

Hurricane Preparation Tips

Hurricanes are always a real threat to Florida each fall. Most Floridians have some experience with hurricanes, but very few of us are truly prepared for a direct hit by a really strong storm. Livestock producers have learned some real hard lessons in recent years from Hurricanes Andrew, Charlie, Francis, Jean, Ivan, Katrina, and Ike.

Loss of Power

At the very least, livestock producers in rural areas can expect power outages following a hurricane. In rural areas, power may not be restored for 1-2 weeks. This can cause some real problems for livestock owners.

- Move animals to pastures with ponds so well filled water troughs are not the only source of water.
- Dairy farms should have enough generator power so that cows can be milked each day.
- For operations that rely on electric fencing, you should have a generator ready to keep the fence hot or at least move animals to interior pastures so they have multiple fences to help keep them in.
- Have enough hay, feed and health care supplies on hand for 1-2 weeks. Feed stores may not be open for business for a week or more after a storm.

High Winds

Coastal areas normally receive the highest winds as a hurricane comes ashore, but even 50-70 mile per hour winds can create some real problems for livestock producers. Barns and fences are very susceptible to fallen trees and limbs from even tropical storm force winds. Tornadoes are also common in rural areas as storms move through.

- Move animals and valuable equipment out of barns. Most agricultural barns are not made to withstand more than 75 mile per hour winds without some damage. Metal roofing material falling and flying around can be deadly. Normally open fields or pastures are much safer for both animals and equipment. Animals out in the open have a way of avoiding danger most of the time.
- Move animals to interior pastures so there are multiple fences between animals and the highway or neighbors.
- Small trees and large limbs will create holes in fences when they fall. Have chainsaws and fencing supplies ready to go to clean up perimeter fences following a storm.
- Identify cattle and horses so that if they do wander out of your property, you can be notified of their whereabouts. Halters or collars and luggage tags can be used for horses. If nothing else is available, spray paint your name and phone number on cattle or horses, so they can be returned to you following a storm. Do not include Coggins number on any identification, because that would allow the animal to be sold at auction.
- Pick up debris that might become high-wind hazards. Strap down feeders, trailers and other items that might blow around and injure animals or cause damage to facilities.

Flooding

Tropical storms and hurricanes can generate 3-15 inches of rain in just a few hours.

- Move animals out of low lying pastures or at least tie the gates open so they can move to higher ground if need be.

- Have enough hay on hand to feed for two weeks in case grass runs short from low areas being flooded.

Clean up and Repairs

Notification and documentation are the keys to getting financial aid following a storm.

- Contact insurance agencies as soon as possible for buildings that are insured.
- Report any damages to the local Farm Service Agency within 15 days of the storm to be eligible for federal disaster aid.
- Document damage and repair expenses. Photographs of damages and receipts for services and materials will be very important when applying for insurance claims and federal disaster aid. Any purchased feed or veterinary expenses related to the storm should be recorded as well.