

# Flooding in the Heartland

*Nebraska Angus producers affected by spring storms lend a helping hand.*

*by Karen Hiltbrand, American Angus Association*

Anyone who farms or ranches knows dealing with the weather is part of the job description. That said, producers couldn't prepare for the disastrous spring weather that continues to leave lasting effects on the heartland.

Across the Midwest and among the fly-over states, historic blizzards, floods and tornadoes have left farming families to rebuild their homes and operations. Luckily, the agricultural industry knows how to lend a helping hand during times of need, and that is exactly what's been happening.

## A bull sale and blizzard

Galen Frenzen of Fullerton, Neb., owns and operates Frenzen Angus and Polled Herefords. The family-run operation markets their purebred Angus and Hereford bulls primarily to commercial bull buyers both locally and across the country, and was one of the many producers tested by the weather this spring.

"The flood was the 'perfect storm,'" Frenzen says. "The ground was frozen. We probably had at least two feet of frost, a foot and a half of snow, and two and a half inches of rain."

The Cedar River runs directly through the seedstock operation located in eastern Nebraska. Having grown up in the area, Frenzen has witnessed the river both during

droughts and at its peak when it spanned three-quarters of a mile wide. He remembers telling his wife he thought they'd dodged a bullet this time, but what he didn't account for was the ice soon to float down the river.

"The water came and it kept coming up and coming up," Frenzen says. "We had a huge wave of ice come."

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Luckily the cattle moved to safety on higher ground and once the water receded we were able to haul feed over to them, Frenzen says. Stories of producers dropping hay from helicopters and breeders boating feed to cattle stranded on high ground were common conversations around the state.

"There was a tremendous amount of destruction to the land," Frenzen says. "A lot of road destruction, and it made it so tough to get out of here."

Every spring the Frenzens host their annual production sale. This year's March 26 sale date couldn't have come at a more inopportune time as it was right in the middle of the flooding.

"About four days before the sale

we started getting calls and the first question they would ask is, 'are you having the sale?'" Frenzen says. Customers would then ask how to get to the sale facility and he would respond with, "by helicopter." It was virtually that bad.

Amidst the trying weeks the family had been through, they stayed positive. Pausing to take a breath,

Frenzen recalled all the stress he'd experienced and proceeded to thank the good Lord for watching out for them on sale day by blessing them with the sun.

Although the process of rebuilding after a flood of

this magnitude will take time for communities across the Midwest, Frenzen knows they will all accomplish it together.

"You have this tendency to feel sorry for yourself, but you don't have to look very far and you can find someone a lot worse off than we are," Frenzen says.

## The worst of years

Jon and Amber Abegglen are another ranching family affected by the floods this past spring.

Weathering the storms, they provide the best care possible for their commercial cow herd and backgrounding operation.

"Growing up in the river bottom you hear about the stories of the

worst of years,” Abegglen says. “With that in mind you don’t build a barn in a low spot, but it wasn’t quite high enough for most of it this go-around.”

After hearing the news that the river was soon to overflow, Abegglen and his family moved quickly. After 10 minutes of attempting to move calving cows to higher ground, the fast-rising water was already knee deep and rising fast, Abegglen says.

“I tried to get the tractor out but the current was too strong,” Abegglen says as he recalls trying to move cattle to safety during the early stages of the impending flooding.

In the meantime, rescue teams airlifted neighbors from their homes in lower spots where the water had already left them stranded. The Abegglen’s began to move items out of their basement.

Cattlemen like Abegglen faced many of the same challenges: feed shortages, washed-out roads and damaged equipment.

“It seemed like the month of January lasted 90 days,” Abegglen says, remembering the long nights of calving cows out in the cold snow.

High water is the main concern when it comes to a flood but many forget about all the soil and sand

carried off which leave vast holes scattered among fields.

“It was just amazing what it did with the frost,” Abegglen says. “How it made holes that were 4-5 feet deep and you didn’t know it because they were still under water.”

To find the hidden dangers Abegglen says they had someone stand in the bucket of a loader tractor and reach around with a stick to scope the water for the deep holes hidden under the flood water.

“We are just lucky nobody right here got hurt,” he remarks.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case for everyone. While attempting to

*Continued on page 170*



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Stories of triumph and trial spreads quickly in the agricultural industry. Donations of feed and supplies poured into northeast Nebraska from states across the nation this spring.

help a stranded vehicle, a bridge gave out and took the life of a member of the local farming community.

### Lending a helping hand

Farmers and ranchers aren't known to ask for help, but they are one of the first to lend a helping hand. Not only did Frenzen and Abegglen receive assistance in the form of supplies and hay, but they also volunteered to man distribution sites on their properties.

"Regardless of how successful you are, you give back," Frenzen says. "You give back to your church, your community and your industry — in that order."

Frenzen explains, right off of Highway 14 they used the facility where they host their bull sale to serve as a prime drop-off and pick-up point for bales of hay and supplies.

"I have no idea how many semi loads of hay have come in," Frenzen sighs, the weight of this spring still sitting heavily on his shoulders. "Even those who did not have a flood disaster went through a phenomenal amount of stress during this cold weather and so it took a tremendous amount of feed."

Donations came in from all over. From South Carolina, to Louisiana, to Kentucky, eastern Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Dakota and parts of Nebraska, the support shown by other agriculturalists was "tremendous," as Frenzen put it.

"It's human nature around here that you help each other out," Frenzen says. "When you have a crisis like this and you see the outpouring in our community — in our industry, it's extremely humbling."

Likewise, Abegglen used his family

business shop to distribute donations to locals in need of assistance. From hay, mineral pellets, pallets of milk replacer and fencing supplies, his shop stayed stocked with supplies.

Among all the donations received, an attitude of service is evident throughout rural communities. Rebuilding after a natural disaster is often a team effort and this is exactly what producers are doing.

"It's been really nice how the word of our little story has been spread so far across the country," Abegglen says. "It's pretty amazing how word travels and how many people are willing to help out where they can."

Hard times naturally bring the community together and the damages from storms will continue to have producers rebuilding for months to come.

"We said the same prayers for those down in Kansas when they had the fires," he says. "It's really something how word can spread and what people are willing to do."

It's to no surprise stories of service are so common. As Abegglen puts it, "It's just kind of the way we are." **A**