



Caring for Livestock After Disaster

Fact Sheet 1.816 | Livestock Series | Management

by S. Cotton and T. McBride*

(Note: This fact sheet is not designed to provide a recipe for livestock disaster management. Its intent is to start the contemplation process to make you and your operation more resilient so you can survive better, recover faster and possibly mitigate future risks. Each disaster and impact is site specific.)

Many people in the United States are moving back to rural communities. For many reasons, these new rural residents often desire a lifestyle that includes owning horses, cattle, goats, ducks, chickens, sheep, llamas, alpacas and others. As people move closer to their natural resources, they also move farther away from the protection offered by urban and suburban infrastructure. It can be argued that rural living offers improved aesthetics, lower noise levels, and the feel of more “elbow room.” These characteristics come with the responsibility of handling a larger share of emergencies that are often encountered in rural areas.

In most cases, the response time and resources in rural areas are greatly reduced. Handling disasters, those catastrophic events that stretch the capacity of communities, can only be approached with preparedness, pre-planned reaction and post-event mitigation.

During a disaster event, rural residents often find their personal safety a large enough challenge without the added burden of caring for livestock. This fact sheet discusses some basic realities of livestock management after disasters occur. Please refer to fact sheets 1.814, Caring for Livestock Before Disaster; and 1.815, Caring for Livestock During Disaster for additional information on this topic.

Disasters, by nature, are catastrophic events that overwhelm the ability of individuals, communities and regions.

During catastrophic events, many things get damaged including transportation, communications, emotions and thinking. When dealing with livestock during emergencies, it is critical to re-establish your priorities.

The first priority should be your personal safety and welfare, followed by the safety and welfare of other people, and finally animals and property. If you are safe, you can do more to benefit animals. If you are at risk, so is their welfare and health. Follow official instructions for access and safety when reentering a disaster zone.

Seek and Own

The first step in caring for livestock and other animals is to locate, control and provide for those animals. Locating animals may be limited by transportation blockages from the disaster. Normal routes may not be available. Your local emergency manager, usually found at an established incident command post, may have alternatives. If the emergency manager is hard to find, contact local law enforcement. As you reenter a disaster area, remember hazards may still occur, including:

- Downed power lines.
- Flooded areas.
- Unstable roads and highways.
- Gas and utility leaks.
- Debris and wreckage.
- Vandals and looters.

Leave an itinerary of your search plan with local authorities and family members. Travel slowly, be alert for hazards, and do not enter unsecured areas.



Quick Facts

- Both livestock and humans can become disoriented after a disaster.
- Make surroundings as familiar as possible to aid in livestock readjustment.
- Livestock management priorities should include getting stabilized.
- Post disaster recovery often leads to pre-disaster mitigation.

Take identification and livestock ownership documents with you as you search. Official emergency responders often evacuate animals, so check with authorities to see if your livestock has been moved to a holding facility before you enter the disaster zone.

Sensitivity

Animals are like people in that they are emotionally affected by disasters. Often violent impacts of disaster disorient and temporarily alter the behavioral state of livestock. When, and if, you locate your animals, realize that they may be upset, confused and agitated. They need help finding their normal behavioral pattern.

Here are some proven techniques for doing this:

1. Handle livestock quietly, calmly and in a manner they are familiar.
2. Wear clothing and use vehicles that are familiar to them.
3. If possible, keep or reunite familiar animal groups with each other.
4. As soon as possible, place them in familiar settings or one which is quiet, calm and insulated from additional stimuli.
5. Soft music and familiar sounds may help calm livestock.
6. If possible, clean the animals (i.e., wipe out their eyes, mouths, and nostrils).
7. If possible, move animals away from the residue of the disaster.
8. Treat wounds of injured animals so their comfort level improves.

Feed, Safety and Shelter

Animals and livestock often relate security to the familiarity of their surroundings. In some cases, you may be able to return them to familiar surroundings and enhance their recovery. Unfortunately, a disaster often impacts the familiar surroundings altering the landscape's character, feel, smell, look and layout. To enhance the animal's comfort level, find another place with similar characteristics. Move the livestock there until you can remedy the damage.

Cultural Practices

Feed and water are a big part in livestock disaster recovery. In addition to the health and nutrient aspects of appropriate feed and water, livestock can become very picky to eat and drink if their feed and water do not smell and taste familiar. This nervousness is usually greater during and after disasters.

People who show livestock often use Kool-aid® water pails before they haul so that when the animal smells the water at a new location, the Kool-aid® smell is familiar and comfortable. Although not practical before a disaster, many animals will see several holding areas after disasters before finally going home. The Kool-aid® approach to sensory familiarity can reduce stress along the way. Always remember that a calm and quiet shelter serves both physical and emotional needs for livestock.

References

- Disaster Preparedness Guidelines for Livestock Owners. Indiana State Public Board of Animal Health.
- Disaster Preparedness Guidelines for Horse Owners. Indiana State Board of Animal Health.
- Guidelines for the Development of a Local Animal Care Plan in Emergencies, Disasters, and Evacuations. Heath, Sebastian E. Ph.D. D.V.M. Purdue University, School of Veterinary Medicine.
- Livestock Handling and Transport. Grandin, Temple. Ph.D., Colorado State University, 1993.
- Behavioral Principles of Livestock Handling. Grandin, Temple. Ph.D., Colorado State University, 1989.
- Cattle Handling Safety in Working Facilities. Hubert, D.J., et al. Bulletin F-1738 Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension fact sheet.