



November 19, 2019

Agricultural Disasters: Recovery Lessons Learned from the Midwest Bomb Cyclone



Extreme weather in 2019 altered the landscape for the American farmer. The “bomb cyclone” – an intense winter storm – that swept through the U.S. in March followed record breaking cold and unprecedented snow. The Missouri River swelled topping levees in four states and breaking dams. The region lost record amounts of livestock, crops, infrastructure, farm machinery, homes and businesses.

NEMA hosted a session at the 2019 Annual Forum that highlighted the role of emergency management in ag-related disaster recovery and lessons that can benefit other regions of the country. Moderated by Ellen Gordon with the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, panelists included State EM Directors Joyce Flinn (IA), Bryan Tuma (NE) and Ron Walker (MS). Todd Barrett with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also served as a panelist.

With many areas still under water and damage assessments unable to be conducted, Midwest states are struggling with long term recovery efforts. The economic impact from the bomb cyclone is in the billions and many farmers have lost at least two years’ worth of revenues. Next year’s earnings are in jeopardy as well since they’ve been unable to get crops in the ground. Agricultural disasters take significant recovery time with long-term implications not only for the impacted states, but much of the U.S. due to price increases and availability of food items produced in those areas.

Bankruptcy among farmers and ranchers is higher than in previous years. While federal assistance is available, these land owners and producers pride themselves on being self-sufficient and often are unwilling to accept outside help. In the most rural areas, individuals and families are still displaced since housing options are limited and people already commute long distances to their jobs.

Each of the NEMA state panelists recommended becoming familiar with USDA programs prior to an ag-related event. Each of them found the farm service agencies in

their states to be extremely helpful. In Nebraska, their university system served as a resource for information, issues identification, and messaging for the ag community.

USDA was able to assist with stranded or dead livestock, disposal of carcasses, aerial drops of forage, and crop assistance. A description of their programs can be found at <https://www.usda.gov/topics/disaster>.

NEMA extends its sincere thanks to our expert moderator and panelists for a most informative conversation focused on lessons learned from agricultural disasters.

nemaweb.org



Copyright NEMA 2019. All rights reserved.