Perceived Threats to Food Security and Possible Responses Following an Agro-Terrorist Attack

LaMesha Lashal Craft
Walden University, lamesha.craft@waldenu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/current
Part of the Food Security Commons

Recommended Citation
Craft, LaMesha Lashal, "Perceived Threats to Food Security and Possible Responses Following an Agro-Terrorist Attack" (2017). Current/Present Programs & Posters. 24.
http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/current/24
Perceived Threats to Food Security and Possible Responses Following an Agro-Terrorist Attack
LaMesha Craft, PhD

Abstract
Terrorist attacks against food and water supplies (agro-terrorism) are a national security threat due to the assessed fear, economic instability, and social instability that could occur following a food shortage. Findings indicate that a comprehensive response plan does not exist and perceived fears and the lack of knowledge in a society with high social capital can still create conditions for chaos and anomie.

Problem
Current research is deficient in understanding how a lack of social capital and community resilience could be the catalyst for social disorganization and possibly anomie during an attack that threatens basic needs such as food security.

This research identified potential catalysts to social disorganization and anomie sparked by perceived threats.

Purpose
Examine, describe, and analyze perceived threats to food security and possible responses to food shortages to a hypothetical agro-agricultural community in Arizona and the possible implications of an attack that threatens basic needs such as food security.

Research Questions
What are the perceived threats to food security in an agricultural community in Arizona and the possible responses to food shortages to a hypothetical agro-terrorist attack on the U.S. food supply?

Findings
A plan does not exist. Yuma’s emergency management plan only addresses the most common disasters, not agro-terrorism or food security.

Conclusions
The lack of a plan to address agro-terrorism and possible food shortages directly correlates to the potential severity of impacts beyond the agricultural community to include disrupting the economy, undermining confidence in the local government, and challenging the resilience of communities.

Limitations
This study may have been limited in a few ways.

• The field study occurred in June 2016 after harvest season ended and migrant workers departed.

• No representatives from the Yuma Department of Agriculture, Yuma County Water Users Association, and the American Red Cross participated in my study.

• Only the perspective of 9 residents and 6 experts.

Social Change Implications
• Addressing threats to agriculture and food security are key elements of homeland security.

• Data could assist Yuma officials in capitalizing on positive aspects of social capital and community resilience.

• Emergency managers could apply recommendations for developing a “Did You Know” trivia campaign to improve citizens’ knowledge of the 72hr emergency kit and the roles and responsibilities of organizations.

• Experts could also explain the concept of primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency program to help citizens establish a family response plan.

• Results of this study may demonstrate the need to include black swan scenarios into emergency management plans.

Relevant Literature
Social capital theory: Social capital exists in societies where individuals recognize the mutual benefit of developing networks and working towards shared goals. This study researched bonding social capital. However, before, during, and after disasters, all three types of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) influence relationships within a community.

Community Resilience: Related to emergency preparedness and social capital; is a key component to stable communities. A community with strong bonds may decrease the likelihood of social disorganization.

Agriculture: Is vulnerable; agro-terrorism could disrupt the economy, cause panic, and discredit the government.

Food Security/Food Shortages: Food security exists when there are sufficient levels of safe/nutritious food to meet daily needs. U.S. legislation focuses on agencies and stakeholders; not the average citizen.

The lack of training at the individual/community level could exacerbate conditions of fear and uncertainty following a perceived threat to food security.

Procedures
Qualitative ethnographic case study

Purposeful sample
• 9 residents, 6 experts
Location, agricultural background, demographics

Data Analysis
Resident Interview Questions were based on the Index of Perceived Community Resilience. Focused on: a) perceptions of fear following a threat to food security; b) feelings about local government’s ability to provide assistance when threats to food security exist; c) levels of social capital; and d) existence of community resilience.

Expert Interview Questions focused on: a) organization’s involvement in preparation against threats to food security; b) responsibility to the citizens of Yuma following a disaster that threatens food security; c) perceptions of social networks and social cohesion among citizens; and d) the perceived functionality of community resilience.

Social capital exists in societies where individuals recognize the mutual benefit of developing networks and working towards shared goals. This study researched bonding social capital. However, before, during, and after disasters, all three types of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) influence relationships within a community.

Method of Attack: does not have to come from U.S. needs be effective in souls, vulnerabilities, abilities, and can be any weapon.

Real or Perceived Food Insecurity: The fear or perceived threat of a food shortage (food insecurity, food scarcity) is a threat that could occur following one or more agro-terrorist attacks within a community. The fear from a terrorist attack could yield more reaction than a standard outbreak.

Community Resilience: has been cited in several documents regarding homeland security/defense and emergency management preparedness. Considered an essential element of national resilience.

Social capital theory: Lacks of social capital are one of the primary features of social disorganized communities. The theory will examine the complexity of human reactions to the threat to food security and the possibility of a food shortage.

Why Yuma, Arizona: Yuma is agriculturally significant, considered the winter lettuce capital of the world. It is 3rd in the nation for vegetable production - 93% of all the lettuce vegetables grown from Nov-March in the U.S. come from Yuma County.

Organizations Responsible for Food Security (According to Residents)

Committee: Drs. Christopher Jones (Chair), Raj Singh (Member), and Paul Rutledge (University Reviewer)