

# Path to Preparedness

## Building Emergency Capabilities in Southwest Georgia

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### BACKGROUND

Georgia is consistently faced with a variety of natural disasters including hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, and floods. These events can sometimes strike without warning and leave our citizens vulnerable, as we experienced with Hurricane Michael in October 2018. Preparation is critical in order to avoid losses sustained to families, homes, and farms. With offices in all 159 counties in Georgia, University of Georgia (UGA) Extension faculty and staff are ideally located to assist communities in times of need by providing necessary information and training for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.

However, before Extension agents can help others, they must first be trained themselves. A state-level team from UGA was awarded a USDA NIFA grant to establish foundational competencies in emergency preparedness. Each Extension district also established their own Emergency Preparedness Team (EPT) comprised of agents from all three program areas: Agriculture & Natural Resources, Family & Consumer Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development. The Southwest District EPT set out to first prepare themselves for disasters that affect their unique geographic location in Georgia.

### OBJECTIVES

The first phase focused on basic training for Extension agents:

- Train Southwest District EPT members in basic emergency management principles, including continuity of operations plans (COOPs) and the incident command system
- Build on the basics by completing community emergency response team (CERT) training
- Work with County Extension Coordinators to establish written COOPs for all 41 counties in Southwest District

### METHODS & RESULTS

The Southwest District Emergency Preparedness Team completed numerous trainings and accomplished great things in the first year of the project.

After completing the FEMA training "ICS 100: Introduction to the Incident Command System", the EPT attended a three-day small teams training. This included instruction from GA Department of Agriculture, GA Emergency Management Agency, and UGA emergency subject matter experts.



EPT members completed an additional four-day hands-on Community Emergency Response Team training. Members learned about fire safety, disaster psychology, mass casualty incidents, search and rescue, and terrorism.

COOPs were written for county offices by CECs under the direction of EPT team members. COOPs laid out a plan of action to keep the Extension office running smoothly when presented with an emergency situation.



Finally, agriculture agents on the EPT were provided with drones for agricultural damage assessments. The drone training consisted of Federal Aviation Administration rules, lessons learned from Hurricane Michael, and flight time getting familiar with how to operate the drone.

### IMPACTS

**150+** faculty and staff protected by a COOP

**412** total training hours received by agents

**2,717,000** acres in Southwest District that can be evaluated by ag agents with drone training, within a 1-hour drive

### NEXT STEPS

The second phase focuses on Extension agents educating their communities:

- Southwest District EPT members instruct families, farmers, and local business owners on emergency management principles
- Drone-trained agents demonstrate visual documentation capabilities to farmers and emphasize need for photos before and after a disaster
- County Extension Coordinators conduct annual updates on their COOP and refresher training for office staff

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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