

Disaster Readiness for Dairy Producers



Hurricane Katrina was devastating to Louisiana's dairy producers. In disasters of this magnitude, it is impossible to prevent all of the devastating losses. However, advanced planning

can help producers minimize the loss of animal lives and the health problems associated with all disasters. Due to the vulnerability of Louisiana to hurricanes and their potential to cause widespread damage due to high winds and flooding, hurricane preparedness is essential. And much of the disaster preparation for hurricanes will also help prepare for other disasters, such as fire, hazardous material spills, animal disease outbreaks, etc. It must be stressed that although help may be available from many sources following a disaster, producers themselves are ultimately responsible for the welfare of their animals, and should prepare accordingly.

Well in advance of a potential disaster situation, producers should evaluate their herd health programs with their veterinarian. Cattle that are exposed to the effects of a hurricane or undergo evacuation either before or after a disaster will be stressed. There may also be commingling with cattle from other herds, which breaches herd biosecurity and makes increasing herd immunity imperative. Pneumonia and abortions should be anticipated and can be minimized with proper herd nutrition and vaccination. Interruption of normal milking schedules can also contribute to stress and lead to mastitis. Mastitis vaccination and milking hygiene protocols should be evaluated in advance. One of the major problems for dairy producers following Hurricane Katrina was prolonged power outages. Although most dairies had generators available, many were old and failed after several days of constant use. Fuel availability was also a problem. Having relatively new, well-maintained generators and temporary sources of fuel will help minimize these problems.

Animal identification is also important. If cattle get evacuated and commingled, or escape and are later captured, it's essential to be able to identify the herd of origin. Many cattle look alike, and plain numbered dangle tags, leg bands, neck chains and tattoos can

be duplicated. Producers should identify the farm or ranch on any type of identification method or use electronic identification that is unique to each individual animal. Pictures and/or videos of cattle may also help identify cattle later.

In situations such as hurricanes where advanced warning is given, health papers should be provided by a veterinarian if cattle are to be evacuated, particularly if traveling across state lines. In some situations it may not be possible to evacuate or rescue all animals, so producers should prioritize animals so their most valuable stock gets attention first. Copies of herd records, proof of ownership and registration papers should be stored in a safe place.

If evacuation is planned, producers should partner with other farms to provide trucking and also evacuation space. Biosecurity issues (potential for disease transmission between herds) should be discussed when making these arrangements. Producers should have safe, efficient penning and loading facilities ready in advance. If flooding or high winds are expected and animals cannot be evacuated, they should be left in large open pastures and not put in barns.

Producers should coordinate plans with other local agriculture-related groups such as Extension Services, milk cooperatives, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Services and Farm Service Agencies, Farm Bureau, local cattlemen's associations, livestock auction markets, feed stores, etc. Different tasks such as livestock hauling; feed, fuel and generator acquisition and distribution; and animal evacuation, rescue and treatment should be assigned to individuals or groups in advance. Primary and contingent holding areas for evacuated and/or rescued cattle as well as staging areas for feed and fuel distribution should be identified in advance. Special evacuation routes for cattle should be considered so loaded trucks and trailers can keep moving to avoid heat stress in the animals.

In large-scale disasters involving high numbers of cattle, providing food and fresh water is the first prior-



ity. Although difficult in many situations, efforts should be made to have an emergency supply of feed and water stored in a safe place. Adult lactating dairy cows need 15-20 gallons of water per head per day in warm weather. Storage tanks previously holding chemicals should not be used to store water. If wells depend on electricity to pump water, hand pumps or generators should be available in case of electrical outages. Producers should make their local extension office aware in advance of the numbers of animals and their locations. This will help ensure that your dairy is included in immediate feed and fuel distributions if available.

Cattle that have been standing in water for prolonged periods of time may have skin infections and may be susceptible to tetanus. Dehydration and digestive upsets may occur if animals have been drinking water with high salinity or had drastic feed changes. Damage to chemical storage buildings and fences may allow cattle access to toxic chemicals or plants. Severely injured or sick animals may require veterinary treatment or euthanasia. If animals do need treatment, working facilities should be inspected before use as they may have been damaged. Access to portable working facilities should be arranged in advance. Ropes, halters and wire cutters should also be collected in advance and stored in a safe place. Plastic/nylon halters and ropes should be avoided in disasters involving fire, as they may melt on the animal and cause injury. With the help of a veterinarian, an emergency supply of medications and supplies can be readied in advance.

There is no way to prepare for every situation that arises in a disaster. However, by working closely with other producers and agricultural leaders, dairymen can lessen the impact of a disaster on their operation.

Disaster Readiness Checklist

Farm Environment

- Do preventative trimming of trees around barns, driveway and fences.
- Try to maintain as much freeboard in manure lagoon as possible to avoid potential overflow.
- Have on hand 3 to 4 spools of barbed wire plus 50 to 60 metal 'T' post to mend fence or to build a temporary fence.
- Calf hutches that are not in use should be stacked together if possible or anchored.

- Nail down all loose pieces of tin on barns.
- Attach extra guide wires to augers on grain bins.
- Have some extra tarps or shade cloth available to cover equipment if roof is blown off or to provide temporary shade.
- Remove shade cloth from portable shade structures to prevent damage.

Equipment

- Fill up all tractors, vehicles, generators and storage containers with fuel.
- Service generator(s) and make sure they are operational.
- Run the generator under a load for a couple of hours at least every two months.
- Set up generator in place before storm.
- If using a PTO-type generator, make sure the tractor being used has no fuel or oil leaks to prevent fire hazard.

Feed and Water

- Have about a two-week supply of all feedstuffs needed.
- Have an emergency supply of water.
- Put extra tires on top of silo to help hold down plastic.
- Move round bales from low-lying areas to an area that is readily accessible.

Animals

- Evaluate herd health program.
- Identify animals.
- Move all animals to high ground if possible.
- Remove calves from calf hutches made out of plastic or fiberglass if possible. If not, anchor the hutches down.
- Have a supply of intra-mammary mastitis treatment, broad spectrum antibiotics, electrolytes and calcium solutions, antiseptics, bandages, needles and syringes.

Miscellaneous

- Have some cash on hand (often credit cards will not work).
- Try to work with milk hauler and marketing co-op to have the least amount of milk in bulk tank possible prior to potential hurricane.
- Partner with other farms in remote areas for help.

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