to get help with farm-specific needs such as evacuating animals. A Bastrop OEM staff person participated in the scenario development work and expressed some interest in supporting stronger relationships with the farming community. No specific actions or support were offered, which is perhaps understandable because the primary mission of OEM is to preserve life and property. Of course, food access is a part of OEM’s work and local farms are not perceived as (and in fact, in an emergency, may not be) a source of food. Development of stronger support from the Bastrop OEM will likely need to come from Bastrop OEM leadership.
 3. **Develop a farm disaster response network coordinated by a paid part-time person. The network would include farmers, ranchers, and consumers.** There was definite interest among farmers for a coalition, network, or some kind of mechanism to focus on local food system resilience including prevention, response, and recovery. There was a distinctly tepid response to forming a coalition that meets regularly and is structured to include roles during a recovery. Farmers agreed that it would be worthwhile, as an exploratory action, for the Texas Center for Local Food to hire a paid part-time person to coordinate disaster response and recovery and that successful responses over time could evolve into a working coalition or network. The network might include trained consumer harvesters that can be called upon in the days prior to a known disaster such as a freeze or windstorm. These “emergency harvester” teams could be trained in advance by specific farms and then be on call to support fast harvest to save crops.
 4. **Create an easily accessible directory of farm disaster response resources.** There is no single point of contact for farmers and ranchers to turn to for resilience or disaster related information. The Texas Local Food Directory is a project of the Bastrop Regional Food Systems Partnership and could be expanded, with additional funding, to include resilience related resources for Bastrop County.
 5. **Expand resilience work in Bastrop County to include farmer mental health, advance planning for disasters, and long-term climate change adaptations.** There is no single place for farmers to find mental health resources and yet farmers agree this would be helpful. The largest organic farm in central
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Texas went abruptly out of business during this project leaving hundreds of consumers, restaurants, and grocers in Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas without their orders and workers without paychecks, and no one answering the business phone or email. Although no reason for the sudden closure has been shared publicly, it's clear that this experience was traumatic for many in our local food system. Many have speculated that accessible mental health resources might have mitigated the trauma. Because farmers have so little available time, as noted in #3 above, perhaps a resilience or value chain coordinator could provide support for mental health and coordinate long-term resiliency work.

6. **Engage consumers in central Texas about the benefits of a more resilient and robust local food supply chain.** Increase the market size for locally grown food. According to the City of Austin, less than 1% of the food consumed in the Austin area is grown nearby. In practice, this means that when local food is not available, whether due to a disaster or simply a lack of farmers, only a few people really notice. Local food systems are just not on the radar of most consumers. As with most Americans, people in central Texas, believe they will always have enough food. The awakened awareness of local food sources seen during the COVID pandemic has faded and the perceived potential for food scarcity has diminished. To create more and better markets in central Texas, a central Texas media campaign educating consumers about where and why to buy local food would support increasing the number of consumers who contribute personally to our local food economy.
 7. **Continue development and implement the Bastrop County Local Food Action Plan.** The farmers and community leaders engaged in the Local Food Action Plan Lead team have demonstrated their commitment to developing more and better markets and a more resilient food system in and around Bastrop County. This group of farmers, social workers, food access leaders, and civic leaders has met consistently since fall of 2022 and can serve as the foundation for a solid collaborative or coalition that can support food system resilience over the long-term. The strategy of the Local Food Action Plan to amplify existing local food projects, rather than create new projects will be a self-perpetuating way to engage the broader community with farmers to create a local food supply chain that is more robust.
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Texas Resilient Food Systems: Scenario Planning

June 6, 2023

Scenario #1: Winter Storm

Farmer's Market

*Needs longer-term planning

Vendors	Structure	Staff
Communication, connection to one another	Leverage indoor space (*Coordinate who has extra storage at their farm that could help)	Need volunteers (*Farmer's markets need community volunteers to assist market vendors)
\$ resources/support	Generator for cold storage (*ACC Ag Sciences has cold storage)	*Texas Farmer's Market mailing list to notify about disaster

DECISION POINT 1: sub-zero temps warning, emergency starts in two weeks

- Changing venues, hours, cancelling, contingency plans (to farmers, staff, customers/public)
- Disaster preparedness info share (ex. Bastrop Co. office of emergency prep), do you need to cover, harvest, etc. (winterize/weatherize)
- Have fuel for generator, make sure it works
- Salt for sidewalks
- Prepare farmer's market infrastructure (wrap pipes, etc.)
- *Decide: do we have staffing, resources to act as a warming center?
- ID closest person to venue to check facility during freeze
- Utilize space for a food distribution location

DECISION POINT 2: pipes will be frozen, emergency starts in two days

- Assumption: road will be icy
- Communicate about cancellations, logistics during disasters (info: don't panic, links to monitor weather/situation, check on neighbors)
- Continue fundraising and preparing for post-storm recovery networks, resources (i.e. farm bureau, FEMA)
- Monitor situation closely and reshare official resources and info
- Reach out to local restaurant to purchase products available

DECISION POINT 3: pipes are frozen, no power, emergency has begun

- Call people to check in on them (post-storm recovery prep through Eglin Farmer's Market manager)
- Continue monitoring and communicating updates
- Check on facility (pipes, generator)
- Identify places and people available to cook food

Community (City of Elgin)

*Needs longer-term planning

People	Structures	Food/Water/Other Resources	Business
Elgin community (migrant worker focus)	Elgin Community Center	Local restaurants	Insurance companies
Micro-communities	ISD	Elgin Community Cupboard	HEB/Walmart
City of Elgin/Bastrop Co. Emergency Management	Community college	Churches	Hardware stores
Need more public/private partnerships	Library	Work with ISD to get food	
Improve communication	Churches	HEB/Walmart	
	Elgin Community Food Bank	Running out of heaters/generators	
	Elgin Emergency Shelter		
	Red Cross/Salvation Army		

DECISION POINT 1: sub-zero temps warning, emergency starts in two weeks

- Reach out to local utilities, police/emergency ISD to notify public of freeze (additions: social media, radio, television)
- Phone tree for who needs to be contacted next
- Announce emergency shelters
- Predetermined volunteer coordinator (pre-panning)
- *ID neighborhood point people with food, water, generators
- *Emergency responders fluent in Spanish—translation!
- Have shelter hours determined at stage of warning
- “Front load” food access (kids, seniors, people with functional needs)
- Partner with ISD on meals on wheels, CAPCOG, etc.
- Transportation plans need to happen before storm, vehicles to transport goods and people (church vans, Bastrop Area Off Road: off-road FB group that helps get people without 4-wheel drive get unstuck/transported, etc.)
- Have county distribute fire-proof bags to prepare for all emergencies
- County needs to plug into the micro-community food distribution
- *Program to assist purchasing generators and other needed resources
- Tips on how to wrap your pipes, how to drain pipes (available before decision point 1)

DECISION POINT 2: pipes will be frozen, emergency starts in two days

- Emergency shelter schedule and volunteers determined

- Multiple distribution locations (churches, HEB, coffee shops, main street businesses) for resources (no-prep food, blankets, water)
- Encourage main street business to purchase from farmers/distribute for free

DECISION POINT 3: pipes are frozen, no power, emergency has begun

- Social media updates, utility updates
- Mobilize emergency feeding programs if possible
- Designate team to support farmer/report on status of farm needs (fill gap until farmer can make \$ again)
- Supporting mental health of farmers

RECOVERY: post-storm

- Post-storm market so farmers could make money with products they may still have
- *Must have volunteers to set up/break down farmer booths (always, not just for storm)
- Farmers need more physical help at market
- Mental health support

Farm (Privately-owned family farm)

*Needs longer-term planning

Crops	Livestock	Structures	People
CSA veg	Poultry	Mobile coops	Farm crew
	Hogs	Electric fencing	Volunteers
	Livestock dogs	Water/irrigation	Family/owner
	Bees	Solar powered gates	CSA customer helpers
	Cattle	Greenhouse	
		Cold storage/walk-in storage	
		Beehives	
		Barn	
		Tractor/large equipment	
		Heat lamps/bulbs/extension cords	
		*Fruit/veg processing on-site or other facility	

DECISION POINT 1: sub-zero temps warning, two weeks out

- Plan in place ahead of emergency to order extra feed, mulch, row cover, fuel, crates
- Ensure generator is working and has fuel
- Make sure you have heat lamps and cords
- Have volunteers deliver to farm so farmer doesn't have to leave (*Communication in place with farmers so people/orgs (BCMG/LPMN pick up produce to distribute)
- *Have emergency fund for crops in place
- *Have emergency harvester training annually
- *Access to ATVs and other safe transportation with traction to access feeding troughs

- Gleaning in advance of storm
- Gloves for workers/woodstove warmth for workers
- Feed mill (*advanced planning—have feed pre-mixed before it closes for storm)
- Don't lock padlocks
- Communicate with customers, volunteers, staff on how to prepare for storm
- Plan for paying farm crew if/when production stops
- Plumbers/electricians to help with mechanic repairs
- Hay, warm bedding available
- Plastic to shield wind

DECISION POINT 2: pipes will be frozen, emergency starts in two days

- Covering/irrigating crops
- Extra feed/hay/heat for livestock
- Groceries for farmer
- Gleaning/harvesting/storing for future sales/value-add (done by helpers, not farmer)
- Wrapping up pipes/pop-ups
- Need immediate payment for food/product
- Access to ATV to feed livestock
- Evacuation plan for large livestock

DECISION POINT 3: pipes are frozen, no power, emergency has begun

- Anxiety/waiting
- Make fire, food
- Care for animals/equipment
- Prep for recovery
- Need organization to promote/seek help with status of farm
- Need help filing claim/accessing damage

Scenario #2: Pandemic

Farmer's Market

*Needs longer-term planning

Vendors	Structure	Staff
	Indoor/outdoor space management	

DECISION POINT 1: illness has been announced

- Policies for indoor and outdoor spaces
- Safety compliance PPE (masks, sanitizer) available
- Reconstruct market layout
- Design safe distancing markers
- Monitor access to storage

- Work with vendors to get credit card technology
- Work with public health officials for guidelines
- Advocate for policy change
- High risk accommodations for staff
- Plan pickup and delivery
- Get critical infrastructure designation
- Improve air flow

DECISION POINT 2: cases of illness have arrived in the community

- Outdoor only market
- Community communication discouraging panic buying—set limits
- Implement food pickup and delivery plan
- Security to enforce safety guidelines and zero tolerance for those who do not wish to comply with guidelines

DECISION POINT 3: shelter in place, civil unrest

- Set up hotline or call center for orders (direct vendor/customer)
- Close building to the public
- Be a designated spot for vendors
- Apply for disaster/emergency money

Community (City of Elgin)

*Needs longer-term planning

People	Structures	Food/Water/Other Resources	Business
ISDs	Clinics/hospitals	Grocery stores	Hardware stores
Local government	Schools	Farmer’s Market	Drugstores
Unhoused	Houses of worship	Restaurants	Doctor’s offices
Working families	Senior living facilities	Walmart	
Famers/ranchers		Outdoor parks	
Inmates			

DECISION POINT 1: illness has been announced

- Masks, gloves, cleaning supplies being gathered
- Create a road map based on lessons learned
- Buy veggie seeds and prep the gardens
- Gather shelf-stable goods
- ID and aggregate emergency food resources (connect aggregators with distribution points, volunteer orgs)
- Recruit volunteers (food, medical, etc.)
- Develop helpful, proactive messaging from reliable sources (education preparedness)
- Plan for food distribution to senior centers

DECISION POINT 2: cases of illness have arrived in the community

- Gather food and water (perishable)
- ID essential workers and prepare how to support
- Mobilize volunteers
- Start distributing PPE to volunteers and vulnerable populations
- Start mutual aid/cash support

DECISION POINT 3: shelter in place, civil unrest

- Find drivers willing to pick up from farms, grocery stores, prepared food places and distribute that food
- Set up “call a senior” or something like that to ensure mental health being checked on

Farm (Privately-owned family farm)

*Needs longer-term planning

Crops	Livestock	Structures	People
Wash and pack	Does the illness impact livestock?		Clear communication from the health department
			CDC
			Texas Dept. of Ag
			Public Health Dept.

DECISION POINT 1: illness has been announced

- Anticipate increased demand directed at farmers (too many customers)
- Train farmers on touchless delivery
- Establish guidelines to follow
- Secure farms from looters
- Safety gear for employees
- *Set up to accept SNAP
- Understand USDA relief programs (FSA farm number)
- Need veterinarians that come out to the farm
- Partner with university students to come to farms to volunteer
- Customer education (manage paranoia via community agencies)
- Stock supplies for touchless sales

DECISION POINT 2: cases of illness have arrived in the community

- Access to back-up staff
- Process and resources for if you are feeling symptoms (pay, medical treatment?)
- Phone number and locations across the county
- Phone lines with translators
- Keep people from taking crops

DECISION POINT 3: shelter in place, civil unrest

- Provide security for farmers/farms
- Implement touchless sales mechanism

