Recovery of Texas Small Family Farms Following Hurricane Harvey

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The rising STAR of Texas

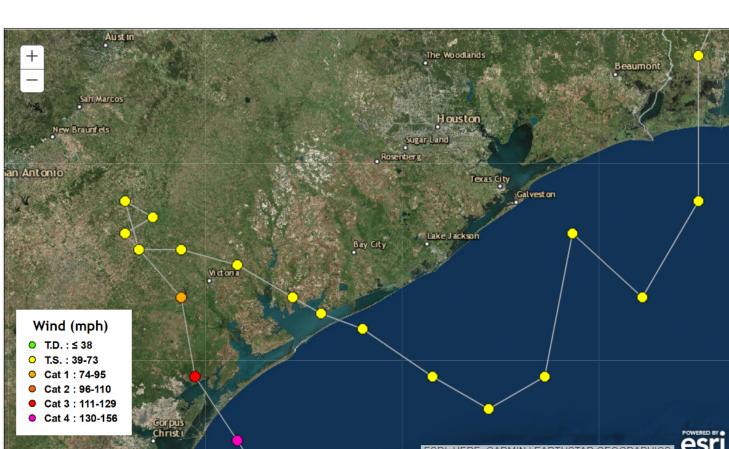
Hurricane Harvey

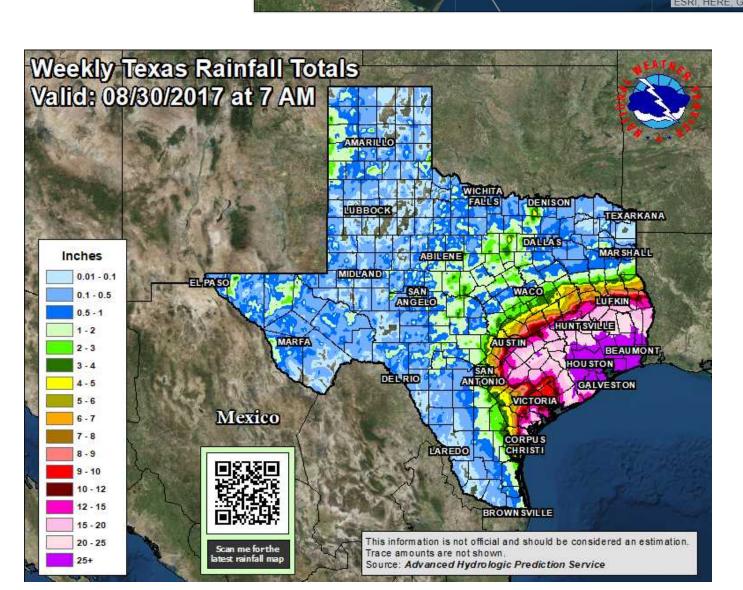
Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 Hurricane, made landfall 30 mile NE of Corpus Christi, TX on August 25th, 2017. Peak wind gusts at landfall were 132 mph and storm surges of 12 feet destroyed buildings and infrastructure. After landfall, Harvey stalled for days, producing up to 60.5 inches of torrential rain, flooding coastal, central and south Texas.

TEXAS

GEOGRAPHY

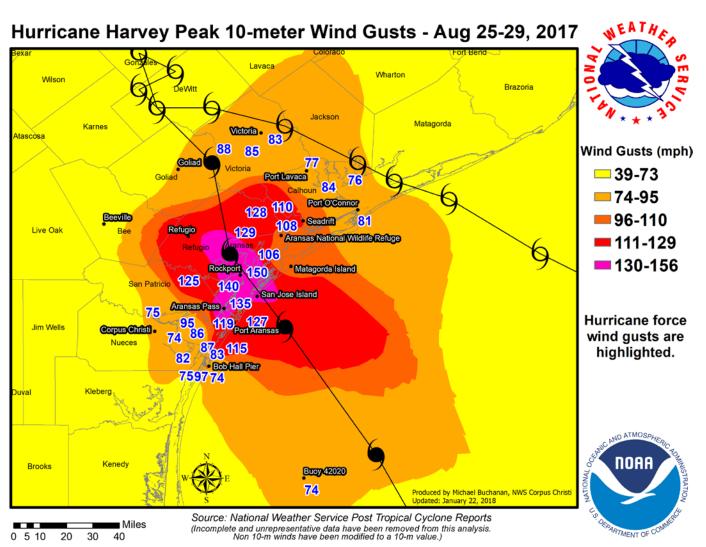
Path of Hurricane Harvey, August 25-29, 2017 (National Weather Service 2017)

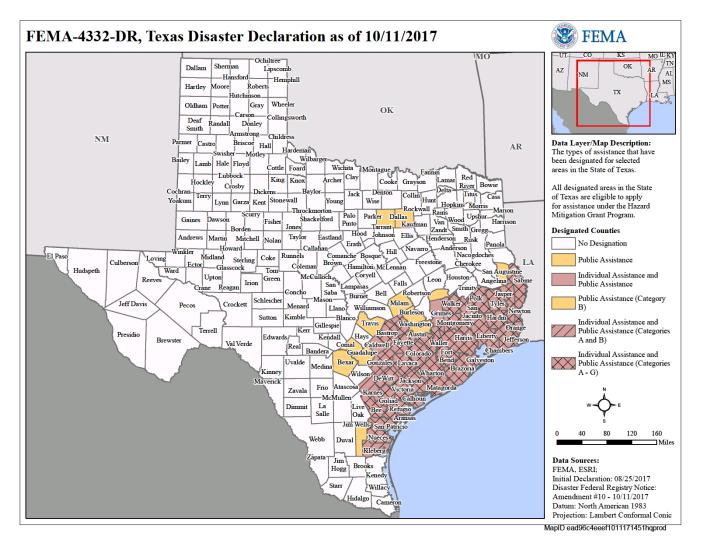




Weekly Texas rainfall totals ending 30th August 2017. (National Weather Service 2017)

Hurricane
Harvey Peak
10-meter Wind
Gusts —
August 25-29,
2017.
(National
Weather
Service 2017)





Texas Disaster
Declaration
FEMA-4332-DR,
Hurricane
Harvey (Federal
Emergency
Management
Agency 2017)

Texas Small Family Farms

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small family farm as a farm with gross cash farm income of less than \$350,000. This category is further subdivided according to the principal occupation of the main operator (retirement or off-farm occupation/part-time farmers) and the level of cash sales (low sales <\$150k or moderate sales \$150k - <\$350k) (USDA 2015).

Total Texas Farms (TTF): 248,809
Texas Small Family Farms (TSFF): 234,503 (94% of TTF)
Off-Farm Occupation: 107,232 (43.1% of TSFF)
Retirement Farms: 87,905 (35.3% of TSFF)
Low Sales (<\$150K): 34,835 (14% of TSFF)
Moderate Sales (\$150k-<\$350K): 4,350 (1.8% of TSFF)

Impact on Small Family Farmers

Harvey's high winds and record flooding impacted a large, rural population of small family farms, with early agricultural damage estimates at over \$200 million. Sixty counties were declared disaster areas by the State of Texas. These counties contain 77,841 farms encompassing 20,767,979 acres of farmland, and 94% of Texas's farms are classified as small family farms.

Research Population

Following Hurricane Harvey, the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (TOFGA) was approached by Farm Aid to manage \$30,000 in relief grants for affected Texas small family farms. Seventy-six farms applied for the \$500 grants, and 58 were awarded in 20 counties.

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TOFGA

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ASSOCIATION

This research will survey affected farmers to determine their current. operating status, ongoing needs and to request interviews. This research can help guide resilience and recovery strategies specific to small family farms

Obstacles To Recovery

In addition to the known obstacles of disaster recovery, such as supply disruption, interrupted power, communication and water supplies, and lack of labor, small family farms face the lack of business insurance; limited financial resources; geographic isolation; daily needs of surviving livestock including clean food and water; the extended time needed to grow new crops or livestock; and the loss of markets, among others.

Results

Initial outreach to a small number of affected farmers indicated a variety of concerns.

1. Lack of capital and high cost of recovery (dead livestock, destroyed feed and forage, damaged and destroyed buildings, vehicles, and equipment).

"The biggest obstacle is working capital. We have to rebuild our infrastructure – everything from, everything from the ground up. Every single thing. We lost everything that we need to farm. From barns, animal pens, fences, all the way down to our hand tools. We even lost the soil in our gardens."



Four Strings
Farm wind
damage in
Rockport, TX.
(Four Strings
Farm, Rockport
TX 2017)

2. Lack of insurance options for small farms.

"The Livestock Indemnity Program, it recently changed. An egg laying chicken, they pay two dollars. A meat chick they pay something like a quarter. It's honestly not worth your time to go do that. To go through the government bureaucracy."

"We had agricultural insurance, an ag policy, that did not cover – and it was expensive – and it didn't cover anything that the storm damaged. We had wind and we had flooding and it didn't cover anything."

Drowned chickens at Whitehurst Heritage Farm in Cypress, TX. (Whitehurst Heritage Farm 2017)



3. Impact on small, part-time and retirement farmers.

"One disaster that's bad and they're done. There not trying to come back."

4. Loss of customers and other farms.

"Of the Rockport clients, four months after the hurricane, none of them were able to buy a farm share. Literally 100% of our area customers were effected."



Farmer demonstrating the depth of the flood water on equipment with ruined hay bales in background. (USDA

5. Government bureaucracy

"You cannot rely on the government for anything except a hassle. We have had no help from the government in any way, shape, or form."

Recommendations

1. Have reserve working capital.

"Follow Joel Salatin's advice of having a year's income in the bank before you start. Be able to live a year and not make money."

"At any point you've got to be in a situation where you can afford to lose a month's income. You've got to be able to absorb it. Because it's going to happen."

2. Have a strong personal network.

3. If you have insurance, know what it covers.

"Be extremely careful how you insure your property and yourself. You need to partner with and an insurance professional who has your best interests at heart, and get a lawyer, or an extremely veteran farmer, to look over your policy. Because you will pay thousands and thousands in premiums and likely be uncovered when something happens. And maybe the best coverage is no coverage."

References

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