



Impact Statement

Project Title: Determining Extension Role in Disasters

Issue:

Extension has long made efforts to help communities and individuals plan for, respond to and recover from disasters. North Carolina, a state often impacted by hurricanes, has long had a rather informal Extension disaster program. During disasters, North Carolina Extension agents work under the guidance of their County Emergency Manager, rather than the County Extension Director. Therefore their responsibilities may vary greatly from agents in other counties. The purpose of my project was to more clearly define the role of Extension personnel in the planning, response, and recovery phases of disaster.

What has been done:

The mid-western floods of 1993 convinced Extension personnel that it was time for Extension to pull together a more formal approach to this process. Extension Specialists and technicians formed the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), a collaboration of some 80 land grant universities seeking to minimize the impact of disasters on our local communities. To determine how NC State Extension could more effectively and efficiently serve those local communities during times of disaster, a multi-pronged approach was used to collect information. First, Extension agents were surveyed to determine what they have done during past disasters; second, a number of County Emergency Managers, who's counties had previously been impacted by major disasters were surveyed to determine their perspective of Extension's role in disasters; next we reviewed the work of other universities to determine the roles their agents take on during disasters, and lastly, a meeting was held with NC agricultural commodity leaders to determine their observations and thoughts about how Extension personnel could better serve our communities during times of disaster.

Impacts/New Partnerships:

While the real results of this project are yet to be determined, a couple of positive actions have occurred in response to the surveys and meetings associated with this project. First, we now have more Extension agents and Specialists interested in disaster preparation and response. This was evident in our recent response to hurricane Florence, which made landfall in North Carolina this past September. We saw more interest, by agents and Specialists alike, in meeting the immediate needs of livestock producers who's feed supplies and properties were impacted by flooding and hurricane force winds.

For the first time, a more vigorous collaboration with the NC Department of Agriculture, to transport and stage these resources was conducted in impacted counties. In addition, other Extension agents took on new responsibilities, including working in human shelters, managing animal shelters, managing donated resources and volunteers. New trainings for agricultural agents were conducted to better prepare agents to address specific issues, like determining how much hay livestock producers will need to get through the winter.

Results of studies from other states, the most recent coming from Mississippi, revealed that their County Emergency Managers preferred, next to agricultural response, to use Extension agents to

manage donations and volunteers during disasters, freeing first responders to address issues in need of the specific skills that they bring to the table.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)

The project has us thinking about ways in which we can better serve North Carolina residents during times of disaster. While our agents may not work for us directly, during a disaster, there are trainings we can provide that will better prepare them to take on new roles in their counties. Things like the development of strike-teams that may be mobilized quickly in response to a disaster in another part of the state or better training for agents who are expected to manage volunteers. Enhancing our value to county management during times of disaster will better demonstrate our capacity and help them justify greater roles for Extension during normal times of business.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?

The introspection that came as part of the FSLI experience, has helped me to better understand my strengths and weaknesses, ultimately allowing me to work more effectively with a wider variety of stakeholders. Those skills were valuable as we sought input from multiple audiences, to better understand the role of Extension in disasters. In addition, my FSLI experience has provided a more thorough understanding of the challenges/issues administrators face. This knowledge was helpful when working with higher level emergency management officials.

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**If you have already written a report for your project and it is available on- line please include the link to the paper. If you have a pdf you can send it to us and we will include a link to that from your summary page.*