

Preparing Your Livestock for the Hurricane Season

With the 2005 hurricane season, we saw the formation of 26 named storms. Four of those became major hurricanes and then made landfall in the

US. Since that time, only 5 hurricanes formed in the Atlantic

and none of these made their way to the states. Halfway through the season of 2007, it looks like we could see an even less eventful year. But isn't that a "the glass is half-full or half-empty" question?

Municipalities in the county work hard to ensure that their residents are informed and prepared. Pick up any publication on hurricane preparedness and you will find that measures commonly recommended are: 1. develop a family plan, 2. create a disaster supply kit, 3. have a place to go and several different routes to get there, 4. secure your home, and 5. have a plan for your pets. Publications can be found just about anywhere to help you prepare your family and your personal property for the possibility of landfall in or around our area.

For the majority of us, these measures, if followed, will ensure that damage to property is minimal and that our families will live to see yet another hurricane season. For the agriculture producers in the county, however, very little information can be found to help ensure the safety of near 22,000 head of livestock and horses that call this area home. County services are very limited when it comes to this topic, so farmers and ranchers must be well prepared for this type of occurrence. The more you do today; the better off you will be tomorrow.

Ideally, since the season is now half over, you should already have some things in place. Immunizations, vaccinations, and/or coggins tests should be up to date and records kept close in case you do decide to evacuate any or all of your animals. Check your trailer tires, brakes, lights, and floor. The last place you would want to break down is in the middle of an evacuation with no tire services, etc. open to help you. Make up a box of medical supplies like bandages, creams, antibiotics, tapes, fly spray, etc. and keep in inside the house so that they aren't ruined by temperature and humidity before they are needed. Finally, have an evacuation plan and map with multiple routes identified, in case one becomes backed up or impassable. One thing to remember is that you should not make an attempt to evacuate unless you can do so at least 72 hours prior to landfall. Livestock trailers become very unstable in high winds. As a reference, fire trucks (which are very heavy and stable when loaded with water) do not respond once winds reach 40 mph. Being caught in high winds pulling a trailer could be disastrous. Do not take a chance!

If evacuation isn't possible, you still have several things that you can do to minimize damage and loss. First, put your cattle into your largest pastures, free of power lines, that may have some sort of solid shelter like tall trees or brush. This could help protect them from flying debris. Livestock should never be locked up in a closed barn with no escape. This type of shelter is usually the first to go in high winds and your animals will be hurt or killed in case of a collapse. Smaller animals can be brought inside the house (garage) if you plan on staying. Use wooden pallets to construct temporary fencing. Next, try and have a two week supply of feed available. Banks, gas stations, ATM's, etc. will be closed even if you do happen to find a feed store that is open. If you have just a handful of livestock, it would be best to keep the feed inside your house in sealed containers.

Once you are prepared to protect your livestock, you can minimize damage to buildings and barns by doing two things. Start by making sure all boards, tin, etc. are well nailed down. Then, tie barns down with anchors, much like you would a mobile home. These efforts will also protect your livestock by reducing the amount of flying debris. With completion of these steps, you can rest assured knowing that you are as prepared as possible.

One final point; in the aftermath of the horrible 2005 season, several lessons were learned that we should note. Smaller livestock owners may be tempted to open gates if they don't have large enough pastures. Opening gates to let cattle roam creates a hazard for everyone out on the roads and you can be held responsible in the case of an accident. These

owners should make plans to move livestock beforehand. Next, horses sought out lower ground, in many cases drainage ditches looking for shelter from the wind. Power lines that were blown down were strung over ditches. Finally, lack of water can be an issue, even after torrential rain if livestock rely on supplied water in troughs. Subsequent dehydration and/or kidney failure can occur.

In today's world, the time most of us have to get ahead on projects is very limited. That fact can move a topic like hurricane preparedness farther down the list of priorities. You probably even ask, "Will doing all of these things pay off personally or even financially?" The answer to that question remains to be seen, but my hope is that we continue to avoid an emergency and by staying prepared, you continue to "waste time."

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