

FARMSTEAD PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Texas is a leader in agriculture production contributing nearly 18 billion dollars in agricultural output each year from its 229,000 farms and ranches. Approximately 77 percent (or 129 million acres) of the total land in Texas is farmland. Agriculture producers are at significant risk from natural disasters including droughts, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires. Agriculture is also susceptible to terrorist acts that seek to damage property, destroy lives, and cause widespread economic damage.

Agriculture producers must realize the effect disasters will have on family members and co-workers, as well as the impact on livestock, crops, farm structures, machinery, water and food supplies, and other bulk materials stored on the farm. They must also be prepared for the economic issues related to loss of life, property, or income that may occur.

Farmstead Disaster Plan

Farmers and ranchers who are prepared for disasters are more likely to preserve life and property. They will also minimize recovery time and resume productivity much faster.

A farmstead disaster plan must consider:

1. The safety of family members and co-workers, livestock, and emergency response personnel that would assist in recovery efforts; and
2. How to protect crops, equipment and machinery, agricultural chemicals, water supplies and stores of food for animals.

Inventory, Inventory, Inventory

A comprehensive accounting of livestock, property, or potentially hazardous substances is essential to farmstead disaster preparedness.

- ✓ Livestock may be killed, lost, or stolen during an emergency situation. Attach animal ID tags on all animals and note the ID number and description of the animal.
- ✓ Maintain a list of machinery and equipment, including make and model number.
- ✓ Keep an updated list of pesticides, fertilizers, fuels, medicines and other chemicals. During a disaster, these chemicals can wash into streams or contaminate food supplies, placing people and animals at risk.

Disaster Supply Kit

In addition to family disaster kits, agriculture producers should also keep on hand additional supplies to protect the farm. These include:

- ✓ Sandbags and plastic sheeting, in case of flood
- ✓ Wire and rope to secure objects
- ✓ Lumber and plywood to protect windows
- ✓ Extra fuel for tractors and vehicles in a safe location
- ✓ Hand tools to assist in preparation and recovery
- ✓ Fire extinguishers at all barns and in all vehicles
- ✓ A safe supply of food to feed livestock
- ✓ A gas-powered generator in case of power failure

Preparing the Farm

Planning ahead can minimize damage to livestock and property. You should:

- ✓ Establish escape routes for cows, horses, sheep and other livestock to higher elevation in case of flooding.
- ✓ Drive large animals out of barns that may be flooded. They will often seek shelter in barns in emergency situations.
- ✓ Make sure livestock have a good source of food and water.
- ✓ Move hay, machinery, fuels, pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals out of flood-prone areas.
- ✓ Turn off electrical power to machines, barns, and other structures that may become damaged or flooded.

Secure loose items, such as lumber, logs, pipes, machinery parts, and tools.

DISASTER RECOVERY

Disaster recovery can be as dangerous as the disaster itself, especially if no disaster preparedness plan was implemented. This is especially true on farms and ranches, where inherent farm hazards such as machinery and equipment, livestock, and agriculture chemicals are displaced and co-mingle. This puts all emergency response personnel, farm workers and family members, and livestock in danger. First responders should recognize the hazards that exist and proceed with caution.

Check Utilities

If you were unable to disable electric power before the disaster, look carefully for signs of damage to electrical components. Contact your electric utility company if you suspect damage, and ask for advice on how to determine if your electric system is safe to turn back on.

Never try to turn the electricity back on in areas that have been flooded before having the system checked. Depending on the extent of damage, gas lines could also sustain significant damage. Have the gas utility check the system for leaks before continuing service.

Inventory, Inventory, Inventory

Following a disaster, agriculture producers should account for all livestock, fuels, chemicals, machinery and equipment. This list should be compared to the inventory prepared prior to the incident.

Any lost livestock should be noted, and any hazardous materials such as fuels, pesticides, fertilizers or other chemicals that have leaked should be reported to emergency response personnel. Check machinery and equipment for damage. Take photographs of all damage for insurance or emergency assistance purposes.

Care for the Animals

As with humans, the aftermath of disasters pose significant safety and health problems to livestock. Agriculture producers can minimize the safety risk to livestock in the following ways:

- ✓ Gather and dispose of trash, limbs, wire, and damaged equipment that could harm livestock. Clear and repair damaged fences.
- ✓ Make sure livestock have plenty of water and food that have not been contaminated by pollutants. In some cases, it is necessary to truck in water and food, or to remove livestock from contaminated areas.
- ✓ Immediately dispose of dead carcasses. Rendering plants will process some dead animals. Those not processed should be buried away from water bodies at least 3 to 4 feet deep and covered with quick-lime to accelerate decomposition.
- ✓ Observe livestock for signs of infectious disease such as pneumonia or foot rot. All animals that die immediately following a

disaster should be necropsied by a veterinarian.

- ✓ Spray livestock with insect repellent in case of floods to protect against mosquitoes that may carry disease.

Farm Disaster Assistance

Agriculture producers do not have to face a disaster alone. If a farm or ranch has suffered a loss due to disaster, it may be eligible for assistance under one or more of the following Farm Service Agency programs:

- Emergency Conservation Program provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by wind erosion, floods, or other disasters.
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program provides financial assistance to eligible producers affected by natural disasters, and covers non-insurable crop losses and planting prevented by disasters.
- Emergency Loan Assistance Program provides emergency loans to help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, floods, other natural disasters, or quarantine.
- Emergency Haying and Grazing Assistance Program provides emergency haying and grazing of certain Conservation Reserve Program acreage in areas suffering from weather-related disasters. Contact your local Farm Service Agency for more information about these programs.

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