



Food System Assessment for the Portland Metropolitan Region

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Emergency food provisions have always been part of disaster planning, but recent events have caused emergency planners to reconsider their approach. Over the last several years, there have been increasing demands on local emergency management offices in the region to mobilize disaster food responses for wildfires and extreme weather events, often in areas already facing chronic food insecurity and by partners facing decreasing capacity and resources. This food system assessment was conducted to help the region better understand the vulnerabilities of the area's food system (i.e., where the system will break) and identify opportunities for partners to coordinate and collaborate (i.e., what we should do to be able to respond quickly, efficiently, and equitably and to speed up local food system recovery).

The [Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization](#) (RDPO) engaged [The Feeding Cities Group](#) (FCG) to identify priorities for strengthening emergency management plans around food provision to ensure an efficient and equitable response, and to develop strategies for minimizing the impact of disasters on local food systems. Using the FCG approach, this assessment focused on how the region can better prepare both for the provision of food during disasters, and the recovery of food retail stores and food assistance after disasters.

The project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) program. The study area focused on the five counties that make up the RDPO service area: Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, and Columbia counties in Oregon and Clark County in Washington.

Planning Priorities Identified

The resulting report, Food System Assessment for the Portland Metropolitan Region, shares five high-level findings and cross-jurisdictional recommendations of actionable, strategic, and geographic planning priorities that may lessen the impact of even minor disasters and make the most of limited resources.

1. Centralize coordination for food system planning: there is no single coordinating structure for food. Emergency response actions related to food fall under multiple coordination structures, which can lead to inefficiencies in disaster food provision and hinder planning.

2. Mass care feeding plans: each county is ultimately responsible for feeding its residents after a disaster, but current county-level mass feeding plans are inadequate for mid-sized events.
3. Mass care feeding plans for at-risk communities: the FCG identified communities in each county most at risk of experiencing a food crisis after a disaster because they have a combination of socially vulnerable populations and vulnerable food systems.
4. Interventions for food retail resilience in priority areas: the faster that food retail stores return to normal operations, the shorter the duration of disaster feeding operations. The FCG identified communities in each county to prioritize for food retail interventions.
5. Local food distribution resilience: interventions for the food distribution centers or warehouses and transportation routes that connect to local food retail stores and food assistance organizations are needed to ensure their resilience to disasters.

A Springboard for Action

The priorities and momentum created by the project's community engagement form a foundation for additional planning efforts, going beyond the RDPO and ideally bringing in other philanthropic, non-profit, and government initiatives. Next steps involve convening cross-jurisdictional work groups to organize and prioritize actions, and identify implementation leads and other partners.

This will not only push the priorities forward but will also build shared knowledge and advance practice across local emergency management partners and food system partners.

Click [here](#) to download the full report. For more information about the project or report, contact Carol Chang at the RDPO at Carol.Chang@portlandoregon.gov.