Hurricane Preparedness Guidance for Livestock Owners

Hurricane season is a good time to dust off your farm-specific emergency response plan.

Preparation:
The most common threats affecting herds are flooding and downed fences. Fallen trees, collapsed structures and barbed wire fence-induced animal injuries are also commonly cited. Early preparation can help you mitigate losses should your farm be in the path of hurricane winds, storm surge, flooding, or spin-off tornadoes.

Review your insurance coverage and ensure you have up-to-date inventories of farm stock and supplies. Keep these and other important papers in a secure spot where you and other family members can quickly reach them. Include a list of emergency contact information for county emergency management (EMD), fire, police, utility companies, county Clemson Extension office, your veterinarian, and agricultural supply businesses. Speaking of EMD, develop relationships with these officials year-round so that they are aware of the importance of your farm operation; this could cut through some red tape if requesting permission for re-entry to an affected area or if other assistance is needed.

Examine your property for any structural defects or hazards "ready to happen" and make improvements. Reinforce barns and outbuildings, remove dead or weak trees, and repair fences. Consider barn roof construction: in past SC hurricanes, flying sheets of tin roofs have severely injured pastured animals. If there are low-lying, flood prone areas on your property, construct mounds or berms to allow livestock to reach high ground.

Develop reciprocal arrangements with neighboring farms so that if one of you is away the other can assist with animal care. Clearly post your evacuation plans, contact numbers (including family or friends out-of state), and animal feed and care instructions.

Ensure your animals' good health. Confer with your veterinarian to update vaccinations and for recommendations about dietary adjustments to reduce stress for your animals in the event that regular feed sources are temporarily cut off following the emergency.

Identify your animals so you can prove ownership should altered landscapes lead to displaced animals. Maintain photos and descriptions. Examples of permanent ID are accessible tattoos, ear tags with unique identifiers, and microchips. A livestock marking stick, freeze or hot brands, and luggage tags braided into manes can also be used for temporary ID.

Prepare a livestock emergency kit with supplies for farm use. Perform required generator maintenance throughout the year.

If you are considering evacuation with some or all of your animals, maintain a current list of potential destinations with their requirements. Keep an emergency kit handy and keep trailers, tires, and hitches in ready condition and practice loading animals. Consider back-up plans to get help from friends with trailers or from professional animal transporters.

When a storm is imminent:
Implement temporary feeding plans, if these have been recommended, to reduce stresses on your animals.

If you evacuate:
      Do it early – three days prior to landfall is best. Closed bridges, lane reversals, bumper-to-bumper traffic, and high winds are likely if you wait. Check to make sure they are expecting you at your destination! Be sure to comply with animal movement requirements: horses need current negative Coggins' test when co-mingling, animals need current interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) when crossing state

lines (interstate hurricane season waivers are possible but not guaranteed). If you set up a paddock at the temporary stable site, place it away from decorative/toxic plants and mark the top of the portable fencing with visible cloths every 4 to 6 feet.

If you stay:
Fill your gasoline tank and grab some extra cash to have on hand. Place feed in waterproof containers, cover hay with plastic tarps and store on pallets or other high, dry, area within a building. Secure all agricultural chemicals and fuel in areas not subject to flooding. Secure or remove objects that could become flying debris.

Implement temporary animal ID measures as described under Preparation. Determine the best place for your animals to go through the storm. Examine your property – barn structure, trees, power lines, low-lying areas -- and decide whether to move them to shelter or turn them outside.

If barn is secure and not in a flood prone area consider moving some or all animals to shelter there. Remove and secure loose items from the aisles. Provide access to hay or appropriate food source and clean water. Remember that automatic water systems may not be working if power outages. Trash cans filled with water can be secured inside stalls.

Animals turned out to pasture will follow their instincts to seek natural or manmade shelter. If necessary, open gates to allow access to higher ground.

Post-landfall:
Human life and safety will be the first priority but there will be systems in place at the county and state level to assist people with animals and agricultural businesses affected by the storm, including donations of hay, equipment and volunteer personnel. The first place to contact is your county EMD: they will seek resources to assist you and will also advise you how or if your assistance is needed should you care to offer it. Affected counties with overwhelmed resources will request help from state EMD who, in turn, will request outside help if needed.

Document property damages, along with photos and report to appropriate parties including your Clemson Extension agent who serves on the county emergency board.

If animals are missing, check to determine if they may have been collected and transported to a holding facility where you can claim them. You can also search via flyer, newspaper ad, craigslist or social media sites.

Examine your property for hazards, especially before letting animals temporarily sheltered indoors, back out onto pastures. Hazards include damaged fences and waste systems, downed power lines, flooded areas, gas and utility leaks, debris, looters, strange animals (including wildlife), and toxic plant parts (such as downed cherry tree leaves) that may have blown in. Observe any animals found on your property and report them so they can be checked or scanned for ID and returned to their owners.

Check animals for injuries, including feet and skin in animals with prolonged exposure to flooded areas, and for wire or string wrapped around limbs which may not be immediately obvious. If animals have been off regular feeding schedules, move back to regular diets slowly. Proportion access to water gradually, especially to pigs: offer small amounts initially to avoid salt poisoning.

Expect that animals may be temporarily disoriented, nervous, and even fractious following the event since the character, feel, smell, look and layout of their surroundings has changed. Animals that don't normally act up may fight to reestablish hierarchy and may need to be separated. As much as possible, use familiar personnel and protocols to assist them to re-acclimate.

If you are unfortunate enough to suffer large numbers of storm-related animal deaths, contact DHEC Ag Compliance personnel to determine if your farm carcass management plan needs to be reviewed or changed for this event.

Your Clemson Extension agent can help direct you to USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and any other resources that may be available to offer disaster assistance to you for your losses.

Livestock disaster kit:
- Waterproof containers
- Animal ID and proof of purchase paperwork
- Health records
- Medications and instructions
- 3 days feed and water and instructions
- Feed and water buckets
- Plastic trash barrel with lid
- Tarps
- Portable chutes, corrals, panels, fencing
- Breakaway non-nylon halters, lead ropes
- Lariats, nose leads
- Shipping boots, leg wraps
- Twitch or snare
- First aid kit
- Fly spray
- Grooming and hoof care tools
- Blankets, bandanas, fly masks
- Garden hose, garbage bags, duct tape, buckets
- Soap, disinfectant
- Tools including wire cutters, knives, shovel
- Gloves, boots, maps, radio, flashlight and batteries