

Bastrop County, Texas Food System Resilience

Impact from COVID and severe climactic events

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The snapshot is formatted to give an in-depth analysis of findings related to impacts of the Lost Pines Fire of 2011 and additional climactic events over the last decade, as well as COVID-19, on the Bastrop County food system. The study included five focus groups (12 participants total), 17 interviews and a survey with 76 responses across Bastrop County. Participants included community advocates, city and county government, farmers and food businesses, non-profits, schools, and state organizations. Texas Center for Local Food supported the project through outreach for participation in surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Overall, community members shared a strong desire for change. This included comments around increased collaboration and improved communication among organizations and networks. Transparency and opportunity to engage was discussed by 58% of interview participants and was brought up in three of the five focus groups, as well as shared in surveys. All focus group discussions included the need for more communication and participation with groups, as well as the desire for actionable items to be identified for next steps.

A special thanks to all the farmers, businesses, organizations, staff, and individuals that met and shared their stories with us throughout the last two years. Thank you for your work and dedication to resilient food systems. We are humbled and grateful for your time.

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Bastrop County Suggested Priorities from Action Planning

Based on the snapshot, interviews, surveys and focus groups, below are priority projects suggested for Bastrop County, Texas, food system. These are broad categories that relate to the ability to prepare and sustain during disaster and build back stronger. The report shares findings from the research conducted in 2021, as well as updated priorities based on the action planning sessions in June 2022. For notes and voting information from the action planning sessions, please see Appendix F.

The priority that will be acted on through funding from the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center will be creating a food system coalition—specifically identified in priority 1 below—with the primary goal to identify roles, expectations, and a response plan for disasters. The \$10,000 will be allocated to the Texas Center for Local Food, which will then provide stipends to farmers, organizations, and businesses for participation in the coalition.

Additional support for evaluating the success of this initial project will be conducted by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Food Systems team.

In addition to priorities for resilient food systems, there is also a need to prioritize re-establishing trust and collaboration across communities and organizations. Individuals frequently mentioned lack of trust due to slow response to disasters from City Government and a lack of understanding about University Extension’s role in this area. An additional gap in Bastrop County is a department focused on Health and Human Services.

Suggested Priorities

1. Create a county-wide coalition for food system resilience, including prevention, response, and recovery
 - 1.1. Identify roles for each partner within the network, including expectations, accountability measures, and capacity
 - 1.2. Expand network and encourage additional participation (shared in sections below); this may include funding allocations for marginalized individuals, groups, and organizations
 - 1.3. Develop materials for multilingual communication, including print, web, text, and call platforms
 - 1.4. Have response teams within locale (neighborhood captains), region (City and County contacts), and external regional partners
 - 1.5. Develop a general directory of resources and available organizations for support that fall within sectors of the food system—as well as intersectional areas such as housing and shelter, emergency resources, financial support, etc., including where to turn to for certain agricultural products
 - 1.6. Encourage more participation from churches, non-profits, chambers, and city administrators through engagement in meetings and dialogue with Bastrop County Cares; coordinate a network of networks for all groups working towards resilience
2. Educate about the complexities and intersectionality of community in formal and informal settings
 - 2.1. Inform public on labeling and consider policy enforcement
 - 2.2. Determine how to best share about production practices
3. Address ability to scale production, processing, and distribution for local and regional farms
 - 3.1. Investigate community-supported business models and cooperatives that encourage community buy-in and ownership
 - 3.2. Create checklist of best practices
 - 3.3. Develop directory of trusted leaders and mentors within farming; include educational workshops and field days to learn from others

4. Build awareness campaign about local food systems
 - 4.1. Share about impacts from farms, food businesses, grocers, and consumers related to disaster and COVID
 - 4.2. Develop awareness campaign about the impact that natural disasters have had on food and farm businesses and the reason for supporting local businesses and organizations – sharing narratives and stories; economic impact indicators; etc.

5. Fund and develop farmer networks for sharing needs and tools in a peer-to-peer setting; may connect to TXFed.org with Texas Center for Local Food; an email or communication tree for farmers
 - 5.1. Develop funding mechanism to ensure that financial capital is available at the time of disaster
 - 5.2. Create professional development opportunities and classes for local food system partners
 - 5.3. Encourage inspirational peer to peer leadership and building experience among community for food systems advocacy

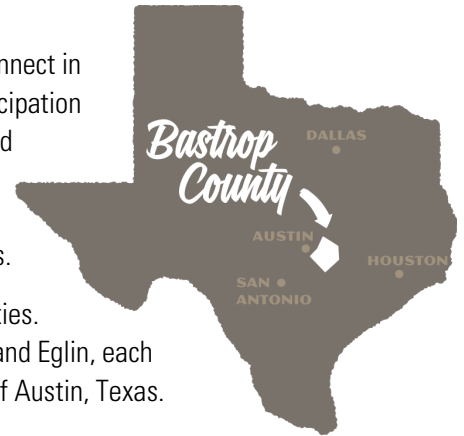
6. Establish new, or identify existing, insurance programs for small to mid-size farmers that will aid in extreme weather conditions
 - 6.1. Teach about the system – local, regional, national, and global production, processing, and distribution
 - 6.2. Detail the impacts of our supply chain on communities, farms, and food businesses

7. Write a hazard mitigation and response checklist for farms, food businesses, pantries and food banks, schools and additional organizations that impact food access; including, but not limited to, access to farms during a severe weather event, water, and power protocols (having water storage, generator access and usability, tool sharing, etc.), food access and shelter locations, etc.



Community Overview

This section reviews values and ways that community members participate and connect in community. Within the survey, questions on individual values and community participation were asked. Within interviews and focus groups, open-ended questions were asked about their community, like “how would you describe your community to someone else,” “what are the best parts about your community,” “what are the worst aspects of your community.” Responses are reflected in the following pages.



Bastrop County is adjacent to Travis, Caldwell, Fayette, Lee, and Williamson Counties. The county encompasses 888 miles and includes three cities, Smithville, Bastrop, and Eglin, each with its own unique character. Part of Elgin also falls within Travis County, home of Austin, Texas.

In 2020, Bastrop County had a population of 97,216 (United States Census Bureau, 2020); in 2021, it was estimated to be 102,058 (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

Figure 1: Bastrop County Texas (Visit Bastrop County, 2022)

- Bastrop: estimated population of 10,434 in 2021 (United States Census Bureau, 2021)
- Elgin: estimated population of 10,549 in 2021 (United States Census Bureau, 2021)
- Smithville: estimated population of 4,363 in 2019 (Data USA, 2019)

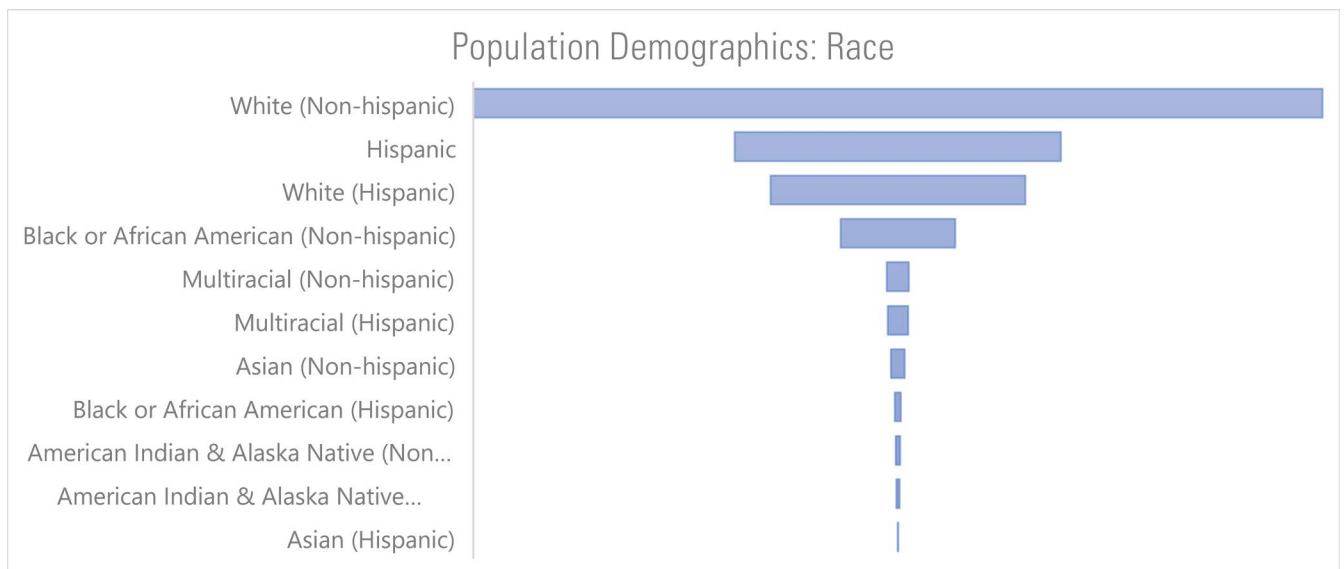


Figure 2: Population Demographics by Race (United States Census Bureau, 2021)

It is estimated that the county experiences a poverty rate of 10.8% (United States Census Bureau, 2021). More detailed data about poverty in Bastrop County can be found in Appendix B.

For information on the demographics of those that participated in the survey, see Appendix A.

Livability

Personal health status is shown to be impacted by where one lives, works, and plays. According to the AARP Livability index, [Bastrop County Texas](#) has an overall ranking of 46 (out of 100) for livability. This ranking is developed based on housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity.

Bastrop County Livability Index Overall Ranking 46

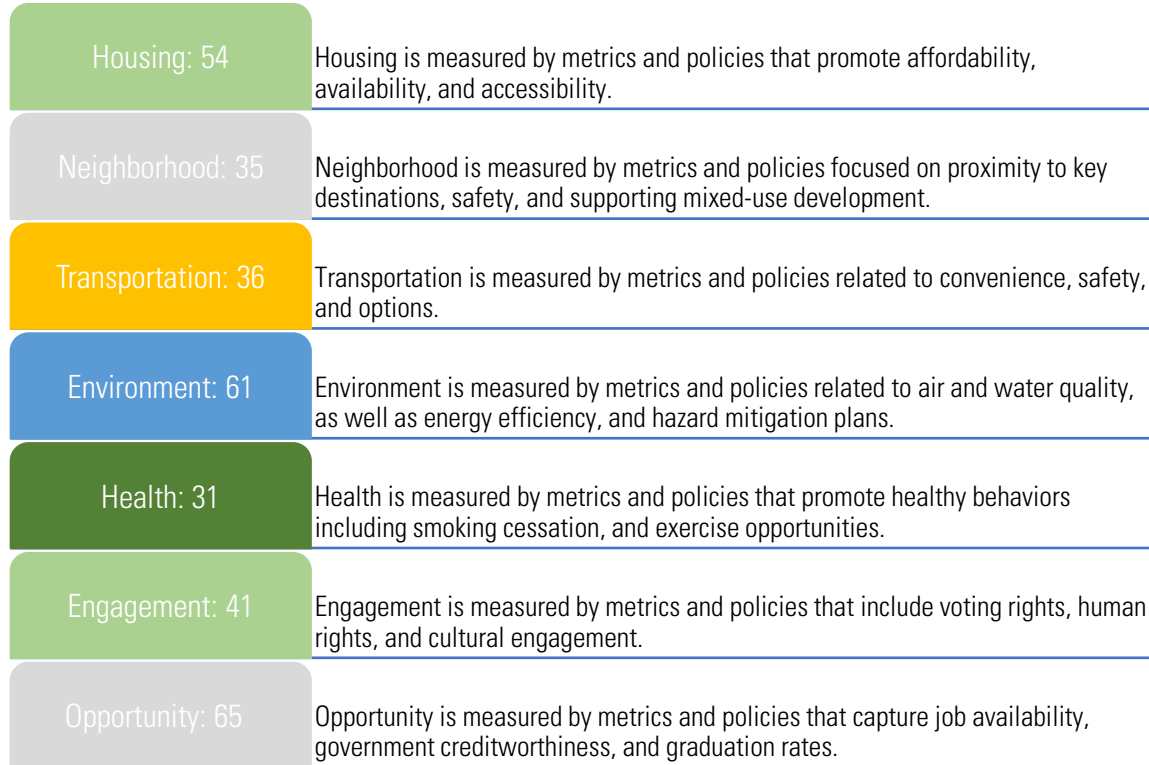


Figure 3: Livability Index Rankings; all definitions from AARP (AARP, 2022)

One of the lower rankings fell within neighborhood and access to amenities such as grocery stores and farmers markets (the county received a score of 0-0.15 on accessibility). Health also scored low, with a 24-32, with over 31% of the population having obesity, and limited access to exercise opportunities as well as a health professional shortage in the county. Bastrop County does not have a health department. Bastrop County does rank fairly high with social engagement and involvement opportunities, but overall, the engagement score is low (40-49). (AARP, 2022)

Values

Individuals were asked to select their top three societal values from a pre-created list; if they had additional values, they could add it using the "other" option. Education, Diversity and Environment rank as the highest values, with 41% agreeing that Education is a value (See Figure 4).

In addition to these values, through focus groups and surveys, community connections, small businesses and downtown vibrancy were shared as assets of the community. While diversity was a top value in the survey, this was shown as both a strength and challenge from interviews and focus groups. It is also important to note, that diversity, within the survey, did not explicitly share racial or demographic diversity, so the term could have been understood differently by participants. Diversity was seen as a strength when discussing ways of engaging with new and underserved populations; however, it was stated as a challenge as several noted that Bastrop County can still have

biases and see racial tension. One participant shared, “there is a significant amount of segregation based on race and skin color,” while another stated, “racial lines are still evident- almost everyone is white- and [we] haven’t had good success to [work with] BIPOC folks.” Urban and rural divide also was discussed as a challenge regarding diverse ways of thinking.

Social networks were seen as a great strength across Bastrop County, including areas of local foods. However, there were concerns about networks being privileged and exclusive in some areas, with many comments on having silos or work and little collaboration between the cities in Bastrop County.

The natural landscape and environment of the county was shown as a value through both survey and qualitative research. It was echoed in discussions that the natural beauty, geographic proximity to several natural landscapes and the urban metro were positive aspects to the county. Within this, there are also concerns about the fast growth of Austin, Texas, and the potential of losing the agricultural values and land due to housing development and sprawl. One participant remarked, “[I] don’t want to lose the agricultural aspects and don’t want large companies like groceries or Walmart to buy up land.” While the natural landscape and environment is the most valuable to individuals, there is also great concern on the increased land values and being pushed out; there is a desire for more intentional efforts around planning, “Texas is typically so laissez fair that things just sprawled. [We need] to be more intentional.”

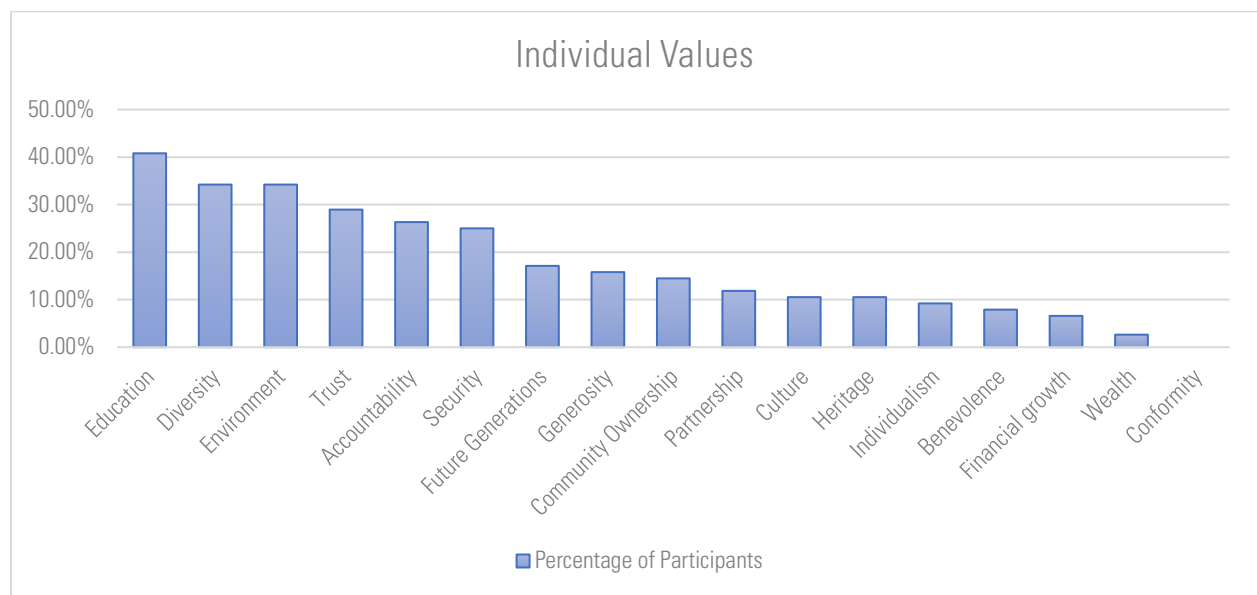


Figure 4: Participant Values (N=76)

In addition to the values shown in Figure 4, individuals also shared “less government overreach,” “animal rights,” “neighborly,” and “shared responsibility” as values.

Participation

There are many ways to participate and support the local community. Individuals were asked to share how they supported their community from a pre-created list and could also type in “other” responses. Over 93% of individuals shared that they voted in local elections and almost 90% purchase from local businesses. Participating and supporting small businesses and enjoying downtown Main Street were mentioned across each community within Bastrop County. Participation in civic engagement opportunities, including leadership roles was also shared as an indicator of interest in the County.

Like individual values, connecting and building relationships was one of the primary ways individuals are participating in their community. It was shared that, “overall, the people who want to come together and learn from each other is a greater majority, think throughout Bastrop County, [networks] are strong in terms of helping in both times of need and times of good.” Many individuals are engaged in several aspects of the community, ranging from participation in social events and activities, elected positions, as well as owning or working for a locally owned business.

The largest challenge that was shared regarding community participation was lack of leadership within the cities as well as interconnections and communication across Bastrop County.

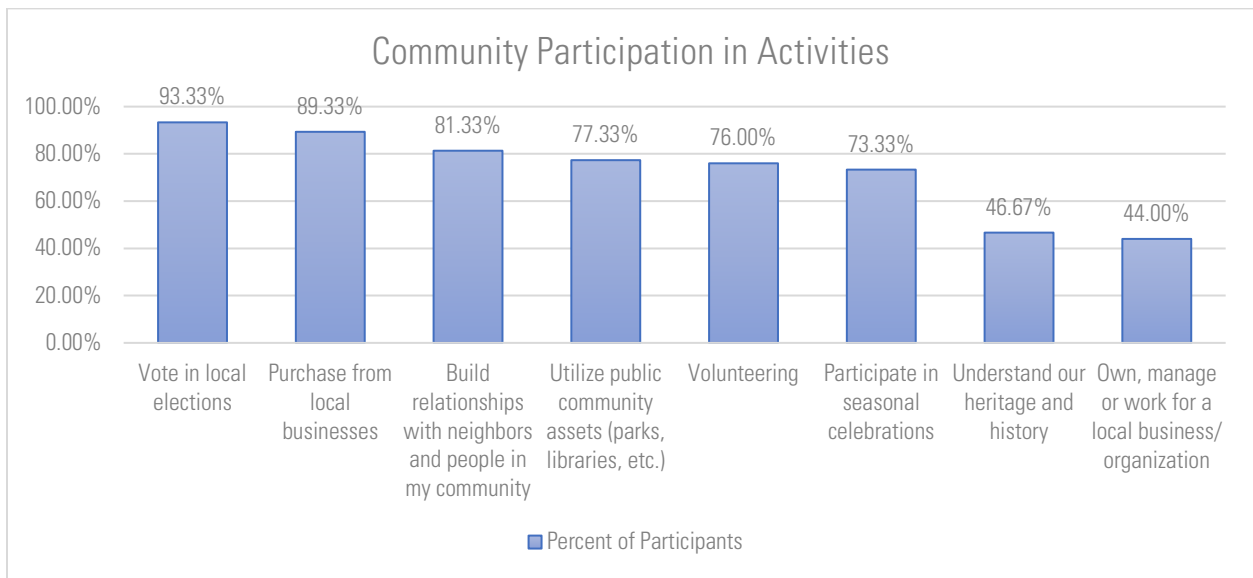


Figure 5: Community Participation (N=75)

In addition to the values shown in Figure 5, individuals also shared that they participated in “church” (3), “entertainment events,” “city board,” “promote our town to potential visitors, investors and residents,” and “donate money to local causes.”

Business and Industry

While the first section of the report took a broad look at community engagement and values, the next portion focuses on the business and industry, specifically related to food systems. Within the community, it is estimated that there are 1,494 small businesses within the county, with an annual payroll of \$529,083,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). See Appendix C for full table of businesses.

Table 1: Businesses by number of employees in Bastrop County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

# of employees	# of Bastrop County businesses
Less than 5	870
5-9	279
10-19	191
20-49	100
50-99	33
100-249	17
Total	1,494

Agriculture

There are 2,120 farms in Bastrop County and 339,689 acres of farms. 97 farms participate in variable government programs, with revenue of \$347,000. The average size of farms in the county is 160 acres with a range class of 50-179 (USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, 2017). Tables 2-4 detail information on the number of farms by product type, farm value, and average number of acres. According to the USDA NASS statistics, almost 1,900 of those farms are making less than \$24,999 per year and 992 farms are less than 50 acres in size. Of the sales by commodity (designated in gray in Table 2), primary human food consumption farms account for 1,629 of the farms, accounting for \$39,730,000 in sales. Additional farms may also engage in the local food and farm system, by providing feed and other inputs for farmers.

Table 2: Sales by Commodity (USDA NASS, 2017)

	Total # of Farms	Total Sales
Crops	442	\$13,684,000
Grain	7	
Corn	4	
Sorghum	1	
Grain, other	5	\$1,000
Vegetables (including seeds and transplants)	16	\$708,000
Fruit and Tree Nuts	69	\$3,326,000
Berry	10	\$40,000
Horticulture	11	\$6,088,000
Cut Christmas Trees and Woody Crops	5	
Field Crops, other, hay	360	\$2,793,000
Poultry, including eggs	156	
Cattle, including calves	1,211	29,286,000
Hogs	35	
Sheep and Goats	120	\$282,000
Equine	102	\$747,000
Specialty Animals	39	\$398,000

Table 3: Farms by Value (USDA NASS, 2017)

	# of Farms
Less than \$2,500	945
\$2,500 - 4,999	337
\$5,000 - \$9,999	333
\$10,000 - \$24,999	284
\$25,000 - \$49,999	109
\$50,000 - \$99,999	48
\$100,000 or more	64

Table 2: Number of Farms by Acres (USDA NASS, 2017)

Acres	# of Farms
1.0 -9.9 acres	185
10-49.9	807
50-179	710
180-499	299
500-999	75
1000 or more	44
Total # of Farms	2,120

According to the USDA, a farm is defined as “any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold during the census year” (2017, pp. Introduction, VIII). The definitions of terms used in Tables 2-4 can be found in the [2017 Census of Agriculture, Appendix B](#) (USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017)

From interviews and focus groups, participants shared that the production sector is doing well and support diverse markets ranging from direct-to-consumer spaces like CSA and farmers markets, with these markets focused on diversified products and retail sales. Others are seeking out wholesale opportunities for consistent production. One participant shared that, “agriculture has changed a lot, and now [I] understand cycles of the community around the cycles of agriculture.”

With climate changes, farmers have expressed the need for seasonal extension, both regarding protecting plants and livestock from extreme heat in the summer months as well as starting plants earlier in the winter. Beyond farmers, gardeners also expressed the impact of climate on their gardens and lack of provisional food for cooking classes and other community outreach activities.

Farms are also seeking out value-added production, whether through on-farm licensed kitchens, or by sale of product for external business use. Value-added production has helped some businesses by increasing revenue as much as 50%. There is still a gap for broad collective use with no access to a licensed kitchen for rent and additional gaps in poultry and meat slaughter and processing facilities.

Another primary challenge mentioned by farmers and food businesses is creating market awareness and feeling saturation in the direct-to-consumer markets. One individual shared, “it’s not easy to build market awareness...[we] encountered saturation at smaller markets with crops like tomatoes due to small garden farmers coming in and then [gardeners] don’t support the market the rest of the year.”

Food System

The intent of this research is to understand the interest and ability to have a resilient food system. Primarily, understanding the community’s interest in local and regional foods, and the willingness to participate and purchase from farm and food businesses that operate within a local or regional geography.

When asked to think about and describe the community food system, several individuals shared that they are unsure if one exists in Bastrop County. Individuals seemed to focus on three areas: food security, farmers markets, and production opportunities. Food pantries and food banks were seen as leaders in providing access to essential food needs, and numerous partnerships have been formed to support the distribution of food to families through non-profits, faith-based affiliations, and businesses.

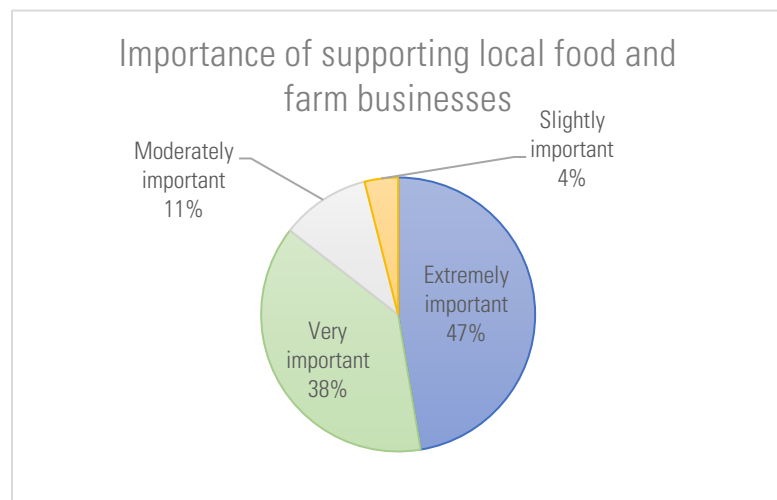


Figure 6: Extent of importance for supporting local food and farm businesses (N=76)

Interview participants shared interest for incorporating local foods into school meals and within restaurants. However, price points were viewed as a barrier to getting into larger markets. There are leaders in the area like FireWild restaurant and Royal Tomato that are supporting the launch of more locally sourced options.

The rising interest and expanded local food networks were seen as a strength; however, there are several starting and there is little communication between different groups.

When asked specifically about how important it was to support local farm and food businesses, 85 percent agreed that it was either extremely important or very important.

Shopping Patterns

There is a clear focus on food access, security, and understanding on the need to provide food for all people. Discussions around food systems mostly focused on access from pantries, and food banks. There have not been deep discussions on food as economic development and community place-making strategies. One participant shared that they believe that “the number one reason [people shop] is interest in supporting local, but in Bastrop [County, it is seen] as more of a food security issue versus local food support.”

Comparisons of Figure 6 (perspectives of the importance of supporting local food and farmers) and Figure 7 (local food purchasing locations) showcase that while individuals believe that supporting local food and farming is critical, there is not a direct correlation with the businesses they are shopping at. There is high interest in supporting local food and farming businesses; however, there is a gap in commitment.

Survey participants were asked about their shopping patterns and where they purchase food, ranging from direct-to-consumer options, like farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), to larger grocery chains and supermarkets. Ninety-seven percent of participants stated they purchased from local or regional grocery stores, like HEB, followed by farmers markets (59%), and utilizing personal garden or farms for consumption (50%).

During action planning sessions, the group spoke about the few direct-to-consumer markets that exist and the need to increase the opportunities to both sell into the markets and to increase consumer awareness. It was also mentioned that there are relatively few farmers market options throughout the county, with limited times within the season.

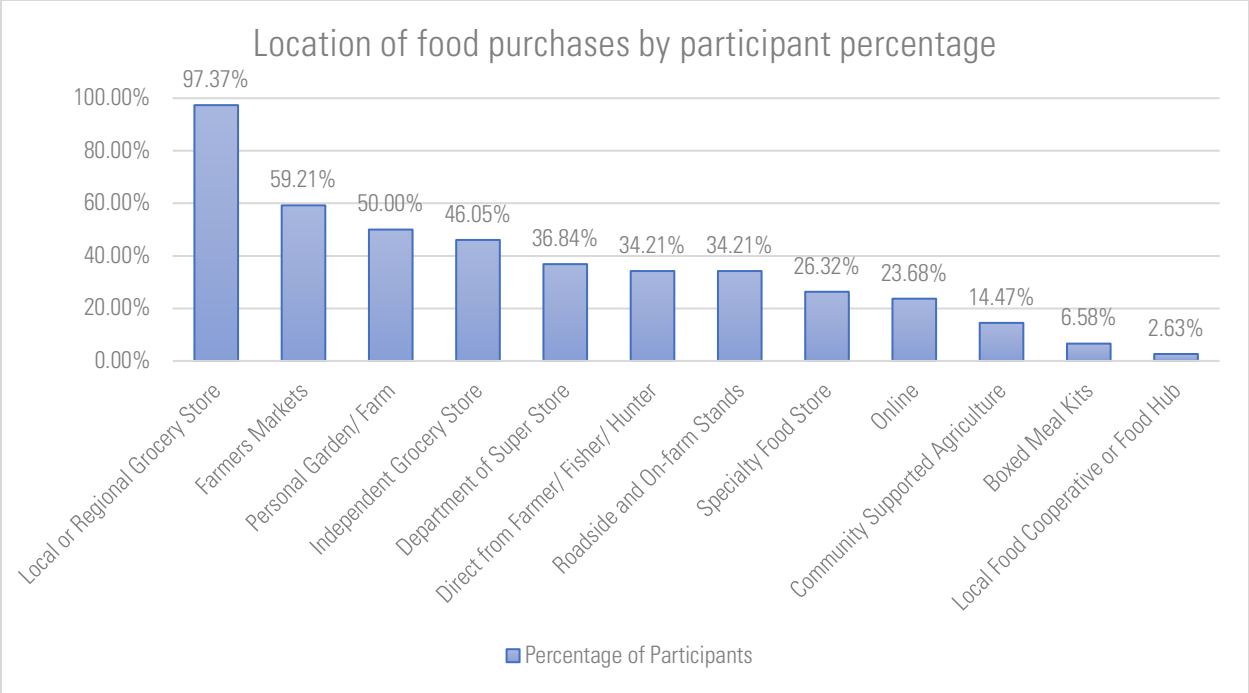


Figure 7: Location of food purchasing by participant percentage (N=76)

Attributes for food purchasing

To further understand purchasing habits, survey participants were asked about the level of importance for attributes for purchasing food. Based on average rankings (with extremely important equaling 5 and not at all important equaling 1), food safety (4.5) and freshness (4.35) were ranked highest; organic (3.03) and a relationship with the producer, seller, or business owner (3.16) were ranked lowest (see Table 5 for all averages). Figure 8 details the percentage of individuals who ranked each attribute by level of ranking. In addition to the attribute options provided, humane and vegan were additional aspects added in “other” as extremely important.

Table 3: Averages for importance of food purchasing attributes

	Grown Local	Affordability	Relationship with producer, seller, etc.	Location	Convenience	Organic	Fresh	Food Safety Practices
Average Scores	3.60	3.79	3.16	3.79	3.67	3.03	4.35	4.50

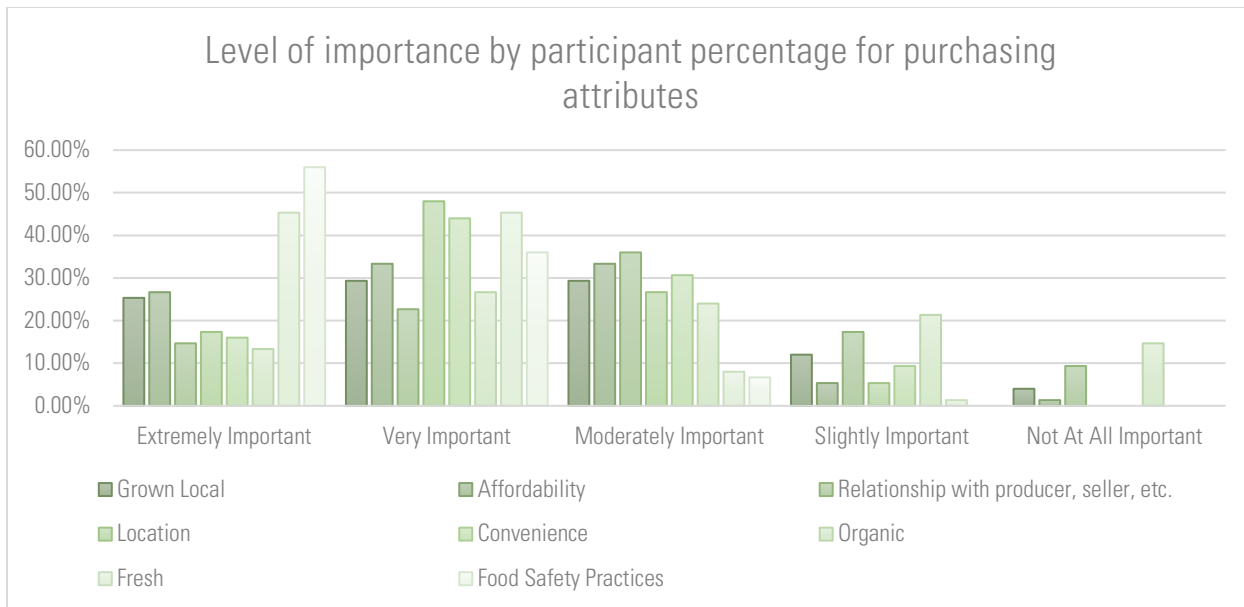


Figure 8: Importance of food attributes by percentage (N=75, except N=73 for location, and N=74 for food safety); for full data spreadsheet on level of importance of attributes, see Appendix D

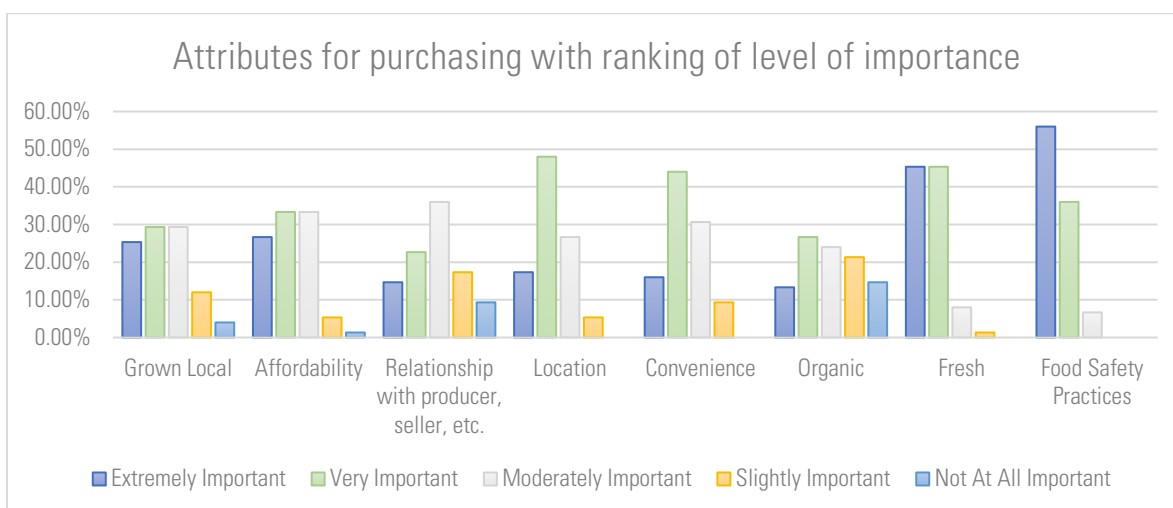


Figure 9: Importance of food attributes by level of importance (N=75, except N=73 for location, and N=74 for food safety); for full data spreadsheet on level of importance of attributes, see Appendix D

Grown local, relationship with producers or seller, and organic rank as the lowest attributes for food purchasing decisions. There is a critical need for increased awareness about the importance of sourcing local to maintain the local farms and food businesses within the community. Without this retention, many businesses will be forced to sell to larger markets, like Austin, which is already happening for many Bastrop County producers.

While there is interest in developing more food related businesses, including a licensed kitchen, increased farmers market and local procurement restaurants, it will be essential to have a customer base that chooses local food first.

There is also concern around overall food security in Bastrop County for all individuals, including food access, affordability, and cultural relevance (InTeGrate, 2018). While the survey looked particularly at food purchasing, there are additional opportunities to integrate with food access and food security organizations. However, a primary

concern that has been mentioned is the need to still incorporate appropriate sales prices for producers that are providing foods and the realization that production and our food has a cost. Texas Center for Local Food, Elgin Independent School District (Elgin ISD), Common Market, and several farmers created a food box program during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an example of a strong partnership between farmers and food access programs, and distribution that allowed for both farmers to be paid for their products (not expected to provide donations) and provided food to individuals.

Cost has been an identified barrier to purchasing local and simply accessing food. The awareness of why food costs what it does was brought up by seven of the interview participants. One community member shared, “most subsidies go to commodity crops, [we need to] shift policy to even the playing field for fruits and vegetables...locals get nailed for the food being too expensive, rather than [consumers understanding] that other food is cheap because it’s exploitive.” Another participant shared they are “frustrated that this [type of work] needs to be done, but [community members] don’t value it enough to pay for it appropriately,” or there is “cognitive dissonance when it comes to food systems.”

Communities across the United States saw an uptick in purchases for local foods during COVID-19, and then immediately when things became more open, individuals went back to their previous purchasing habits. How can the community ensure support of local, even when not in a crisis, so businesses can continue? The following sections will dig into the response of natural disasters and COVID to help showcase the impacts and potential shifts.

Natural Disasters

Disaster's impact all of community life, ranging from mild challenges for transportation and ease of access to devastating loss of infrastructure and life. Bastrop County has been involved in 10 designated disaster areas since 2011 according to FEMA (FEMA, 2022); Table 6 details each of these disasters. The funding allotment is shown for the entire region of impact, as specific county level data is not available. Each line details the name of the disaster, date, type of assistance and total amount allotted. Within the assistance type, only the assistance that was provided to Bastrop County is included. These have created numerous issues with infrastructure damage, debris, and damage to shelter and community areas. Types of disaster declarations include:

- DR: Major disaster declared
- FM: Fire Management
- EM: Emergency Declaration

The table design has the most recent disaster listed first, and the shading includes all disasters within a particular year. For example, the first light grey shades occurred in 2021, the second dark grey coloring occurred in 2017.

Table 4: Natural Disaster Declarations (FEMA, 2022)

Disaster Declaration	Date	Assistance Type	Funding allotted (full region)
Texas Severe Winter Storm 4586-DR-TX	Feb. 11, 2021 – Feb. 21, 2021	Individual Assistance Housing + Other	\$200,106,813 60,284 applications approved
		Public Assistance PA- A-B Emergency and PA C-G Permanent work	\$47,171,386
Texas Severe Winter Storm 3554-EM-TX	Feb. 11, 2021 – Feb. 21, 2021	Public Assistance	N/A
Texas Hurricane Harvey DR-4332-TX	Aug. 23, 2017 – Sep. 15, 2017	Individual and Households	\$1,656,898,381 373,150 applications approved
		PA- A-B Emergency and PA C-G Permanent work	\$2,362,663,802
Texas Severe Storms and Flooding DR-4272-TX	May 22, 2016 – Jun. 24, 2016	Individual and Households	\$40,647,560
		PA- A-B Emergency and PA C-G Permanent work	
Texas Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line winds, and flooding DR-4245-TX	Oct. 22, 2015 – Oct. 31, 2015	Individual and Households	\$18,624,864 3,305 applications approved
		PA- A-B Emergency and PA C-G Permanent work	\$42,510,767
Texas Hidden Pines Fire FM-5116-TX **Bastrop only**	Oct. 13, 2015 – Oct. 28, 2015	PA- A-B Emergency;	\$3,568,585
		PA-H Hazard Mitigation Assistance	\$312,245
Texas Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line winds, and flooding DR-4223-TX	May 4, 2015 – Jun. 22, 2015	Individual and Households	\$57,635,747 12,963 applications approved
		PA- A-B Emergency	\$167,517,02
Texas Wildfires DR-4029-TX	Aug. 30, 2011 – Dec. 31, 2011	Individual and Households	\$14,405,990 1,017 applications approved
		PA- A-B Emergency	\$50,313,626
Texas Bastrop County Fire Complex (Lost Pines Fire) FM-2958-TX **Bastrop only**	Sep. 4, 2011 – Oct. 11, 2011	PA- A-B Emergency; PA-H Hazard Mitigation Assistance	\$12,571,783
Texas Wildfires DR-1999-TX	Apr. 6, 2011 – Aug. 29, 2011	PA-B	\$49,125,112

Natural Disaster Impact

While there are disasters covered by FEMA for federal support, there are many instances where climate change is creating additional havoc on farming and businesses with ever-evolving cycles and changes in weather which make it difficult to plan.

Interview, focus group and survey participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of natural disasters. Of the 76 survey participants, 71 (93%) shared that they experienced a natural disaster, which included Lost Pines Fire of 2011 and Winter Storm Uri of 2021, or other climactic events such as hail, flood, wind, tornado, and drought (see Figure 10). Participants were also able to add in other events they were impacted by, which included two people who experienced Hurricane Harvey.

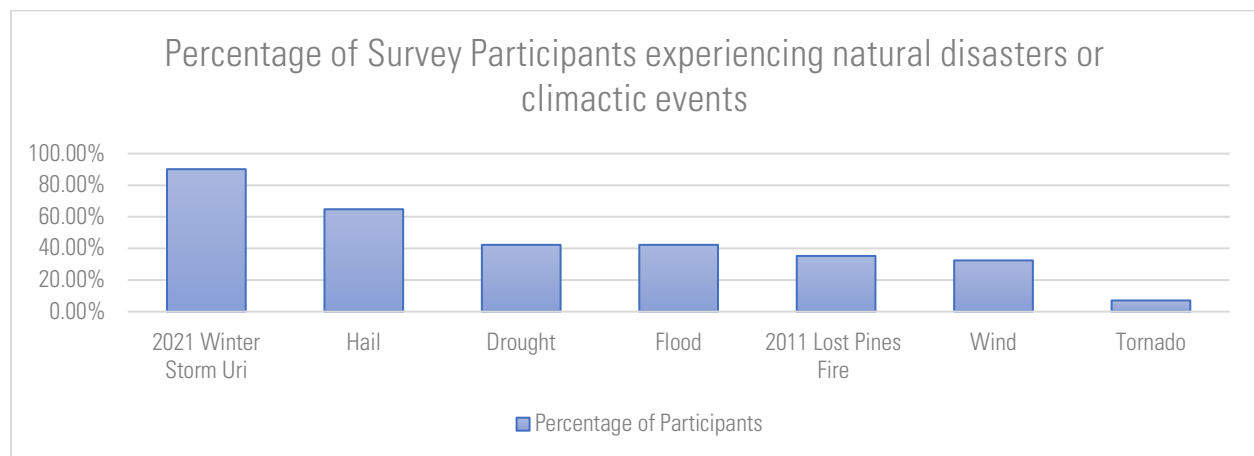


Figure 10: Percentage of Survey Participants experiencing natural disasters or climactic events (N=71)

Impact from Natural Disaster or Climactic Event

Of those who experienced a natural disaster, 59 (83%) experienced more than one event. Table 7 details the number of participants that experienced each type of event (left column) and the impacts they experienced. Figure 11 showcases the percentage of individuals that experienced each event and the impact it had.

Table 5: Total participant numbers based on impact from natural disasters and climactic events

	Increase in mental stress	Damaged home/land/etc.	Loss of communications	Increase in financial pressures	Increase in physical stress	Loss of essential provisions	Business closure	Diminished personal health	Damaged business/farm/etc.	Diminished family health
2021 Winter Storm Uri (62)	46	29	36	23	32	47	12	11	10	8
2011 Lost Pines Fire (23)	20	7	8	5	12	8	6	7	3	3
Drought (29)	20	16	0	9	12	2	1	2	10	1
Flood (30)	19	15	15	9	7	6	3	3	7	2
Hail (42)	14	34	7	18	3	2	0	1	5	1
Wind (22)	11	13	9	4	2	1	0	0	4	0
Tornado (5)	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Totals:	131	117	75	70	68	66	22	24	40	15

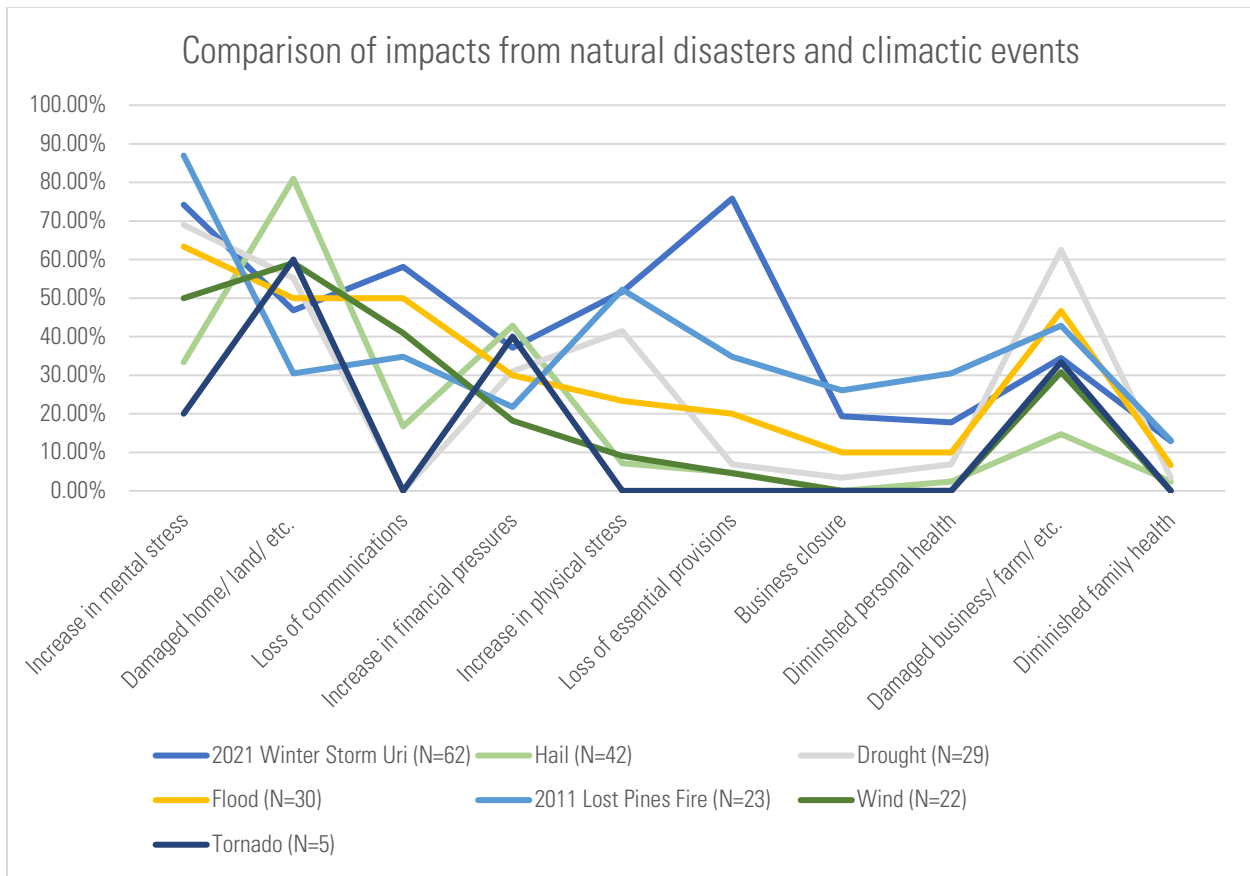


Figure 11: Comparison of impacts from natural disasters and climactic events based on percentage (total population numbers are expressed in the graph)

Other responses for impact are shared below based on disaster type:

- Hail: car damage (4)
- Flood: “inability to leave community due to high water on the access road”
- Lost Pines Fire: “volunteered 4 years planting trees for State parks, individuals and tree folks;” “loss of home and all contents”
- Drought: “high water usage”
- Winter Storm Uri: “increase in stress of farm animals, including loss of life;” “I just lost hot water for a few days, not really impacted”

Increase in mental stress and damage to home or property were the most common impacts across all disasters, with the Lost Pines Fire creating the most stress. Many individuals shared that while they did not experience the fire firsthand, there was an immense amount of community outreach and support, and concern for neighbors through this event. The Lost Pines Fire also has long lasting impacts on mental and physical health with continual concern about fires and trauma from the event. Participants shared, “The mental impact that the fire had, [we] still see some struggle. This mental impact is what made the Bastrop County Cares come together;” and “people are still really not over that, it was a huge traumatic event, and took out a lot of housing.”

Winter Storm Uri created the most issues of all storms for loss of essential provisions, where many experienced losses of power and water for days and weeks. Drought was seen as the highest cause of damage to business and

farmland, and hail created the most damage to home, land, and other property. Communication concerns were shared as a gap from the city and county on expectations and preparedness for the storm. Participants mentioned that the storm highlighted the communication constraints that exist including access to internet service and messaging needed as text or phone call. A focus group discussion centered around communication and the need for “reporting out to the community every 2 hours with updates.” This group also discussed the need for communication beyond just email and website posting. Roughly 83% of individuals in the county have access to broadband through subscriptions (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Anecdotally, it was shared that broadband usage is spotty and there is need for additional communication methods to provide updates related to weather and public health emergencies. There is low access to high-speed internet, with approximately 30-56% accessing high-speed internet across the county (AARP, 2022).

Many of these events happened consecutively or during COVID leading to longer time periods for recovery. However, individuals were still asked to share their perspectives on recovery on a scale of zero to ten (see Figure 12). On average, participants have mostly recovered from each event, ranging from 8.76 to 9.8. The flood, drought, and Winter Storm Uri are the events that have created longer term recovery issues, with scores ranking in mostly recovered. It should also be noted that the 2011 Lost Pines Fire was experienced over a decade ago, and while most have fully recovered, there are still individuals and families facing recovery challenges.

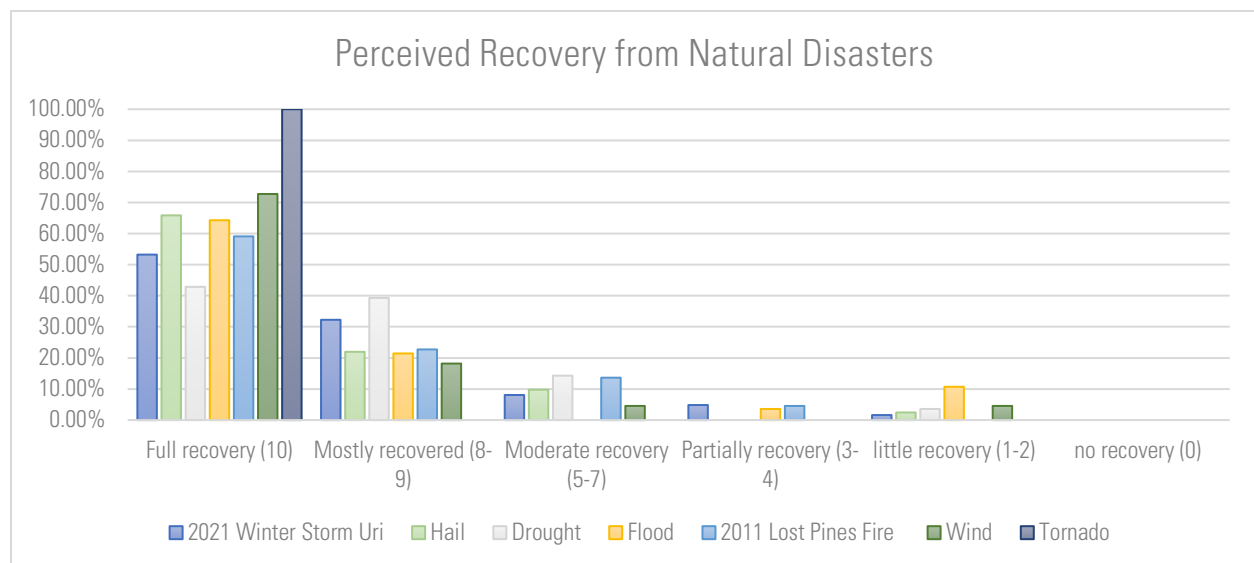


Figure 12: Extent of recovery for natural disasters; see Table 7 for number of individuals impacted; for full data spreadsheet on perceived recovery see Appendix E

Usefulness of Organization when responding to a Natural Disaster

Individuals were asked about usefulness for organizations in Bastrop County, based on a pre-made list from interviews. Organizations included in the survey were City Government, County Government, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Department of Education, Texas Department of Public Health, Texas A&M, Texas A&M Extension Services, Bastrop County Extension, Texas Center for Local Food, Bastrop County Cares and FEMA. Figure 13 details the extent individuals felt that each organization was useful in responding to disaster on average, not specific each type of natural disaster. Table 8 shows exact percentages; bolded numbers are the top three highest values per category.

Table 6: Average and Percentage usefulness of organizations in responding to natural disasters (N variable - see row "Total Number of Participants")

Organization Usefulness	City Government	Bastrop County Cares	County Government	Texas Center for Local Food	Bastrop County Ext	FEMA	Texas DOA	TX A&M Extension	TXDPH	TXA&M	TX DOE
Total number of Participants	62	48	62	46	46	42	46	41	49	40	44
Average Usefulness	3.63	3.56	3.52	3.26	3.13	2.83	2.80	2.80	2.78	2.63	2.39
Extremely useful	40.32%	27.08%	27.42%	17.39%	8.70%	14.29%	6.52%	2.44%	6.12%	2.50%	2.27%
Somewhat useful	19.35%	22.92%	32.26%	21.74%	26.09%	16.67%	15.22%	14.63%	16.33%	10.00%	9.09%
Neither useful or useless	17.74%	33.33%	14.52%	43.48%	41.30%	35.71%	50.00%	58.54%	46.94%	57.50%	45.45%
Somewhat useless	8.06%	12.50%	16.13%	4.35%	17.39%	4.76%	8.70%	9.76%	10.20%	7.50%	11.36%
Extremely useless	14.52%	4.17%	9.68%	13.04%	6.52%	28.57%	19.57%	14.63%	20.41%	22.50%	31.82%

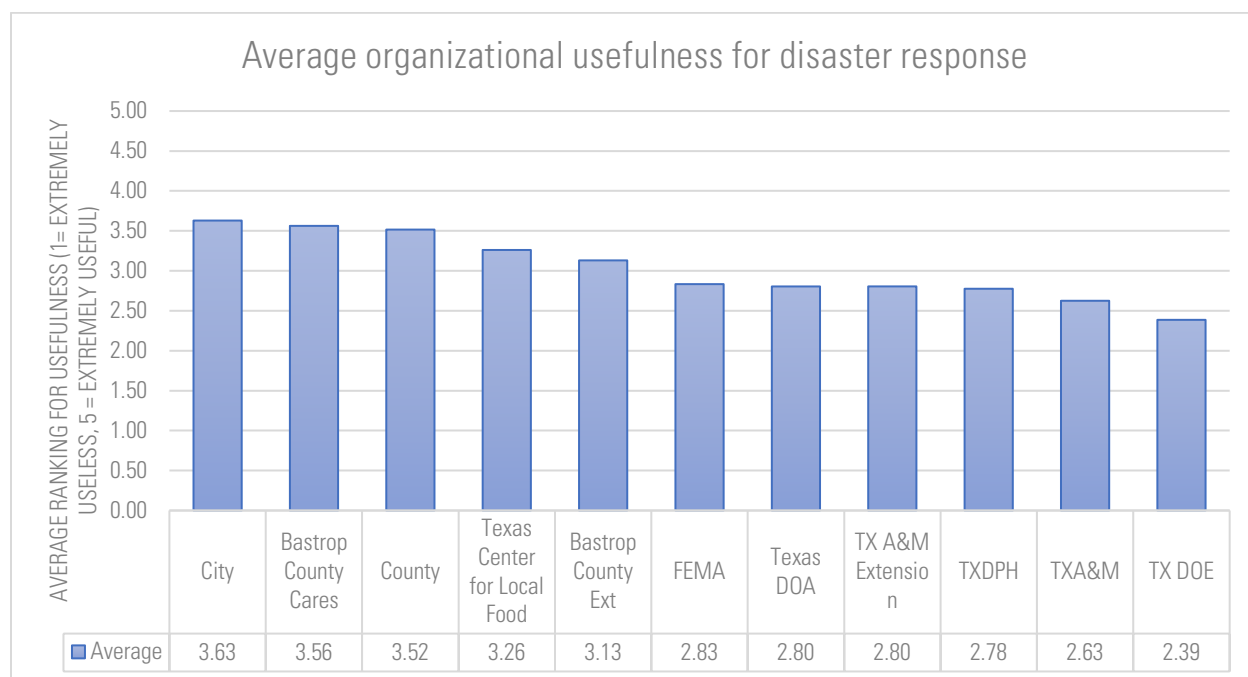


Figure 13: Average usefulness of organizations for responding to Natural Disasters; see Table 7 for total participant numbers

City Government, Bastrop County Cares, and Bastrop County government were seen to be the most useful organizations, while Texas Department of Public Health, Texas A&M, and Texas Department of Education were seen to be the least useful. Additional categories were identified by providing "other" responses in surveys, which included churches, school districts, neighbors, local businesses, Texas Recovery, and USDA. When discussed within interviews and focus groups, it was also shared that funders and grantors, neighbors, and volunteers, as well as

partners outside of the state were influential in responding to natural disasters. Additionally, it should also be noted that organizational usefulness may be more about branding and outreach, rather than actual usefulness once individuals connect. Many times, individuals may not know which organizations provide support in response to disaster, which is an additional need for organizations to determine how, and if, they want to be seen as a useful resource when disasters occur.

Future

To understand future needs for natural disaster response, a review of FEMA’s National Risk Assessment for Bastrop County was taken into consideration. Bastrop County has a relatively low risk – 10.92 compared to 12.89 of the state of Texas, and the national average of 10.60. The risk assessment considers expected annual loss, social vulnerability, and community resilience based on datasets from 18 natural hazards (Department of Homeland Security, 2022). The formula utilized to assess risk includes:

$$(Expected\ annual\ loss \times social\ vulnerability) \div community\ resilience = Risk\ Index$$

- Expected annual loss: “natural hazards component that represents the average economic loss in dollars resulting from natural hazards each year”
- Social vulnerability: consequence enhancing risk component and community risk factor that represents the susceptibility of social groups to the adverse impacts of natural hazards
- Community Resilience: consequence reduction risk component and community risk factor that represents the ability of a community to prepare for anticipated natural hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions
- Risk Index: represents the potential for negative impacts resulting from natural hazards

Moderate areas of risk include flooding, tornadoes, and winter weather; according to the index, strong winds, wildfires, and drought are relatively low risks. However, the Bastrop County resilience research has shown impacts from these issues that are significant (FEMA, 2022).

Figure 14 details estimates for expected annual losses from storms based on FEMA calculations. In addition to these figures, to understand full economic impact of the storms, Table 9 utilizes the estimated losses from FEMA Risk Assessment and then incorporating them into the [Local Food Economic Impact](#) study to understand overall impact across the community.

Composite Expected Annual Loss	\$8,649,577.28
Building Value	\$1,690,767.59
Population	0.87 fatalities
Population Equivalence	\$6,633,213.66
Agriculture Value	\$325,596.03

Figure 14: Expected Annual Loss Overview (FEMA, 2022)

Table 7: Economic Impact of Storms (FEMA, 2022)

Disaster	Risk Index Rating	Expected Annual Loss (from similar type of storm)	Economic Impact
Flood	16.19	\$4,900,000	\$7,233,298.08
Tornado	20.09	\$2,600,000	\$3,838,076.53
Drought	8.20	\$270,000	\$398,569.40
Hail	7.36	\$79,000	\$116,618.48

Wind	9.65	\$19,000	\$28,047.48
Fire	7.55	\$16,000	\$23,618.93
Winter Storm	16.52	\$13,000	\$19,190.38

Natural Disaster Resilience Next Steps

Based on the full research scope, the following are suggested priorities and next steps. Additionally, partners were identified through focus groups for who would need to be a part of prevention and recovery.

1. Establish new, or identify existing, insurance programs for small to mid-size farmers that will aid in extreme weather conditions.
2. Create a county-wide network for communication for prevention, response, and recovery, expanding across and within all cities in the County, multilingual communication materials, and text and phone platforms. One participant shared a unique idea of creating “neighborhood captains that are trained to do this type of response for Neighborhood associations- councils.”
 - a. Coordinate networks, both internal and external to the disaster zone, to address needs and innovative ways to respond. Establishing and maturing relationships with surrounding counties as well as partners and support systems out of the disaster zone, may help with receiving support from non-impacted areas.
 - b. Encourage participation from churches, rodeos, non-profits, chambers, city administrators to be engaged in meetings and dialogue with Bastrop County Cares; coordinate a network of networks for all groups working towards resilience.
3. Develop awareness campaign about the impact that natural disasters have had on food and farm businesses and the reason for supporting local businesses and organizations – sharing narratives and stories; economic impact indicators; etc.
4. Develop hazard mitigation and response checklist for farms, food businesses, pantries and food banks, schools and additional organizations that impact food access; including, but not limited to, access to farms during a severe weather event, water, and power protocols (having water storage, generator access and usability, tool sharing, etc.), food access and shelter locations, etc.
5. Fund and develop farmer networks for sharing needs and tools in a peer-to-peer setting; may connect to Texas Center for Local Food online learning platform TXFed.org; an email or communication tree for farmers.

COVID-19 Impact

Interview, focus group, and survey participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of natural disasters. Of the 76 survey participants, 70 (92%), shared that they experienced COVID-19. Of those who experienced COVID-19, 66 (94%), also experienced at least one natural disaster that happened within the same time frame. COVID-19 and having multiple disasters influence mental and physical health, including general fatigue from exposure and worry, and stress related to financial and employment constraints that have occurred due to supply-chain and corporate closures. Table 10 details the funding allotment for the entire state of Texas for COVID-19 response, which was deemed both a “major disaster declaration” and “emergency declaration.”

Table 8: COVID-19 Natural Disaster Declaration (FEMA, 2022)

Texas COVID-19 Pandemic DR-4485-TX	Jan. 20, 2020; continuing	Individual and Households	\$236,079,186 36,381 applications approved
		Public Assistance (B)	\$14,249,034,314
		Hazard Mitigation Grant Program	\$9,796,451
Texas COVID-19 EM-3458-TX	Jan. 20, 2020; continuing	Public Assistance (B)	NA

Table 11 details the number of participants that experienced COVID-19 by type of impact and Figure 15 showcases the percentage of individuals that experienced each impact.

Table 9: Total participant numbers based on impact from COVID-19 (N=60)

	Inability to see family/ friends/ social networks	Increase in mental stress	Increase in physical stress	Increase in financial pressures	Diminished personal health	Diminished family health	Business closure	Loss of job or unemployment	Unable to pay rent/ mortgage/etc.
COVID-19	56	55	25	17	15	11	11	6	4

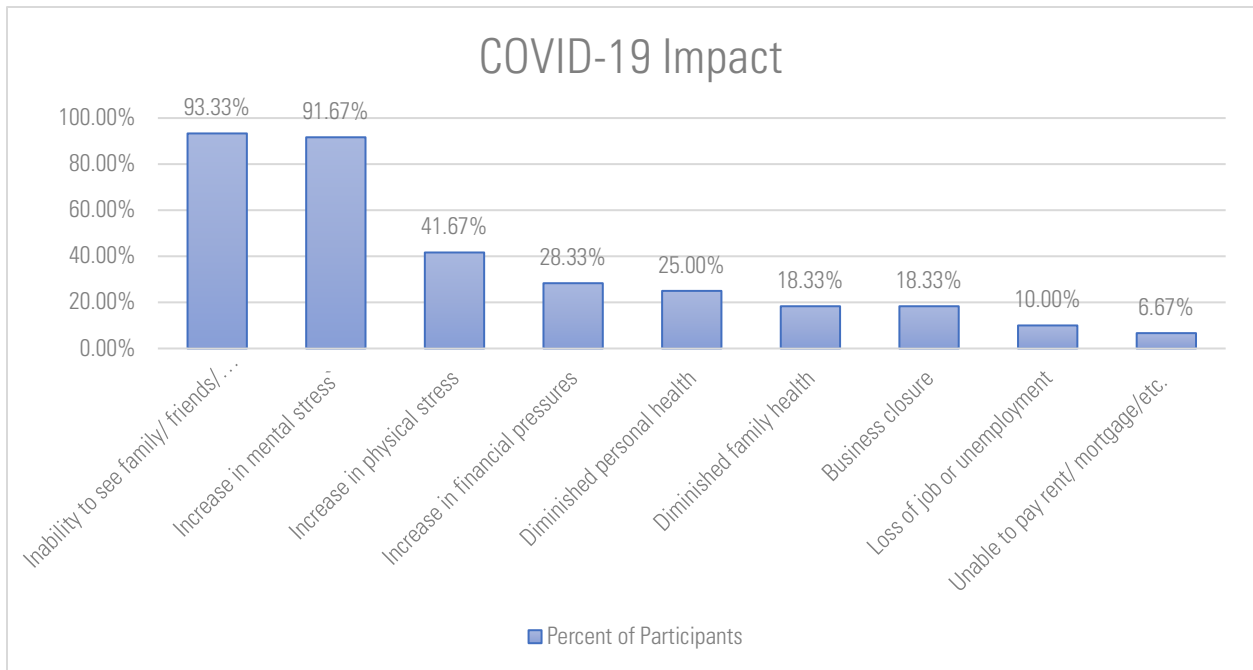


Figure 15: Comparison of impacts from natural disasters and climactic events based on percentage (N=60)

Other responses for impact included: “stress over loss of freedom/church closure,” “increased despair about my fellow humans who won’t wear masks,” “am weakened due to too little exercise during the months of isolation, currently concerned about breakthrough Covid,” “harder to feed local with my vegan free food pantry,” “I followed safety guidelines and got vaccinated so the impact was minimized,” “had to learn to order from HEB on phone, curbside pickup, do without.”

The most significant impact for individuals was being unable to see others and the mental stress that COVID-19 caused. While several organizations moved to virtual settings, interview and focus group members shared that this worked smoothly and has continued to be a “new way of doing” in hybrid formats. Individuals shared their fear of the future due to lack of “not knowing” and general stress over how individual community members are responding. One person shared that they wondered where the spikes in cost were coming from and “wondered where this is coming from- is it greed?” while another spoke to the “hoarding that began, and when [people] saw the hoarding, there was fear on how to respond.” This was also directly correlated with being involved in previous disasters, and a trigger of fear was realized through the act of watching people hoard.

Individuals shared that there was a large mental impact, and individuals reported “the level of anxiety has been really high everywhere with everyone; even talking to neighbors is different.” Another person saw “a lot of new people coming in with mental health issues,” which was exacerbated by the lack of technology and tele-health services in the county.

Bastrop County had a high number of individuals sharing significant concerns about vaccination rates and politicization of vaccines. One individual shared they “heard that the wealthy are getting vaccines sooner, and [they are] trying to reach out to black communities, but there is mistrust on vaccines...” Others commented on the need for changing course in existing work and concentrate on vaccinations, “there are a lot of people calling on us to do garden projects, but [we] don’t have enough time to support because of vaccine work.” Another individual shared that “[our organization] changed the way we do everything, and because of COVID, [we] are now helping to run a vaccine

clinic.” The need for pivoting to vaccination response also left a gap in recovery areas such as gardening, food access and distribution, and commitment to food system development.

While the survey only shares that 28% of individuals experienced financial constraints, 18% closing their business, and 10% losing their job, interviews and focus groups shared the extent to which financial need was present in Bastrop County. One participant shared that they felt, “unemployment failed in Texas; the system broke at the state level and [they] still haven’t gotten checks. . .the two-step process didn’t work well.” Other businesses shared that they had “staffing issues” and were short-handed, and one expressed that “as [we] got to summertime, more employees dropped off. . .had about 50% stay on through the summer.” The gap in employment and labor has had immense impact on the ability to re-open and get back to a previous level of work. Those who had established businesses found benefit from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP); however, if the business didn’t have enough history, or the correct paperwork, PPP loans were not available.

Shelter and housing also became a critical need during COVID, and there was work to have a local motel offer housing to those that were unable to afford rent, payments, or other necessary bills. Advocacy became critical to ensure evictions did not occur. Additionally new pantry programs, meal support, and food box delivery items started up to provide for essentials to individuals and families.

It was also critical that services, such as the farmers market, were deemed to be essential businesses so they could continue to operate. These services stayed open and were frequented due to new technologies that allowed for customers to pre-order and pick up, as well as new door-to-door delivery options that occurred. When it comes to considering how to maintain new programs, like food box delivery or curbside delivery, one individual shared that “[this] program became a more expensive and labor-intensive program; [they] have gotten a number of COVID grants in the past year – wrote a lot of grants last year, but it is a little worrisome thinking about what this will be like this coming year.”

While it is difficult to know the extent of recovery that has been able to occur from COVID-19 since it is an ongoing pandemic, individuals were still asked to share their perceived level of recovery from COVID-19 based on the moment in time that they were participating in the research study. Figure 16 showcases the extent individuals feel they have recovered. On average, people thought they were moderately recovered (6.5 on a scale of 10). It is fair that people have mixed reviews on recovery as we are still continuously hearing about COVID-19 impacts and new scares. This is a time to take stock in the potential reality that this will be a long-term impact for our communities and the need to have practices in place to ensure safe and economically vibrant communities, amidst an ongoing pandemic.

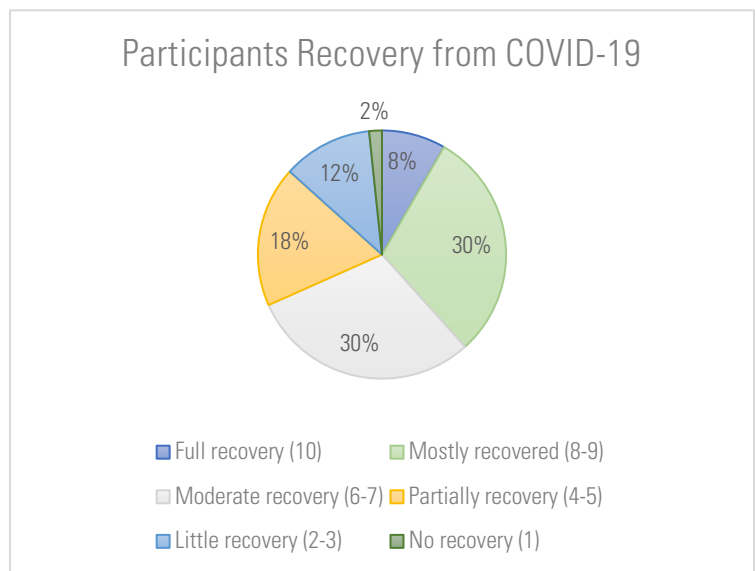


Figure 16: Perceived extent of recovery from COVID (N=60)

Usefulness of Organization when responding to COVID-19

Individuals were asked about usefulness for organizations in Bastrop County, based on a pre-made list and options to add additional responses. Organizations included in the survey were City Government, County Government, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Department of Education, Texas Department of Public Health, Texas A&M, Texas A&M Extension Services, Bastrop County Extension, Texas Center for Local Food, Bastrop County Cares, and FEMA. Figure 17 details the extent individuals felt that each organization was useful in responding to COVID-19, on average and Table 12 shows exact percentages; bolded numbers are the top three highest values per category.

Table 10: Average and Percentage usefulness of organizations in responding to COVID-19 (N variable - see row "Total Number of Participants")

Organization Usefulness	Bastrop County Cares	County Government	City Government	TXDPH	Texas Center for Local Food	Bastrop County Ext	TX DOE	TX A&M Extension	TXA&M	Texas DOA	FEMA
Total Number of Participants	42	56	55	51	39	35	42	32	31	35	33
Average Usefulness	3.90	3.64	3.53	3.49	3.46	3.00	2.60	2.56	2.48	2.40	2.30
Extremely useful	45.24%	30.36%	25.45%	31.37%	15.38%	20.00%	11.90%	9.38%	3.23%	2.86%	3.03%
Somewhat useful	23.81%	32.14%	34.55%	29.41%	46.15%	8.57%	7.14%	3.13%	9.68%	2.86%	12.12%
Neither useful or useless	16.67%	19.64%	18.18%	13.73%	20.51%	42.86%	38.10%	50.00%	48.39%	57.14%	36.36%
Somewhat useless	4.76%	7.14%	10.91%	7.84%	5.13%	8.57%	14.29%	9.38%	9.68%	5.71%	9.09%
Extremely useless	9.52%	10.71%	10.91%	17.65%	12.82%	20.00%	28.57%	28.13%	29.03%	31.43%	39.39%

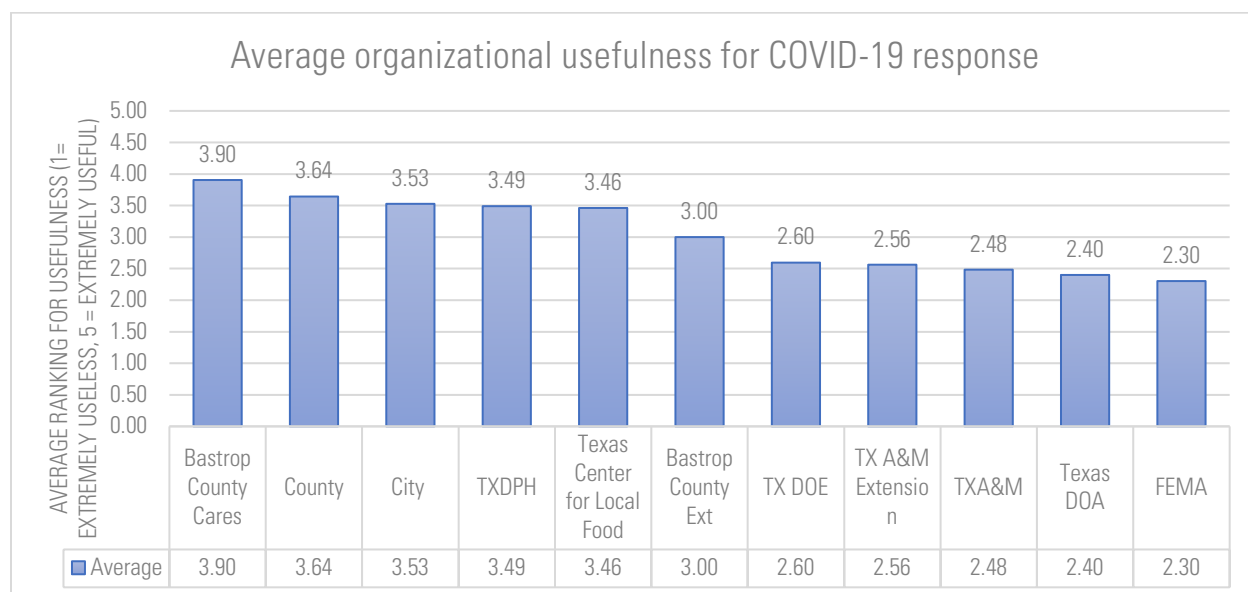


Figure 17: Average usefulness of organizations for responding to COVID-19; see Table 12 for participation numbers (N value)

Bastrop County Cares, Bastrop County government, and City government were seen to be the most useful organizations, while Texas A&M, Texas Department of Agriculture and FEMA were seen to be the least useful. It should also be noted that while City government was ranked to have a usefulness of 3.53, they also had one of the top three percentage (10.91%) of being “somewhat useless,” and each organization had at least 9% of the survey participants stating they were “extremely useless” when it came to COVID-19 response. It should also be noted that organizational usefulness may be more about branding and outreach, rather than actual usefulness once individuals connect. Additionally, individuals also shared their support of each other during COVID-19 and not always relying on organizations for responding to COVID-19.

Additional categories were identified by providing “other” responses in the survey, which included school districts, USDA, Walmart, UT Austin and State Government; interviews and focus groups shared non-profits, clinics, volunteers, food banks, and churches were also influential in response.

COVID-19 Resilience Next Steps

Based on the research scope, the following are suggested as next steps. Additionally, partners were identified though focus groups for who would need to be a part of prevention and recovery. The first two priorities are closely aligned with that of natural disaster response.

1. Create a county-wide network for communication for prevention, response, and recovery, expanding across and within all cities in the County, including multilingual communication materials, and text and phone platforms. One participant shared a unique idea of creating “neighborhood captains that are trained to do this type of response for Neighborhood associations- councils.”
 - a. Encourage more participation from churches, non-profits, chambers, city administrators to be engaged in meetings and dialogue with Bastrop County Cares; coordinate a network of networks for all groups working towards resilience.
2. Develop awareness campaign about the impact of purchasing from local food and farm businesses and how this support can provide financial sustainability for the local economy and community at large.
3. Create space and educational materials, for all generations, to explain the complexity of our food system and the connections between our health, food, and financial systems.
4. Develop funding mechanisms that enhance the current food system and ensure sustainability during disaster; funding food for people and infrastructure/ insurance for farmers.

Appendix A: Demographics and additional identifiers from survey participants

Zip Code

78602: 7
78612: 2
78621: 38
78650: 1
78659: 1
78751: 1
78942: 1
78957: 25

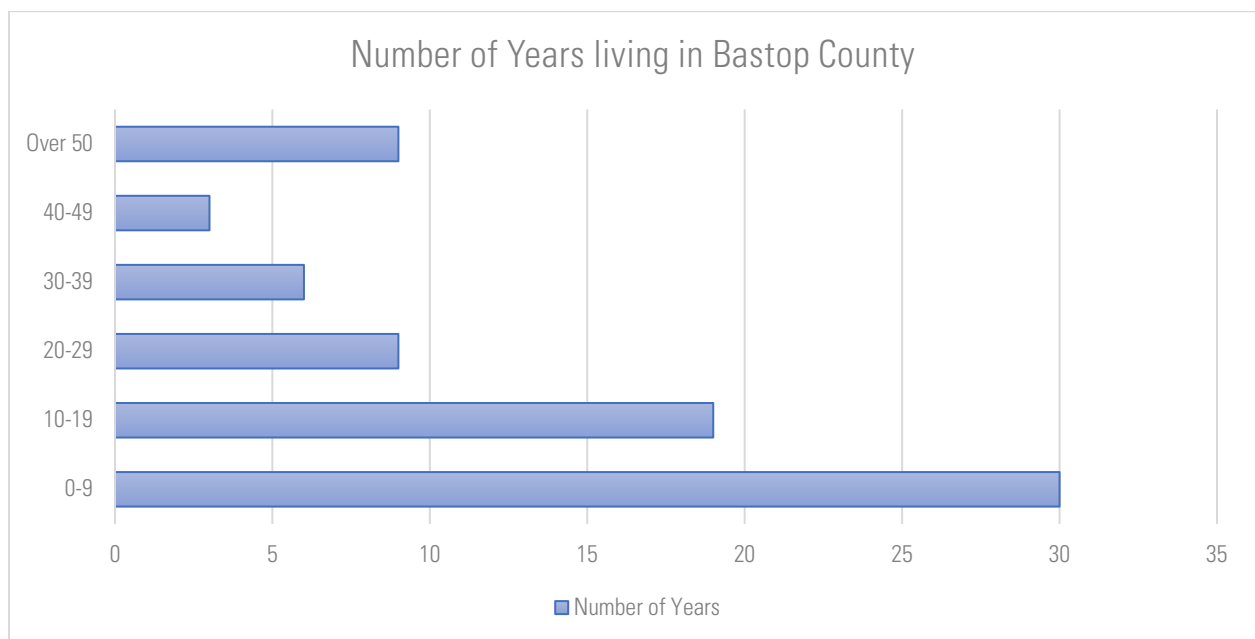


Figure 18: Number of years participants have lived within county (N=76)

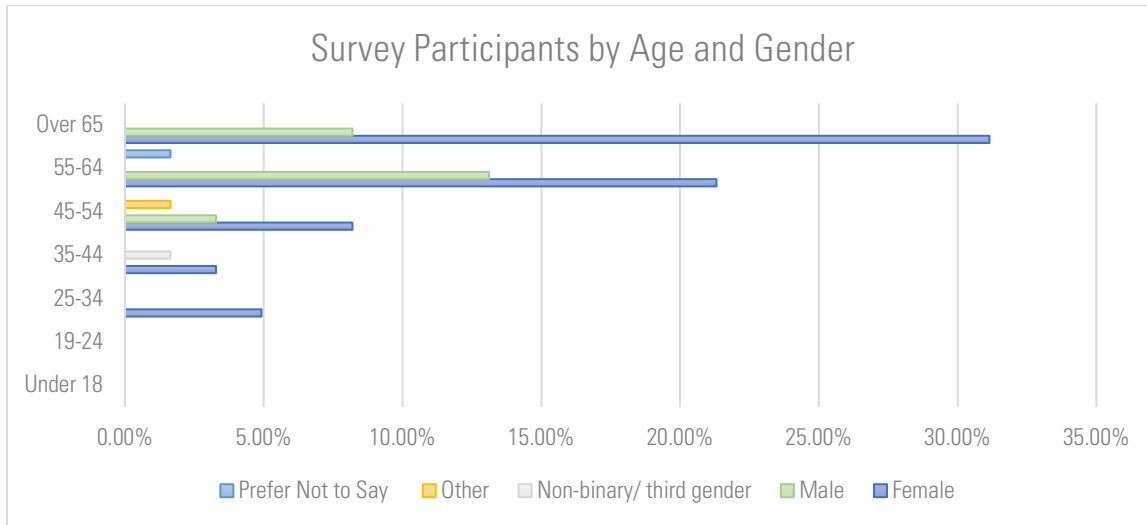


Figure 19: Survey Participants by Age and Gender (N=61)

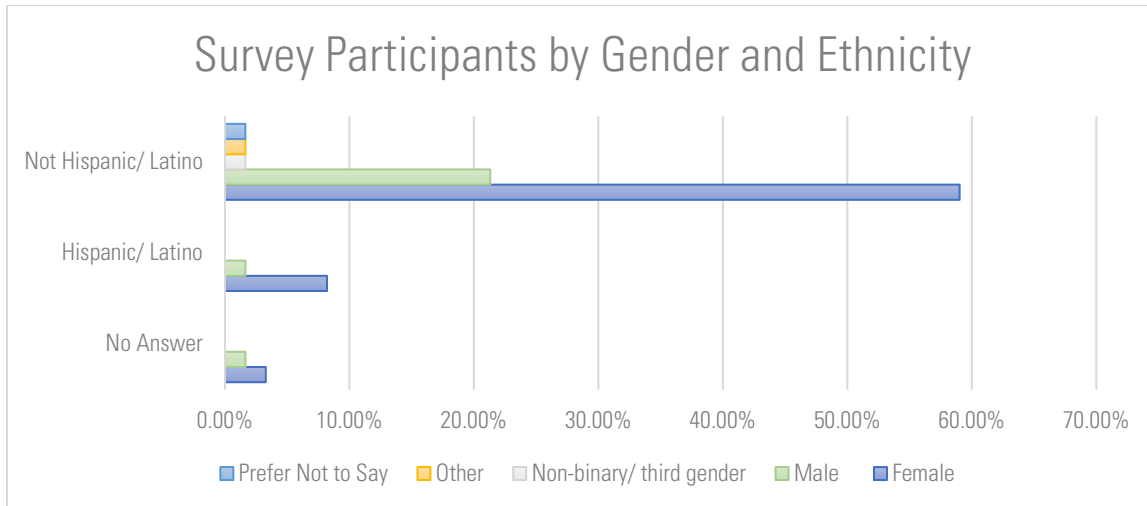


Figure 20: Survey Participants by Gender and Ethnicity (N=61)

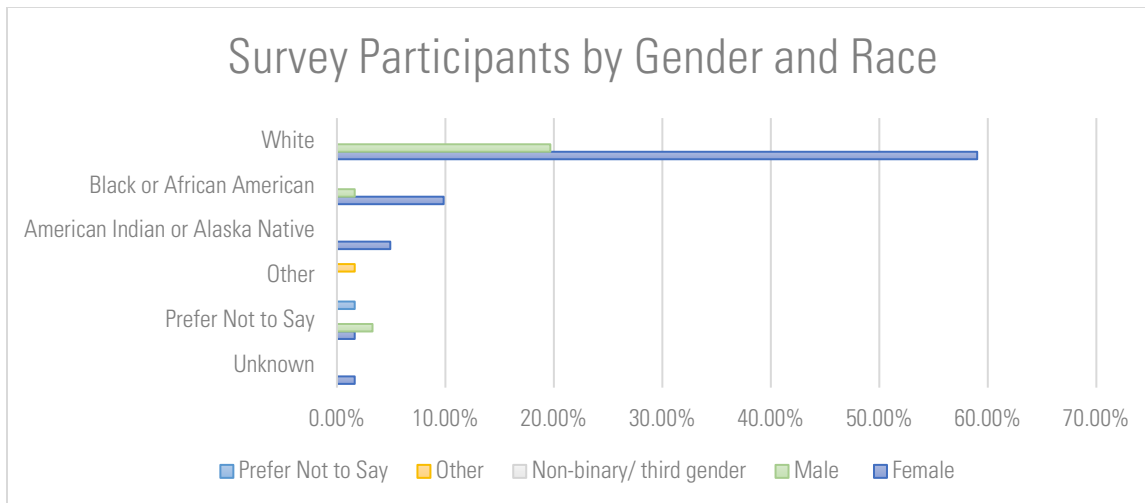


Figure 21: Survey Participants by Gender and Ethnicity (N=61; Participants could select all that apply)

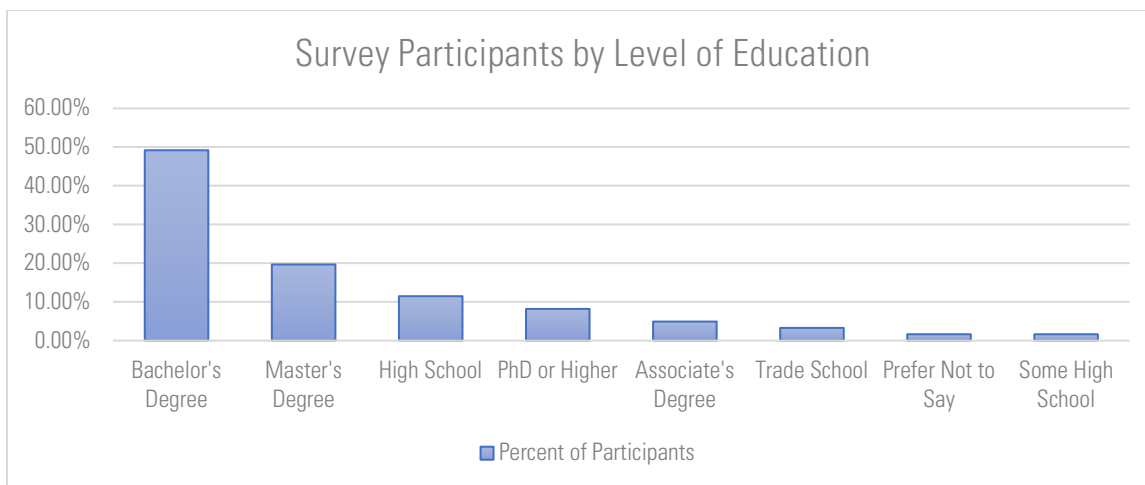


Figure 22: Survey Participants by Level of Education (N=61)

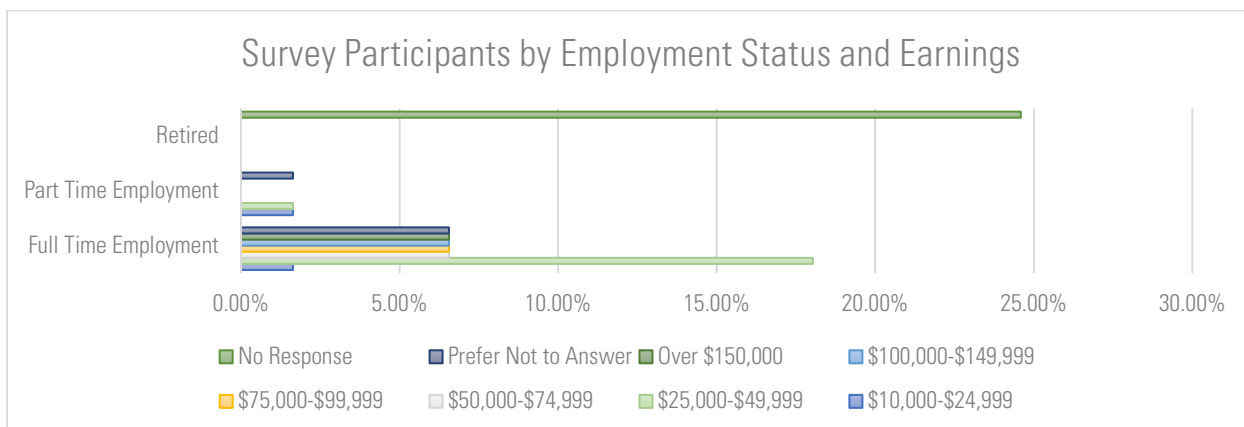


Figure 23: Survey Participants by Employment Status and Earnings (N=61); all other responses had less than 2 participants respond as self-employed, elected official, unable to work, unemployed (looking for work), unemployed (not looking for work), and other.

Appendix B: Poverty Data

It is estimated that the county experiences a poverty rate of 10.8% (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

- Bastrop: 12.0% poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2021)
- Elgin: 14.9% poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2021)
- Smithville: 8.98% poverty in 2019 (Data USA, 2019)

The mean income deficit for families was \$10,744, where the poverty threshold shown in the chart below (Table 13 – received from U.S. Census – [Income and Poverty in the United States 2020](#)).

Table 11: Income and Poverty Thresholds for the United States

Size of family unit	Related children under 18 years									
	Weighted average thresholds	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
One person (unrelated individual):	13,171									
Under age 65.....	13,465	13,465								
Aged 65 and older.....	12,413	12,413								
Two people:	16,733									
Householder under age 65.....	17,413	17,331	17,839							
Householder aged 65 and older.....	15,659	15,644	17,771							
Three people.....	20,591	20,244	20,832	20,852						
Four people.....	26,496	26,695	27,131	26,246	26,338					
Five people.....	31,417	32,193	32,661	31,661	30,887	30,414				
Six people.....	35,499	37,027	37,174	36,408	35,674	34,582	33,935			
Seven people.....	40,406	42,605	42,871	41,954	41,314	40,124	38,734	37,210		
Eight people.....	44,755	47,650	48,071	47,205	46,447	45,371	44,006	42,585	42,224	
Nine people or more.....	53,905	57,319	57,597	56,831	56,188	55,132	53,679	52,366	52,040	50,035
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.										

Additionally, based on this poverty guideline, households can apply for assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to receive monthly allotments to support their food purchases.

SNAP Participation

It is estimated that 2,240 households received SNAP in 2020, or about 8.6% of the households within the county. About 21% of those households had not worked within the past 12 months, 39.4% had one worker in the family, and 39.6% had two or more workers in the family (U.S Census Bureau, 2020).

Appendix C: Business and Industry

Table 12: Business and Industry, Bastrop County, United States Census 2021

Establishments by employees	Number of businesses	Annual Payroll (\$1,000)	Number of employees
Less than 5	870		
5-9	279		
10-19	191		
20-49	100		
50-99	33		
100-249	17		
Total	1,494		
By category			
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	4	1,197	27
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	6	14,061	173
Utilities	9	21,893	264
Construction	256	66,627	1,293
Manufacturing	70	54,161	1,054
Wholesale Trade	34	11,606	220
Retail Trade	215	111,396	3,724
Transportation and Warehousing	32	11,427	382
Information	13	3,463	60
Finance and insurance	83	23,829	421
Real estate and rental and leasing	59	4,905	128
Professional, scientific, and technical services	123	23,919	541
Management of companies and enterprises	6	3,494	188
Administration and support and waste management and remediation services	85	18,091	584
Educational Services	17	2,215	89
Health Care and Social Assistance	151	80,263	2,005
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	29	3,215	321
Accommodation and Food Service	151	51,263	3,195
Other services (except public administration)	2,020	90	

Appendix D: Food Purchasing, Levels of Importance

Table 13: Level of Importance for food purchasing criteria (N variable, see row "Total number of participants")

	Grown Local	Affordability	Relationship with producer, seller, etc.	Location	Convenience	Organic	Fresh	Food Safety Practices
Total number of participants	75	75	75	73	75	75	75	74
Average	3.60	3.79	3.16	3.79	3.67	3.03	4.35	4.50
Extremely Important	25.33%	26.67%	14.67%	17.33%	16.00%	13.33%	45.33%	56.00%
Very Important	29.33%	33.33%	22.67%	48.00%	44.00%	26.67%	45.33%	36.00%
Moderately Important	29.33%	33.33%	36.00%	26.67%	30.67%	24.00%	8.00%	6.67%
Slightly Important	12.00%	5.33%	17.33%	5.33%	9.33%	21.33%	1.33%	0.00%
Not At All Important	4.00%	1.33%	9.33%	0.00%	0.00%	14.67%	0.00%	0.00%

Appendix E: Recovery from Natural Disasters

Table 14: Perceived Recovery from Natural Disasters (N variable, see row "Total number of participants")

	2021 Winter Storm Uri	Hail	Drought	Flood	2011 Lost Pines Fire	Wind	Tornado
Total number of participants	62	41	28	28	22	22	4
Average Recovery	8.92	9.1	8.82	8.77	9.00	9.26	10
Full recovery (10)	53.23%	65.85%	42.86%	64.29%	59.09%	72.73%	100.00%
Mostly recovered (8-9)	32.26%	21.95%	39.29%	21.43%	22.73%	18.18%	0.00%
Moderate recovery (5-7)	8.06%	9.76%	14.29%	0.00%	13.64%	4.55%	0.00%
Partial recovery (3-4)	4.84%	0.00%	0.00%	3.57%	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%
Little recovery (1-2)	1.61%	2.44%	3.57%	10.71%	0.00%	4.55%	0.00%
No recovery (0)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Appendix F: Bastrop County Action Planning Group Notes

Elgin – Farmer Action Planning Group (Session 1)

Introductions: 6 attendees

Sharing the data/presentation

Farmers market discussion, Mueller market (which is the only enclosed market)– ratio of producers to craft vendors. Perception that Mueller Market was for crafts. Discussion of how even the farmers markets are only 10-15% producers... craft vendors bring in the money for professional staff for organizing the market.

Thinking bold in the vision of “Is this what we want? To go back where we were or is it something else?”

Attributes –

- Organic label – folks are not prioritizing organic food, but they are prioritizing safe food. Think that organic needs a new PR/branding campaign. HEB greenwashing and what they sell as organic isn’t actually organic.
- Clarified that this data was collected on the Likert scale, not a ranking scale.
- Recognizing that this data is drawn from them and their community.

It is important for folks to provide farmer/produce-based evidence and stories to obtain funding/money. “People don’t survey well.” Being able to share stories about issues that producers/farmers face is something that needs to happen...how can we build a campaign around that for the action plan?

Natural disasters –

How does Bastrop County compare to other places in terms of number of disaster declaration?

Action planning

Create – regional / partnerships external to the state – Creating partnerships that extend beyond the state of Texas, and specific disaster zones.

Enforcement – faith in labelling

Create a county wide network – what are the action pieces?

There’s a lot of people who are willing to help out. There are various Facebook pages where people would post saying they need help or they have this available... There are also similar posts on the NextDoor platform. How do you get people together?

Other folks have similar experiences with seeing people being willing to help, but they’re untrained. It would have been great if volunteers were trained before the need or volunteered at the farm beforehand. One surprise from the snow-pocalypse – the extent to which neighbors wanted to help. It was emotionally fulfilling to feel like producers aren’t alone. Even if the volunteers/neighbors were clueless, they were there.

There are a lot of people who want to help, but for the most part, people don’t know how to help until the disaster.

ADRN – Austin disaster relief network. – the official red cross facilities. A level of professionalism – to be able to volunteer with them, they have trainings for volunteers so they are prepared.

Discussion of when farmers just need help, period, instead of skilled help. One farmer shared that when a hoop house on their farm blows off, they don't need "smart help," they just need "people."

What if there was a group like ADRN but for farmers? This might look like volunteers spending a few hours throughout the year to become a "Farm Aid" for disaster relief aid.

Mentor relationships for farmers – mentorships don't have to be formal or paid. One farmer shared that knowing that they could call an experienced, well-seasoned farmer when they had a question was invaluable.

Another farmer shared how they got a boar from a significant producer in pastured hog operations and the connection to that producer was such a big deal for their smaller operation. Also, Facebook groups are also a good source to learn stuff (differing opinions, lots of people). People also call them for advice on how to do their operations.

One of the roles of a mentor is to sift through the overwhelming amount of information that new/beginning farmers have access to.

Mentor with multiple mentee farmers – it organically creates a network. Initially thought only farmers, but farmers need to be plugged into others, like a carpenter who can donate time or connection to mental health services/counseling.

Who is going to help you get through a disaster?

Thinking of farms as a bullseye in a circle. Who is around you to help? This structure and connections need to be figured out before the disaster. Having resources clear before the disaster hits.

No longer have farming communities. You have farms stuck in communities. They no longer have that support from the community.

Farm tool that you must have.

Just don't have the bandwidth to call around and figure out who can help rebuild hoop house after a tornado.

Multilingual resources – Where are you seeing this need? In general, the group didn't really see this need show up. One farmer shared that their Spanish-speaking laborers don't really need the resources translated because they already know what they're doing. They have the community built in place.

Looking at the data, it says that Hispanic folks are not landowners. They are farm workers, not farmers. They are laborers.

Sticky dots activity: Suggested priorities

Create: Create a county-wide network for communication for prevention, response, and recovery; develop task teams for tasks and types of disaster. (4)

Address: Address ability to scale production, processing, and distribution for local and regional farms (2)

Build: Build awareness campaign about the impact that natural disasters and COVID-19 has had on local businesses, including farmers, through storytelling, fact sheets, etc. (0)

Write: Write hazard mitigation and response checklist for farmers, food businesses, pantries and food banks, schools and additional organizations that impact food access. (0)

Fund: Fund and develop farmer networks for sharing needs and tools in a peer-to-peer setting; may connect to TXFed.org with Texas Center for Local Food. (1)

Establish: Establish new, or identify existing, insurance programs for small to mid-size farmers that will aid in extreme weather conditions. (0)

Educate: Educate about the complexities and intersectionality of community in formal and informal spaces (3)

Develop: Develop funding mechanisms to ensure financial capital is available at the time of disaster (2)

NEW ADDITION: Enforce: Enforcement of truth in labeling; specific to organic/feed, etc., transparency on practice (0)

NEW ADDITION: Fund inspirational leaders and professional development: Building leadership, experience to have knowledge and awareness on response, peer-to-peer leadership (0)

Smithville – Action Planning Group (Session 2)

Introductions – 5 attendees

Sharing the data/presentation

Discussion of resilience vs. transformation:

One participant shared that resilience is not a word that is used commonly used in the public sector with people. Advocating for use of resilience. Another participant shared that they think that maybe transformation or transform is a better description of what we want. Think resilience is tired because of covid fatigue, and it is so important to continue to be forward thinking. As the changemakers in the community, we need to be a step ahead and bring the community with us. People are looking for leaders right now

In Smithville, there is a community garden, but there's no farmers market, which would be nice to have

Discussion of food system values vs. practice information:

Isn't this also in line with the country? Yes, definitely something we're seeing nationally. Reinforces the importance of needing to do something nationally and at home to align values with practice.

There is a farm stand between here and Rosanky on every Friday. Another one nearby on Saturday – fruitful farm. Also, eden east, Bastrop, TX- Wednesdays and Saturdays.

One participant commented that resilience efforts are more at the underground level... a friend is starting a producer co-op model space in Bastrop.

The CREATE priority is so important. The others can only happen if a network is created and connected.

Why is Texas A&M on there? They're a university, how would they show up in this work? Explaining land grant university mission, extension aspect, responsibility to community. It's also important to acknowledge that some organizations have also been affected by the disasters and COVID...county extension lost one of their field specialists to covid and still have not gotten a replacement for animal specialist

Discussion of priorities

Are you finding that young ppl are wanting to go into local food? There is interest but there is a lack of peer-to-peer support and mentors.

Bastrop County Cares – putting together a communication network for food systems, different sectors – farmers, educations. Farmer network is just one piece - can't have community-wide access. Directory network for food systems. Networking is especially important for us to be strong. Talked about necessity of communication between sectors (farmers, education, etc.).

Are people really using the community gardens? One group participant and her friends would go there for herbs and spinach. Another participant shared that during covid- there was an up-tick, yes. But also found that people were stealing the entire plant. However, that ended up helping them to shift to program for potted plants and lending library so that people can grow their own... awareness of plants (talking about getting herbs from community garden, but folks don't know the plants). The need for a mentor when it comes to gardening and planting.

The Smithville Community Garden is in the process of building out their YouTube channel. One participant shared that they had a preconceived notion of community gardens are for those who can't afford to buy produce, so they personally never checked it out

Benton County Cares was not created to be a direct services organization. They were ready to respond because they made plans to have pieces together for the benefit of the county.

Sticky dots activity: Suggested priorities

Create: Create a county-wide network for communication for prevention, response, and recovery; develop task teams for tasks and types of disaster. (1)

Address: Address ability to scale production, processing, and distribution for local and regional farms (2)

Build: Build awareness campaign about the impact that natural disasters and COVID-19 has had on local businesses, including farmers, through storytelling, fact sheets, etc. (1)

Write: Write hazard mitigation and response checklist for farmers, food businesses, pantries and food banks, schools and additional organizations that impact food access. (0)

Fund: Fund and develop farmer networks for sharing needs and tools in a peer-to-peer setting; may connect to TXFed.org with Texas Center for Local Food. (0)

Establish: Establish new, or identify existing, insurance programs for small to mid-size farmers that will aid in extreme weather conditions. (1)

Educate: Educate about the complexities and intersectionality of community in formal and informal spaces (2)

Develop: Develop funding mechanisms to ensure financial capital is available at the time of disaster (0)

NEW ADDITION: Food System Coalition and Network (3)

Elgin – Action Planning Group (Session 3) – no attendees.

Total Sticky Dot from Aggregated Sessions

Create: Create a county-wide network for communication for prevention, response, and recovery; develop task teams for tasks and types of disaster. (8)

NEW ADDITION: Food System Coalition and Network

Educate: Educate about the complexities and intersectionality of community in formal and informal spaces (5)

NEW ADDITION: Enforce: Enforcement of truth in labeling; specific to organic/feed, etc., transparency on practice

Address: Address ability to scale production, processing, and distribution for local and regional farms (4)

Develop: Develop funding mechanisms to ensure financial capital is available at the time of disaster (2)

Build: Build awareness campaign about the impact that natural disasters and COVID-19 has had on local businesses, including farmers, through storytelling, fact sheets, etc. (1)

Fund: Fund and develop farmer networks for sharing needs and tools in a peer-to-peer setting; may connect to TXFed.org with Texas Center for Local Food (1)

NEW ADDITION: Fund inspirational leaders and professional development: Building leadership, experience to have knowledge and awareness on response, peer-to-peer leadership

Establish: Establish new, or identify existing, insurance programs for small to mid-size farmers that will aid in extreme weather conditions. (1)

Write: Write hazard mitigation and response checklist for farmers, food businesses, pantries and food banks, schools and additional organizations that impact food access. (0)

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