Disaster Relief: Maintaining Livestock Health after a Flood

Disease Control

After a flood, there may be danger of infectious diseases in livestock, but, unless serious outbreaks of infection have occurred recently, there is no need to be alarmed. Observe these precautions:

• Where large numbers of animals assemble, watch for any sign of infectious diseases, such as pneumonia, foot rot, or leptospirosis.
  ▪ These diseases are more likely to occur where cattle are crowded on wet ground and where there are lots of horn flies and house flies.
  ▪ If possible, an experienced livestock owner under the supervision of a veterinarian should handle and feed the animals.
• Promptly report any sign of disease to the nearest veterinarian or county Extension office.
• Contact a veterinarian about vaccinating animals for immunity from flood-related diseases, such as anthrax, lepto, blackleg, and swine erysipelas.

Feed and Water

• Provide clean, uncontaminated water.
• Inspect feeds, such as corn, wheat, and hay.
  ▪ Damaged grains and moldy hay may cause digestive disturbances.
  ▪ Horses, sheep, poultry, swine, and cattle are affected most severely (in that order) by damaged feed.
  ▪ Do not force livestock to eat silage that has been flooded, even though it may not look any different.
  ▪ Do not use any feed or forage that may have been contaminated by chemicals or pesticides.

Pastureland

• Standing water may have ruined some pastures.
  ▪ Lack of adequate forage could force animals to eat poisonous plants that are abundant in some parts of the country.
  ▪ Remove fallen wild cherry limbs from pastures to prevent livestock poisoning.
• Before restocking flooded pastures, remove debris, especially along fence lines and in corners. Livestock could be injured from pieces of barbed wire, sharp metal, and trash.

Protect Dairy Cows

• Try to milk at regular times. It is better to lose the milk from one milking than to stress high-producing cows.
• If you must use a neighbor’s milking parlor, try to keep the two herds separate.
• If feed supplies are limited, give the largest portion of available feed to the highest-producing cows and those recently fresh. This may be a good time to cull less productive animals from the herd.
• Clean and sanitize the milking parlor and dairy barn, milking equipment, and feed-handling equipment before returning to normal use.
• Watch for signs of mastitis, which is likely to flare up as cows are stressed because of changes in milking procedures, equipment, and/or milking schedules.

Sanitation

• Clean out hog houses, barns, and chicken houses.
  ▪ Spray buildings with a good disinfectant before animals occupy them again.
  ▪ Air buildings thoroughly before they are dried out.
• Remove debris from dairy barns.
• Scrub and disinfect walls, ceilings, floors, stanchions, and other equipment.
• Scrub the milk house and equipment with detergent and hot water.
• Sanitize equipment, walls, ceilings, and floors with dairy sanitizing products.
• Dispose of animal carcasses promptly. If there is no rendering company operating nearby, burn or bury carcasses deeply in a place approved by your local soil conservation office.

Insects
Mosquitoes and other pests may be abundant after a flood. They not only annoy animals, but some species carry disease. Spray animals with an insect repellent as recommended by your county Extension office.