

# Seminole County Extension Aids County and Citizens in Hurricane Michael Recovery

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## Response

The County Manager and County Board of Commissioners called Seminole County Extension Agents Cindy Meadows and Andrew Warner to assist them at the emergency command center. The agents reported to the command center every day to assist with needs of Seminole County and its citizens.

In the weeks following the storm, the Meadows and Warner estimate providing 150 hours helping with recovery efforts in Seminole County. The breadth and depth of their leadership and service was incredible. They coordinated multiple tours for local, state and federal officials including Emergency Management agencies to assess agricultural and other damage from the storm. Additionally, they assisted with many tasks associated with county governments' needs. They delivered meals to 150 members of the National Guard Army Reserves that mobilized in the county's agricultural pavilion; meals to inmates conducting debris clean up; assisted neighbors with sawing and removing tree limbs and other debris; picked up hundreds of jugs blown roadside; delivered supplies where needed throughout county; provided cattle fence repair; clean up and temporary repair of the County Extension office grounds, roof, building and any task asked of them.

Additionally, the Extension agents worked with Seminole County Young Farmers to host two meetings for growers. These educational programs provided much needed information that helped farmers with everything from fence repair to updates from the United States Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency. Options for federal assistance on crop damage and assessments were continually shared. Meadows and Warner were also called on multiple occasions to set up and assist with TV interviews and media coverage from Atlanta, Dothan, and The University of Georgia's Office of Communication and Media team.

## Summary

Hurricane Michael caused catastrophic damage in Florida's panhandle and extreme Southwestern Georgia. One of the hardest hit areas in Georgia was Seminole County. This area of the state is extremely rich in agricultural production. The timing of Hurricane Michael could not have been any worse. Farmers were at the very beginning of harvest season. Crops were ready to be harvested and removed from the field, but there wasn't enough time as the hurricane's landfall was imminent. As a result, in just a few hours crops were destroyed, infrastructure was damaged, and thousands of families were left without electricity.

## Situation

On October 10, 2018, the lives of all 9,000 citizens turned upside down as the eye of storm, Hurricane Michael, paid a visit to Seminole County. The storm's powerful eye wall swept north-northeast through Seminole County — still as a Category 3 storm, with sustained winds up to 115 mph and gusts of up to 150 mph — delivering destruction in every square inch of the county. Hurricane Michael shocked the community with terrifying power, downing live oaks and pines and damaging hundreds of homes, uprooting acres of pecan trees and sweeping away the highly anticipated bountiful yields of the year's harvest. The morning after the storm 100 percent of Seminole County residents were without electrical power because of snapped poles and thousands of trees being blown onto lines, and for the most part, every road in the county was blocked by fallen trees and/or debris. The farms and everything else took a severe beating. The damage was so widespread that the Georgia Agriculture Department estimates a \$2 billion hit to the state's economy.

## Impact

Serving the citizens of Seminole County in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael was priority number one for UGA Extension agents Cindy Meadows and Andrew Warner. The economic value of their service is significant; however, the social and emotional value to humanity is immeasurable. Although the storm clean up and meeting needs of citizens continued for months following, power was eventually restored after several weeks, students returned to school and Extension programming began to resume. Warner continued supporting farmers and producers with federal disaster news, information and regional meetings. Meadows provided 4-H youth programming at the Extension office and in schools to help return a sense of normalcy back to youth. Upon returning to school in early November, Meadows worked with teachers to prepare over 30 fourth through sixth graders to participate in 4-H Project Achievement, a written and oral communication contest that builds confidence and public speaking skills in youth. They traveled to Moultrie to compete with 70% of the 4-H'ers earning first, second or third place awards. Meadows also conducted other life-skill building activities and service projects with youth and volunteers to help them experience being part of the recovery of Seminole County. From debris clean up to pumpkin carving, college tours, state and region fair projects, 4-H youth leadership conferences at Rock Eagle 4-H Center and so much more, Meadows and Warner engaged over 370 youth in opportunities to help them continue to learn and grow amidst the daily struggles of hurricane recovery and loss. In fact, Seminole County's local leadership selected them as Co-Citizens of the Year for 2018. The Donalsonville News story included this quote "Meadows and Warner are praised by their nominator and the judges for their countless selfless acts performed for the betterment of Seminole County and its citizens before, during, and after Hurricane Michael."

