

Defining Emergencies for Small-Scale Farmers: A Framework for Policy and Support

The broad definition of "emergency" for small-scale farmers encompasses events that have sudden, unexpected or immediate effects that disrupt agricultural operations, such as biological outbreaks, climate events or water scarcity. Regulatory changes, which typically involve a long-term public process, can have negative impacts on a small-scale operation's economic viability. Small-scale producers typically lack the financial and logistical resources to quickly mitigate these threats independently, necessitating clear recognition and proactive policy support. This definition guides policies for disaster relief, labor support, and long-term resilience, ensuring small farms are protected during crises and supported in adapting to ongoing challenges.

Defining 'Emergency' for Small-Scale Producers and Ranchers

For small-scale farmers and ranchers, an "emergency" can be defined as any sudden or unforeseen event or condition that significantly threatens or disrupts their agricultural operations, livelihoods, or the environment they depend on. This definition encompasses a wide range of challenges and risks, including but not limited to:

1. Biologic: Outbreaks of pests or diseases affecting crops, livestock, or reduction or loss of beneficial species crucial to farm ecosystems.
2. Pest quarantine due to pest infestations that restrict movement of produce or animals.
3. Animal disease: Outbreaks of contagious diseases.
4. Water contamination, quality, and access: Sudden or prolonged lack of water availability due to pollution or degradation of water sources critical for irrigation, livestock, or drinking.
5. Extreme weather events: Immediate impacts of climate change such as storms, floods, freezes, hail, tornadoes, typhoon etc.
6. Fire, smoke, fire-residue (ash/soot): Wildfires or controlled burns causing damage to crops, livestock, or infrastructure, and affecting air quality.
7. Drought: Prolonged periods of low rainfall leading to water scarcity and reduced crop yields.

8. Extreme heat, heat illness, sunburn/sun blast: High temperatures posing risks to both crops, livestock, and people potentially causing heat stress or sunburn.
9. Wind events: Severe windstorms damaging crops, buildings, or infrastructure.
10. Earthquake: Sudden ground movements causing structural damage to farms or infrastructure.
11. Pandemic and Related Emergency: A pandemic and its related emergencies refer to widespread health crises that cause significant disruptions to labor availability, supply chains, and market demand.
12. Policy Implications for Small Farms: Small farms are highly vulnerable to changes in government regulations, agricultural policies, and labor availability, which can significantly impact their ability to compete and grow. Policies on subsidies, market access, labor costs, and immigration are particularly critical, as even minor shifts can strain their already tight margins and operational stability.
13. SGMA Implementation: Groundwater access, adjudication of critically overdrafted basins: Regulations and legal processes concerning sustainable groundwater management, affecting irrigation and water availability.
14. Supply Chain Disruptions: Increased input costs and/or shortages of essential resources.
15. Land Access / Lease: Access to agricultural land is often hindered by issues like land tenure, leases, and disputes between farmers and landowners. These conflicts can disrupt farm operations and threaten long-term viability.

Definition Revision Clause

The current definition of "small-scale producer" used in this document aligns with the definition provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This definition is subject to change. In the event of updates or revisions to the USDA definition, this document will be reviewed and amended as necessary to ensure alignment with the most current standards and criteria.

Authored by Subcommittee: Josefina Lara Chavez-Chair, Patrick Mitchell, Anna Knight