



# A Team Effort

## Rural Disaster Planning: The Strengths And Gaps

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of a two-part series on rural disaster planning.

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

It makes sense that the strongest rural emergency planning teams would encourage input and involvement from local farmers and ranchers and other agricultural partners.

And that's what Amy Dronberger of Stillwater, Okla., found through surveys for her dissertation on how rural areas can best plan for disasters, such as tornadoes — that community-based, non-governmental organizations and individuals, with agricultural leadership at the helm, tend to be the most cohesive in working together.

"Those who reached consensus were more of a local network," said Dronberger, director of Oklahoma State University's Center for Innovation and Economic Development, whose PhD dissertation on coordinating local partners for disaster planning specific to protecting regional agricultural systems was inspired by a 2003 F4 tornado hitting her family's farm near Girard, Kan.

"We had cattle running loose everywhere. For months afterwards, people were sending us mail and other items that had blown as far away as Missouri," she said. "We really relied on other people in helping us to catch livestock, clean up and figure out what she still could use in terms of buildings and equipment."

In her personal case, as well as through her dissertation research, it was disaster planning and response groups led by members of the agricultural community who were most effective.

Yet, within this agricultural leadership group, Dronberger identified several points in need of improvement. For example, while individual residents are often quick to come together to respond after a disaster, generally individuals struggled to identify defined roles. It would be helpful to local emergency planning if there were general guidelines as to what individual residents, whether rural or community, could expect to help out with in preparing or responding to a disaster.

Dronberger also gathered this information regarding disaster planning specific to local agricultural networks:

- Farmers and ranchers found it most helpful to rely on local and state agricultural associations to provide information on disaster planning and a support system. In turn, agricultural associations expected to be responsible in providing this information specific to their industry as well as offering technical assistance to



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

producers in developing individual disaster plans.

- County Extension offices saw their role in being the information point between the public and producers. Extension educators can also provide guidance to non-agricultural emergency officials on agricultural matters.

- Veterinarians tend to be overlooked but are instrumental in providing guidance on animal care, including vaccinating, and animal diseases, including those that can be transmitted to humans.

- Coops could be advantageous in providing guidance on chemical matters.

More information from Dronberger's presentation, according to non-agricultural resources, include:

- Community-based organizations, such as the Red Cross or Salvation Army, have ample volunteers and donation-procuring capabilities available and therefore should be used extensively in local disaster planning. However, while these organizations see their involvement as crucial, there was no agreement of what specific roles would look like in a local emergency planning team — except in the case of churches, which agreed that they could provide short-term shelter, food and clothing.

- Rural fire departments and law enforcement not only can provide medical and rescue services, but are also important in locating missing people. Postal mail carriers and school bus drivers are also likely to be helpful in locating people in that they know where people live, especially out-of-town residents that may be less known to community-based

emergency personnel.

- City and district utility offices can provide basic services, such as electricity, water and sewage.

- Local health departments can offer basic health information as well as immunizations.

- The local National Guard excels in disaster response, especially cleaning up debris.

- Rural water districts can identify critical water sources and sensitivities.

- Banks and other local business owners felt they should be involved in disaster planning but, as a whole, they would need help in identifying a specific role. Local banks may be most helpful in the recovery stage by providing emergency loans to producers.

- County commissioners and other local government boards were identified as the point people for coordinating local rural disaster planning teams, including identifying key individuals and organizations in the area and helping to develop partnerships among them.

What does this mean for rural disaster planning in the Yankton area? Dronberger gave these recommendations for any local area looking to strengthen its rural disaster planning process:

1. Identify available resources in the local area.
2. Encourage local farmers and producers to become involved in the local emergency planning team.
3. Open up local emergency planning meetings to the public and inviting input from community members.

## Climate Study Outlines Climate Change Impacts

BROOKINGS — The frost-free growing season is getting longer, and heavy rainfall events are becoming more common in the northern Great Plains, according to a national climate science report released this week.

"The National Climate Assessment (NCA) is the third report since 1990 to address climate science in the United States," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension Climate Field Specialist.

The NCA addresses evidence for climate change, long-term projections of climate through the 21st century, and also impacts of a changing climate across the United States.

Edwards said that changes in our climate have already affected many of us who live in the northern Great Plains.

"We have already seen trends in rising temperature in South Dakota, particularly in the winter season," Edwards said. "The report also confirms the increases in precipitation that we have seen across the Dakotas in recent decades."

This trend towards a wetter climate has been a factor in increased flooding across the region, as has been experienced in the James River Valley in the last 10 to 20 years, as well as general increases in standing surface water. In addition to being wetter overall, Edwards added that there has been an increase in heavy rainfall events, by almost 30 percent, in the northern Great Plains.

Dennis Today, SDSU Extension and State Climatologist, adds that there are impacts to agriculture, water supply, energy, urban, rural and tribal communities and others that are outlined in the report.



Today

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"In agriculture and horticulture, for example, the frost-free season is now about 10 days longer than it was about 50-100 years ago, and is projected to be 10-30 days longer by the end of the century," Today said. "This might actually be a positive, not a negative impact, in South Dakota."

Today said other impacts due to a changing climate include increased risk of heat and drought during the summer season, which could stress agriculture and water supplies. The combination of warmer temperatures and increased rainfall may also change weed and pest pressures in agriculture. Livestock may potentially face risk from increased heat stress.

Today and Edwards agree that there are both positive and negative impacts of a changing climate in South Dakota. There are some opportunities for South Dakotans to capitalize on what these changes mean for agriculture, water, energy, and communities, to improve productivity and create ways to become more resilient to changes in climate.

For climate information throughout the 2014 growing season, visit igrow.org.

## Governor's Agricultural Summit Set For Deadwood

PIERRE — The fifth annual South Dakota Governor's Agricultural Summit hosted by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) will be held on June 26-27 at the Lodge in Deadwood. Pre-registration is required and will be accepted through Monday, June 9, at www.sdagsummit.com/.

"The Governor's Ag Summit is a great time for farmers, ranchers, ag industry leaders, legislators and congressional delegates to come together and discuss the future of our number one industry," said South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture Lucas Lentsch.

A Black Hills Ag Tour will kick off this year's event on Thursday afternoon with

demonstrations from the SDDA's Wildland Fire and Resource Conservation and Forestry divisions and a tour of Belle Joli Winery in Sturgis.

Friday morning will begin with a "State of Ag Address" from Lentsch. U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Michael Scuse will give an update on the 2014 Farm Bill and Gov. Dargaard will present the 2014 Ag Ambassador Award.

Pre-registration is required and space is limited. For more information about the Summit, visit <http://sdda.sd.gov/office-of-the-secretary/ag-summit/> or contact Kea Warne at [kea.warne@state.sd.us/](mailto:kea.warne@state.sd.us/). This event is free and open to the public.

## Commentary

# We're Losing Mid-Sized Family Farms

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, the United States is quickly losing mid-sized family farms, and U.S. Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack is concerned.

He told media earlier this month that of the 2.1 million farms in the United States, 68 percent are smaller than 180 acres — in other words, they're more likely to have part-time farmers or be hobby farms.

But that's not the whole story. Vilsack also said that the majority of all farmland are contained in operations of 2,000 acres or more. While these farmers are working full time in agricultural production, having 2,000 acres tied up in one farm means that there are fewer people living in those rural areas and therefore affecting rural economy, especially the small towns and schools that rely on a solid ag base.

"What's shrinking is the middle, and that's what I'm concerned about," Vilsack told Brownfield Ag News. Vilsack feels that implementing

the new Farm Bill programs will help rebuild mid-size farms.

Of course, it won't be that simple. Probably the biggest barrier to getting and keeping mid-size farmers is simply the cost of land. I think a trend of fewer mid-sized farms is more a reflection of real estate values than lack of programs. No offense, Vilsack, because programs are important, too, but land prices are just unreal. Mega-farmers, with 2,000-plus acres, can get the ag loans for more land because they have more collateral. Otherwise, yeah, the land is going to be broken up into small properties because people can't afford to buy them otherwise.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* recently reported on farmland values. In Nebraska, the average price per acre is now \$3,200. According to the *Journal Star*, that value is actually down, indicating that

the growth in real estate values is slowing.

I think it depends on the area. Where I live, there is a lot of irrigation and a lot of competition among local farmers. Flat land already fitted with a pivot goes, on average, for \$9,000 an acre. Just a month ago, a quarter of the roughest, most cedar-infested, ravine-dominated, overgrazed pasture went for \$3,000 per acre. Immediately the day after the auction, the new owners were out if the pasture tearing out trees and starting the process of smoothing the land. A month later, they have it planted with a pivot on it.

Where did those mid-size farms go? They got bought out, probably.

Vilsack was positive about the potential for the small farms, particularly in growing the organic industry and local and regional food systems. It's good that he's not ignoring what the stats

are telling us and he's willing to work with the trends.

Here are some other highlights of the 2012 Ag Census:

- 22 percent of all farmers were beginning farmers,
- There was a 11.3 percent increase in the number of young, beginning farmers,
- 30 percent of all farmers were women,
- There was a 21 percent increase in the number of Latino farmers,
- 70 percent of all farms had Internet access, up from just over half in 2007,
- There was an 82 percent increase in organic sales by farms.
- Additionally, more farmers are selling products directly to consumers and more farms are using a renewable energy source.

Overall, there was lots of good news. I'm most excited about the states in terms of young, women and ethnic minority farmers. I'll write more about this next time.



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