When Agriculture Bites Back

Preparing Today for Tomorrow’s Black Swan
The Black Swan: When Agriculture Bites Back

“For the life of me, I cannot understand why the terrorists have not, you know, attacked our food supply. Because it is so easy to do.”

- T. Thompson, Former Secretary of Health and Human Services

• Human nature discounts events that have yet to occur
• Agriculture is vulnerable
• Agro-Terrorism could disrupt the economy, cause panic, and discredit the government
  • Could lead to chaos and anomie
• Food security / food shortages: U.S. legislation focuses on agencies and stakeholders, not the average citizen

“We plan for what we know how to respond to, and forget about what we don’t want to face.”
Background: Lessons from our Recent History

Despite post 9-11 legislation, research indicated a comprehensive response plan does not exist across federal, state, and local levels to mitigate responses to food insecurity / food shortages.

DHS and USDA lack a strategy to identify and safeguard agriculture from terrorist attacks.

• Agriculture and food industry are important to economic stability

• Several variables have potential to bring a government to its knees (PMEIIL-PT)
  • Economics, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Time can be impacted by agro-terrorism

• Goal of Terrorism = Fear, distrust in government, economic instability => Impact of agro-terrorism
The Unknown can Unhinge any Community

Data from Ethnographic Case Study of Yuma, Arizona Residents

• Potential of social instability and chaos exists
• Yuma residents: high social capital, community resilience, and trust … but …
• Lack of emergency preparedness, knowledge, and expectation management can create divide
• Residents’ level of trust in neighbors also decreased when introduced to scenario
Feasible Means to Prepare for the Black Swan

Observation: Current emergency preparedness announcements provide information on what to do (be informed, make a plan, build a kit, go to the website for more information). But it does not tell citizens how to do it (ensure each person has a gallon of water per day for hydration and hygiene in the 72-hr emergency kit).

Recommendation: Trivia campaign to better disseminate information from Ready.gov

Phase I: Educate
• Teach citizens how to make plans, what to include in the 72-hr kits, which organization is responsible for what kind of assistance.

Phase II: Test and Reward
• Citizens participate in a game of trivia
• Leverage existing local government partnerships with local businesses for sponsorship of rewards (e.g., gift cards and prizes)

What: “Be Ready Trivia Campaign”
Why: Critical information to educate citizens on how to build and plan & what to do and expect
How: Already established social media and broadcast systems
Who: Volunteers (CERT & EMS)
When: Select days of the week during high volume time based on the venue “Trivia Twitter Thursdays” “Facebook Trivia Fridays”

Curriculum Modules:
A: Building Emergency Kits
B: Making a Plan
C: Knowing When to Evacuate or Shelter in Place
D: Expectation Management

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Examples: Twitter, Facebook, Radio Broadcasts

Radio Broadcast Script (30 seconds): And now for our “Be Ready” Emergency Preparedness Trivia Campaign message of the day. Did you know that when you are making your 72-hr kit you should include one gallon, per person, per day for drinking and hygiene? Learn more about preparing your emergency kit on “www.dot.ready.dot.gov forward slash make-a-plan” [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan]. This message was brought to you by our proud sponsor Wegmans, Every Day You Get Our Best.

Twitter from FEMA (example only)

Facebook post from CERT (example only)
Conclusion

• Human nature discounts events that have yet to occur, **we must improve our mindsets**

• Agriculture is vulnerable

• Agro-Terrorism could disrupt the economy, cause panic, and discredit the government
  • Could lead to chaos and anomie

• Empowering citizens through education and practical application is paramount to improving emergency preparedness
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