



Keeping the South Supplied

**Food access, supply chain resilience,
and lessons from South Island severe
weather events**

Foodstuffs South Island – August 2026

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Executive summary

Severe weather events across the South Island have placed sustained pressure on New Zealand's food supply system.

While communities continued to access essential goods, this outcome is not always guaranteed. It's achieved through experience, strong relationships, and coordinated effort across the supply chain, rather than a system designed to operate seamlessly under prolonged disruption.

Food supply is a core component of community resilience. In many South Island towns, supermarkets are the primary, and sometimes only, reliable access point for food, water, and everyday essentials. This is particularly true for smaller and more remote communities, where alternative supply options are limited or non-existent.

In this context, Foodstuffs South Island (FSSI) plays an important role in maintaining food access for communities across the region.

FSSI is a co-operative of family owned New World, PAK'nSAVE, Four Square, and On the Spot stores. Together, we operate the South Island's most extensive and geographically dispersed grocery network. For nearly 100 years, this model has enabled us to serve communities ranging from major urban centres to remote rural towns - 35 of our stores serve towns with fewer than 5,000 people, and 54 serve towns with fewer than 10,000.

This scale allows stores to support one another, enables efficient distribution across long distances, and helps sustain food access in communities where a standalone model would struggle. It also provides flexibility to respond quickly when disruption occurs.

During emergencies, supermarkets and the supply chains that support them operate as an essential service for community wellbeing and continuity. They provide continuity of supply, support emergency services, and, where circumstances require, act as community hubs.

Severe weather events have highlighted opportunities to further strengthen resilience through continued collaboration and more deliberate system design. Building on work already underway between FSSI, local authorities, and central government agencies, areas for focus include:

- A store specific risk assessment that considers geography and hazard exposure, potential for isolation and community reliance
- Continue strengthening collaboration between FSSI and Civil Defence Emergency Management, including engagement in emergency planning and exercises where this can add value
- Ongoing consideration of freight prioritisation approaches during significant disruption, informed by shared operational experience
- Opportunities to enhance real-time information sharing between agencies, transport operators, and industry during response and recovery
- Targeted investment, where appropriate, in backup power, communications, and distribution capability in areas frequently affected by severe weather

This paper outlines FSSI's operational response, key observations, and practical opportunities to further strengthen food supply resilience. It also highlights emerging risks beyond weather events, including Cook Strait ferry maintenance and global fuel pressures, both of which have the potential to disrupt supply continuity.

Chief Executive's message

Foodstuffs South Island was founded on the belief that local grocers can achieve more for their communities by working together, across long distances and through unpredictable challenges.

Outside our main centres, many towns are small, remote and spread across testing terrain. Their reliance on the roads, ports, power networks and supply chains that connect them is part of everyday life. When those connections are disrupted, whether by severe weather, infrastructure failures or other events, the importance of a resilient food system quickly becomes clear.

Increasingly common severe and disruptive weather events are a sharp reminder of this reality. Despite frequent road closures, power outages and communications disruptions, food continues to reach communities because of the efforts of store teams, suppliers, our freight network and distribution centres, emergency management agencies and many others who work together under difficult circumstances.

For Foodstuffs South Island, these events reinforced something that has shaped us for nearly a century. Back then, local grocers recognised that by working together they could create the scale, efficiency and resilience needed to better serve their communities, while remaining locally owned and accountable. It's that combination of local decision-making supported by shared infrastructure, investment and capability that remains at the heart of our business today.

The experiences outlined in this paper demonstrate the value of that model. During disruption, local owner-operators are often among the first people to respond in their communities. Behind them sits a co-operative network of distribution centres, transport operations, suppliers and support teams working to reroute freight, prioritise essential goods and maintain continuity of supply. Together, these capabilities help ensure communities can continue accessing essential food and products when normal supply routes are disrupted.



Resilience is not the result of any one organisation. It is built through relationships, investment, experience and a shared commitment to keeping communities supplied. Many of those capabilities require long-term investment and scale, while remaining grounded in the needs of local communities.

As New Zealand considers the future of critical infrastructure and essential services, including priorities South Island Chambers of Commerce have collectively identified to support the region's future growth, it is important that resilience and food security stay part of the conversation. Strong food systems are not only measured by efficiency and value, but also by their ability to withstand disruption and continue serving communities when they need them most. Yes, food systems should be judged by their ability to deliver value for customers, but also by their ability to provide reliable access to food when communities need it most.

This paper shares what we observed during recent weather events, the strengths that emerged, and the opportunities we see to further reinforce the resilience of the South Island's food supply system. We present Keeping the South Supplied as a contribution to the discussion about how industry, government and communities can work together to ensure South Islanders continue to have reliable access to the essentials they need, before, during and after disruption.

Mary Devine

**Chief Executive Officer
Foodstuffs South Island**

Foreword from the Chair

In the South Island, distance is not just about geography, it determines how people and communities connect and work together.

For generations, South Islanders have rallied together to take on challenges too large to solve alone. The result has often been collaboration, mutual support and long-term thinking and many of the South Island's co-operatives were built on that very foundation.

From major centres to remote rural towns, reliable access to food across the South Island's challenging landscape depends on infrastructure, supply chains, local businesses and the people who work together to keep them operating.

Foodstuffs South Island was established nearly a century ago because independent grocers recognised they could achieve more together than they could alone. By combining the advantages of scale while remaining locally owned and connected to their communities, they created a co-operative that continues to support South Islanders today. That same principle remains at the heart of our co-operative. It enables locally owned stores to benefit from shared infrastructure, logistics capability, and investment that would be difficult for any business to replicate on its own, helping us support communities from major urban centres to some of New Zealand's most remote towns.

Destructive weather events over the last 12 months highlighted both the resilience and the vulnerability of the food supply system that South Islanders rely on. Road closures, power outages and communications disruptions placed significant pressure on communities and critical infrastructure. Yet they also demonstrated the importance of local knowledge, established partnerships, and a co-operative network capable of adapting quickly when conditions change.

This paper is not simply a record of how Foodstuffs South Island responded to those events. It is an opportunity to consider a broader question: What kind of food system does the South Island, and New Zealand more broadly, need for the future? As disruptive weather becomes more frequent and damaging, infrastructure faces increasing pressure and global



supply chains become more uncertain, the capability to keep communities supplied and support food security during disruption must remain front of mind.

We do not present Keeping the South Supplied as the final word on food supply resilience. Rather, we offer it as a contribution to an increasingly important discussion about the need for New Zealand to continue strengthening the systems that support communities during times of disruption. We have learnt more frequently than anyone would like that resilience cannot be assumed, but actively maintained, strengthened and invested in.

As Chair of Foodstuffs South Island, I am proud of how our owner-operators, team members, suppliers and partners respond during extreme weather and disruptions beyond our control. More importantly, I am confident that the spirit of co-operation that has served the South Island so well for generations remains one of our greatest strengths. The ability of locally owned businesses to work together, invest together and respond together will continue to play an important role in keeping communities supplied as we prepare for future challenges.

Marcel Gray

**Chair
Foodstuffs South Island**

Who we are

14,000+
team
members

175
family-owned
locally operated
stores

1.5
million
customer
transactions
each week

1.3
million
cartons
supplied
to stores via our
supply chain
each week

2,000+
suppliers

1
B2B brand
Trents
Wholesale

**4 retail
brands**
PAK'nSAVE
New World
Four Square
On the Spot

Key insights from severe weather events

- Supermarket supply chains operate as essential services during disruption, maintaining access to food for communities and responders
- Reliance on key transport links remains a significant vulnerability
- Communities hold limited food reserves and rely on frequent replenishment
- Coordination between local and central government agencies and industry has significantly strengthened in recent years



What works well

- Strong, established relationships across suppliers, transport providers, and local authorities enable organisations to work collaboratively in delivering for communities
- Local decision making supported by central coordination and visibility ensures the needs and interests of communities are consistently reflected in operational decisions
- Foodstuffs South Island co operative model enables both scale and local flexibility

Where the system could be further strengthened

- Clear and consistent approaches to freight prioritisation, where access is limited, support timely delivery of essential goods during disruption
- Continued investment in critical infrastructure such as key roads, interisland ferries, and ports

Our store network



Nelson/Marlborough

●	PAK'nSAVE	2 stores
●	New World	4 stores
●	Four Square	9 stores
●	On the Spot	12 stores
●	Trents	1 branch

West Coast

●	New World	3 stores
●	Four Square	4 stores
●	On the Spot	13 stores

Canterbury

●	PAK'nSAVE	8 stores
●	New World	23 stores
●	Four Square	16 stores
●	On the Spot	20 stores
●	Trents	2 branches

Otago/Southland

●	PAK'nSAVE	3 stores
●	New World	13 stores
●	Four Square	27 stores
●	On the Spot	13 stores
●	Trents	3 branches

Stewart Island

●	Four Square	1 store
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Severe weather

– a growing challenge

Severe weather events in the South Island are becoming more frequent, more intense, and more complex. This is placing increasing pressure on infrastructure, logistics networks, and communities, particularly where geographic isolation already presents challenges.

Between 2017 and 2026, the South Island experienced 51 local states of emergency, compared with 39 in the North Island, including two national events[^]. Increasingly, these events affect multiple regions simultaneously, stretching response capability and prolonging recovery.

New Zealand's food supply system operates on a continuous flow model. Supermarkets typically hold a few days to around a week of stock, with regular replenishment from distribution centres and suppliers. While this is efficient under normal conditions, the model depends on the consistent operation of transport, power, and communications.

When these systems are disrupted, impacts are felt quickly - particularly in smaller and more remote communities. Many communities would see reduced availability of key essentials within a short timeframe.

These risks are amplified by reliance on key transport links. Alpine passes, major bridges, and inter-island connections act as critical corridors for freight movement. When these are disrupted, entire regions can become isolated.

A multi-day disruption to Cook Strait would materially constrain supply into the South Island within days.

Disruptions rarely occur in isolation. Transport outages are often accompanied by power and communications failures, creating compounding impacts that are more difficult to manage and slower to resolve.

At the same time, demand patterns change rapidly. Uncertainty drives precautionary purchasing, often before any actual shortage occurs. This creates short-term spikes in demand, placing additional pressure on supply chains that are already operating under constraint.

In many South Island communities - particularly smaller towns - supermarkets are the central access point for essential goods. During disruption, and where circumstances allow, they also become informal support hubs, providing assistance to emergency services and the wider community.

[^]Source: Busy Few Years and Hazardscape – Civil Defence Report. Civil Defence New Zealand, 10 March 2026.
Available at: <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/documents/publications/Busy-Few-Years-and-Hazardscape-10-March-2026.pdf>



Four Square | Tekapo

What we've seen

Recent events have highlighted both the resilience and the fragility of the system.

Key events:

June – July 2025: Flooding in Nelson–Tasman isolated communities and damaged roads, farms and crops

October 2025: A multi-region event caused widespread outages across Southland, Canterbury, Kaikōura, and Banks Peninsula

July 2026: Severe storms caused floods with local states of emergency being declared in Oamaru and Kaikōura while heavy snow caused Alpine Pass closures

Common impacts:

- Road closures and landslips restricting access
- Multi-day power and communications outages
- Rapid increases in customer demand driven by uncertainty
- Heavy reliance on supermarkets for essential goods

What this makes clear:

Food supply is highly dependent on transport links remaining open and operational, and power being supplied. Disruptions cascade quickly through the system, customer demand rises sharply, and supermarkets become central to both community resilience and emergency response.

Foodstuffs South Island

response: **capability in practice**

Foodstuffs South Island's response to severe weather events demonstrates the value of an integrated, co-operative network with both central coordination and strong local capability.

Coordinated response

A central Incident Management Team is activated to establish priorities, coordinate resources, and maintain real time visibility of store operations across the network.

Strong agency coordination

Relationships with Civil Defence, New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), and other agencies have significantly strengthened over the last few years, through sustained engagement and practical collaboration. During events, this supports effective coordination, including situational awareness and, where possible, prioritised freight access.

Supplier and freight partnerships

Long standing relationships with suppliers and transport partners enables flexibility in sourcing, routing, and delivery under rapidly changing conditions.

Supporting communities

Stores experiencing the greatest disruption are prioritised. Essential goods such as water, bread, milk, and ambient staples are directed where need is highest. Foodstuffs South Island also supports emergency services and communities under boil water notices.

Case Study: **Four Square Hanmer Springs**

During the October 2025 storm, the Four Square in Hanmer Springs became a critical community hub.

Owner-operators John Dawber and Annie Truman maintained operations despite disruption, supported emergency services, and assisted a group of 150 stranded school children overnight.

Once access was restored, supply was quickly replenished, allowing the store to continue supporting recovery.

This reflects a broader pattern: local stores play a frontline role during emergencies, supported by the strength of the wider network.

This is what the system looks like at its best - local leadership backed by co-operative scale - but it depends on conditions holding.

Logistics and distribution

Keeping food moving across a large and sparsely populated region is complex. Distance, terrain, and population distribution all contribute to higher operational complexity.

FSSI's logistics networking, including Transport South Island (TSI) Logistics – a dedicated division providing a 24/7 freight network to every corner of the South Island, travels around 150,000km each week. It delivers 1.3 million cartons of goods to stores from Stewart Island to Collingwood, connecting major centres with smaller and more remote communities, many of which are hours from alternative supply options.

During severe weather events, several factors are critical:

- **Road access co-ordination:** Direct engagement with NZTA and Civil Defence enables priority access through restricted routes where it is safe to do so
- **Local intelligence:** Real-time updates from drivers and transport partners informs routing decisions
- **Distribution capability:** Investments such as FSSI's Hornby automated freezer significantly increases capacity and responsiveness, while FSSI's Dunedin distribution centre provides important regional support
- **Operational flexibility:** The ability to adjust delivery schedules, consolidate loads, and redirect stock is essential in maintaining supply

These capabilities are the result of long-term investment and co-ordination across the co-operative.

What works, and why

Several factors underpin the effectiveness of the response:

- **Scale and adaptability:** The network is designed to flex, allowing rapid adjustment to changing conditions
- **Strong relationships:** Established partnerships enable fast, co-ordinated action
- **Improved engagement with CDEM (Civil Defence Emergency Management):** Better connections support more effective communication and response
- **Local decision-making:** Store owners are able to respond quickly to the specific needs of their communities
- **Co-operative model:** Resources are shared across regions, ensuring support can be directed where it is needed most



Where the system is **exposed**

Severe weather events also reinforce a number of system-wide risks:

Reliance on key transport links

- Around 35% of groceries sold in the South Island have been moved via the Cook Strait ferry, putting particular importance on the reliability and resilience of this critical freight link.
- Key routes and particular bridges can be a single points of failure

Infrastructure vulnerability

- Road closures can isolate communities quickly
- Port capacity limits flexibility during large-scale disruption

Fuel supply risk

- Freight movement depends on reliable fuel supply
- Disruptions have immediate downstream effects

Store-level constraints

- Power outages and connectivity issues disrupt operations
- Staff fatigue and customer demand surges place pressure on local teams
- These risks are system-wide and require co-ordinated planning and ongoing investment.

Opportunities to strengthen resilience

Experience highlights several practical opportunities:

- **Freight prioritisation:** Continue developing shared approaches to prioritising essential goods during major disruptions
- **Information sharing:** Build on existing arrangements to support timely, shared situational awareness
- **FSSI's targeted investment:** Co-operative support for ongoing investment in backup power, communications, and distribution capability
- **Infrastructure alignment:** Strengthen alignment with national transport and fuel planning

A system perspective

Recent research reinforces these findings.

The Southern Lakes Food Resilience Report (2025) found that up to 95% of food in the Queenstown Lakes district is transported by road, and supermarkets typically hold less than one week of stock.

This reinforces the need for diversified supply chains, better emergency planning, and stronger co-ordination between public and private systems.



PAK'nSAVE | Queenstown

Foodstuffs South Island's commitment

Foodstuffs South Island is committed to strengthening food supply resilience through:

Continued collaboration

Working with government, CDEM, and industry partners

Participation

Engaging in planning and response exercises

Investment

Continuing to strengthen stores and logistics capability

Insight

Sharing operational experience to inform system design

Conclusion: from experience to resilience

Severe weather events have demonstrated that the South Island's food supply system is resilient, but operating under increasing pressure.

Supermarkets play a critical role in maintaining access to essential goods and supporting communities during disruption. As severe weather events become more frequent and complex, maintaining and strengthening this resilience will continue to rely on close collaboration between government, emergency management agencies, and industry.

Foodstuffs South Island brings scale, operational capability, and real world experience from working alongside partners during disruption. The co-operative will do what is required to ensure South Island communities have reliable access to the essentials they need – before, during, and after disruption.

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