

## Background

Farming is notoriously susceptible to ebbs and flows of weather. The increase of extreme weather means farmers are dealing with greater weather risk.<sup>1</sup>

In December 2022, the U.S. was hit by extratropical cyclone Winter Storm Elliott. In Georgia, the temperature dropped to single digits for several days, causing crop loss and damage for many small-scale, sustainable farmers. These farmers are less likely to use traditional disaster relief plans,<sup>2</sup> which increased their risk of losses from extreme weather.

Using impacts of and responses to Winter Storm Elliott in Georgia as a case study, this project asks:

- What strategies do sustainable farmers use to maintain stability during a period of crisis?
- What roles do farmers market organizations undertake to support farmers during periods of crisis?
- How can these methods be improved?

## Methods and Objectives

Through ten semi-structured farmer interviews and three with food system representatives, this project:

1. Documented organizational strategies that help farmers maintain stability during weather crises;
2. Identified supports that farmers markets and other actors provided for farmers;
3. Developed practical recommendations for farmers and farmers markets to maintain stability during times of crisis.

## Huge losses, unequally experienced

Not every farmer was impacted equally, but several suffered massive crop and/or livestock losses. The most affected farmers were growing in uncovered fields and lacked the time and resources to add row cover. All interviewees said unpredictable weather increased product losses.

Affected farmer comments:

- “We lost 80 to 90 thousand pounds of crops overnight”
- “We lost 12 of our pigs”
- “\$48,000 loss”
- “\$60-80,000 loss”



Empty fields after the storm

## Three primary support categories

### 1. Financial

An alliance of five non-profit organizations including a farmers market organization worked on the Farmer Fund. Originally an internal fund for Georgia Organics programs, the Farmer Fund morphed into an emergency farmer fund for disaster relief or medical emergencies. After Storm Elliott, the fund supported 57 farmers who were on average awarded 70% of funds requested. Additionally, farmers markets were fundraising and promoting GoFundMe’s for farmers.

### 2. Education

Farmers market managers used their platforms to inform the customer community of the magnitude of loss. However, it was not just customer education. Market managers became knowledge access points for farmers to receive the support they needed.

## 3. Navigation of Support Systems

Many farmers expressed overwhelm at accessing available resources. Though aware of programs, grants, and relief options, they struggled to identify the correct ones and lacked time to navigate systems to access supports. Some farmers market managers and organizers helped farmers by identifying resources, collaborating on applications, and creating toolkits where all the options are easily identifiable and accessible.



The Farmer Fund received 57 applications requesting around \$470,000 and were able to award \$190,735



communityfarmersmarkets Dear community, our farmers were struck hard by last week's unprecedented temperatures. Many lost most of their winter crops or faced severe damage. Representing not only a huge loss of time and money invested in these crops (an investment they won't be able to turn into profit) but also a significant setback to an already challenging season.

Farmers play a vital role in healing the climate challenges we are all experiencing. Being on the front lines of this fight exposes them to great difficulties. We urge our community to show up for them in the next year.

Our winter markets will open next weekend, and you can support them by:

Showing up  
Buying anything and everything they have to offer  
Checking in on them

you can make a tax-deductible donation before the year ends, head to georgiaorganics and donate to the Farmer Fund. They will provide direct farmer support to mitigate the impact of this loss during the 2023 winter season.

farmers, applications for the Farmer Fund are currently open. Thank you for your tenacity and for nourishing our community. We are here for you.

Thank you for making up such a strong community. We hope everyone has a safe NYE!  
See you in January for winter weekend markets and weekday mini-markets.

Instagram post from a local farmers market organization using social media as an education tool for both both farmers and customers

## Farmers felt lack of federal support

Interviewed farmers recounted a lack of government support. Available resources for navigating disaster (like crop insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) did not suit their needs. Some tried to access funding but struggled to navigate application systems. Farmers were unsure how farmers markets could better support them.

## Conclusions and Future Research

After Storm Elliott, farmers markets functioned as a liaison between farmers, customers, and larger organizations and institutions. While government programs are difficult to navigate and access, farmers market organizations provided support systems such as access to financial relief, educational support, and providing ways to better understand how to use federal programs.

These findings suggest that in Atlanta local agriculture has a civic agriculture system that is functioning as a local support network<sup>3</sup>. Considering the existing relationships between farmers and farmers market management, continuing and expanding this relationship could be beneficial. In the coming year, I plan on continuing my research into this relationship between farmers market management and farmers, as well as the idea of civic agriculture and how to better facilitate local networks.

### Acknowledgements

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2021-38640-34724 through the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under subaward number LS22-368. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.

Thank you to Hilary King, Scott Schnur, and Seng Aung Sein Myint for your help. Special thanks to the farmers and food system representatives who participated.