

A Framework for Equitable Resilience

Resilience Playbook Project Team 2022

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The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the many ways people working in communities and governments are developing comprehensive approaches to preparing, responding, and recovering from disaster and disruption. The playbook captures some, but certainly not all, of these approaches to provide guidance to future food systems leaders for when similar disruptions inevitably occur. The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing climate crises show us that disruptions are inherently unpredictable and affect each community differently. Therefore, we know a top down, prescriptive approach to disaster preparedness won't work. It's also critical to understand how systemic injustice impacts people's ability to prepare, respond, and manage disruptions in the food system. Addressing inequity is a key aspect of disaster preparedness and response, but also a core component of building vibrant, robust, and equitable food systems.

Throughout the Local and Regional Food Systems playbook, we use the term resilience because it communicates that the strengths and vulnerabilities of communities change across time and place. The term resilience is often associated with examples of individuals and communities persisting through adversity. We recognize that the term can also normalize and perpetuate the conditions that create inequality and adversity in the first place.

Below is an outline of the playbook's approach to and understanding of resilience as a concept, emphasizing the *process* of achieving and maintaining resilience of any system (food system, educational system, ecosystem, etc.). Understanding resilience as a dynamic, relational, and evolving process, and not something to "achieve" allows us to focus on a learning process, rather than a destination.

The processes necessary for fostering resilience look different for every community and change over time. No single program, policy or model will work everywhere all the time. However, systems are strongest when their resources, connections, and information are readily accessible by everyone impacted by them, and all needs of all people are met. Therefore, connecting with stakeholders across multiple sectors, organizations, and places to amplify expertise and resources is fundamental to quick problem solving, adaptation, and other resilience processes.

It is important to acknowledge that within disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, it is nearly impossible to ensure everyone is included.

We think that success is measured by doing the best work, for the most vulnerable people within your existing networks. also includes intentionally doing work outside of times of crisis to build inclusive and community centered networks and relationships.

The playbook outlines a framework that, while relational, is not designed to provide specified guidance or geographic nuance to specific stakeholders. It doesn't provide a one-size-fits-all model or an all-encompassing checklist for becoming a resilient community. Rather, it is a tool to help situate yourself within your local and regional food system and form relationships with the diverse stakeholders that reflect your geographic context, scale, and community dynamics. It summarizes best practices from across the nation that people working on the ground have developed in the midst of emergencies. The playbook reflects the best of what local and regional food systems across the country are capable of in times of need in the hope that future food systems leaders will not have to “reinvent the wheel” when they face similar disruptions.

LRFS Resilience in Action

Raised in playbook are practical guidance and experiences from on-the-ground actors with big picture assessments of how Local and Regional Food Systems (LRFS) are uniquely impacted and positioned to respond in times of disruption. It also covers how LRFS can continue to organize and engage in processes that foster equity and resilience between disruptions to minimize the need for vulnerable communities to bear the brunt of the negative impact.

Case studies, interviews, worksheets, and other materials ground this work in what LRFS stakeholders think and believe, and how those thoughts, values and frameworks are translated into day-to-day action. The food systems disruptions and breakdowns we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic brought vulnerability of consolidated systems to the forefront. There are many lessons that LRFS can teach about resilience in action through local and regional food systems that are diffuse, diverse, adaptive, and redundant.

Rather than swinging between a focus on maximizing market efficiency in ‘good times,’ and command and control approaches in ‘bad times’ – this approach sees the three dimensions of preparedness, response, and recovery as ongoing and interlinked. How do we organize LRFS in a way that acknowledges and accounts for the inevitability of disruption, attends to underlying vulnerabilities and structural injustices, and guides strategic investments of time, money, and social capital to realize a shared vision?

A singular focus on maintaining markets will not resolve every underlying vulnerability; nor will a singular focus on charity-model emergency response. Communities across the country have proven their extraordinary capacity to care for themselves when given the opportunity and freedom to do so. Local and regional farms and food businesses provide invaluable support to their communities in times of disruption precisely because they're dynamic, adaptive, and relational.

Seven practices and principles key to establishing resilient and equitable processes for local and regional food systems are outlined in Figure 1.

PRACTICES & PRINCIPLES FOR EQUITABLE RESILIENCE



LRFS leaders must **identify systemic barriers** to ensure that those most impacted by a disruption can access resources and information.



Impacted communities must have **access to resources, markets, and expertise** to ensure flexible, redundant, and innovative adaptations in times of disruption.



Resources and relationships must **incorporate different scales** of operations and diverse stakeholder groups to make sure that response efforts are aligned and efficient.



Share with and learn from related food system networks across market channels, regions, or other factors to introduce new expertise, examples, and resources in times of disruption and growth.



Ongoing and regular **community dialogue** is necessary to develop shared visions for vibrant, equitable food systems and identify and evaluate areas of change, growth, and needed adaptation.



Have connections with networks and partners who can adjust, innovate, and respond to geographically-specific supply chain needs, have a broad and skilled work force, and **leverage deep connections** with, and knowledge of communities.



Develop long-term preparedness, response and recovery strategies that incorporate **cross-sector relationships**, public/private partnerships, grassroots/government initiatives that reinforce each other by sharing information, resources, and relationships.



Figure 1. Designed by Annelise Straw, USDA

Thanks for reading!

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For more information and resources on Local and Regional Food Systems Response to COVID: Recovery and Resilience, visit www.lfscovis.localfoodeconomics.com.

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