

Blizzard Batters Black Hills Region

Thousands of cattle found dead.

compiled by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

Grim reports of cattle carcasses buried in snow drifts along highways and rural roads in western South Dakota emerged after a blizzard dumped as much as 3 and 4 feet of wet, heavy snow across the Black Hills region Oct. 4-5. The precipitation was accompanied by strong, 40- to 60-mph winds in some areas and created intense blizzard conditions, scattering herds and claiming the lives of some cattle that were trampled or drifted with the storm. Some producers were reporting losses between 20% — and as high as 50%-90% of their herds — with the total number of dead cattle expected to be in the tens of thousands.

Steve Schell, a 52-year-old rancher from Caputa, S.D., called the aftermath of the storm “totally devastating,” in an interview with the *Rapid City Journal*. He added, “This is horrendous. I mean the death loss of these cows in this country is unbelievable.” Schell estimated he had lost half of his herd, but feared it could be more.

The blizzard is being called one of the most costly in the history of the region’s agriculture industry, with an expected multi-million dollar impact to the regional economy.

“Our hearts and prayers go out to all the ranchers who faced the wrath of Mother Nature this weekend and are dealing with substantial death loss,” said North Dakota Stockmen’s Association (NDSA) President Jason Zahn, who ranches near Towner, N.D. “Cattlemen and women are dedicated stewards of their land and their livestock, and losses like many experienced over the weekend take a heavy toll on them, emotionally and economically.”

The government shutdown is further complicating issues for federal disaster assistance to affected producers. Many of the government agencies that ranchers would normally turn to for assistance are furloughed.

Currently, there are no federal disaster assistance programs available for adverse weather disasters. The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), which provided some relief for livestock deaths in excess of normal



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Disaster resources

For additional carcass disposal information, contact the South Dakota Animal Industry Board at 605-773-3321.

Individuals experiencing disaster-related stress should contact a local community health provider or call Youth and Family Services in Rapid City at 605-342-4195 or 605-342-4870.

mortality caused by adverse weather, expired in September 2011 and Congress has not yet passed a farm bill. To qualify for the program in the past, however, producers were required to verify their inventory and losses and when those losses took place.

Renewal of LIP and related disaster programs with retroactivity application — to address this blizzard and other weather-related disasters since the program expired — has been the NDSA’s No. 1 farm bill priority.

“The widespread devastation caused by the Oct. 4-5 storm underscores the urgent need to pass the farm bill and provide some reassurance to cattle producers and others

who have been significantly impacted,” said NDSA Executive Vice President Julie Ellingson.

Documentation a must

South Dakota officials with both the state department of agriculture and university Extension emphasized that livestock death losses should be properly documented, and if possible verified by a third party. This can be from a veterinarian, a local law-enforcement official or community official. Family members or hired employees are not considered a third party.

Julie Walker, SDSU Extension beef specialist, advised ranchers, “It is critical that you document your losses. The lesson learned from [the] winter of 1996 to 1997 showed the importance of good records needed for getting some assistance from governmental programs.”

Items to document include: number of dead animals; time/labor for processing dead animals; equipment used and amount of time; and pictures or videos — with the

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correct date stamp. Walker added that having a third party verify losses can be helpful; however, she said if that's not possible, taking pictures is a producer's next best option. This information will be necessary if the livestock disaster assistance programs are renewed.

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture is working closely with the Office of Emergency Management, Animal Industry Board, Brand Board and Governor's Office on recovery efforts, with the South Dakota Animal Industry Board coordinating disposal of livestock carcasses. Brand Board inspectors will be involved in identifying livestock and carcasses, and will document these losses and ownership.

Dustin Oedekoven, South Dakota's state veterinarian, said that the next immediate challenge for ranchers would be disposal of carcasses because they can be a significant source of disease spread. "We want to make sure those carcasses are burned, buried or rendered as quickly as possible," he said.

Monitor cattle health

SDSU Extension Veterinarian Russ Daly also cautioned that after displaced cattle are returned to pastures, ranchers may still face health problems with their animals in the days and weeks following the storm.

Daly notes that prolonged stress placed on animals, especially younger animals, due to weather events results in increased cortisol levels in the animals' bloodstream, which can have profound effects on the immune system. "In practical terms, this means that the body has less of an ability to respond to diseases caused by viruses," Daly says.

"Respiratory diseases in cattle generally have an incubation period of seven to 14 days. Therefore, ranchers might expect that cattle affected by the blizzard could break with these illnesses over the next two weeks," he states.

Weaned calves may be more susceptible to coccidiosis, as well. This condition will present as bloody stools, along with dehydration and depression in more severely affected calves. Prompt identification of affected calves and treatment with individual or feed-based medications is important, says Daly. He suggests ranchers should consult with their veterinarian whether feed- or water-grade antibiotics, especially in weaned calves, would be appropriate for any of these conditions.

For ranchers who plan to wean and vaccinate calves in coming weeks, Daly advises, "It's best that calves have seven to 14 days following the blizzard event for their immune system to recover from the stress

before they receive initial or booster doses of vaccines. Vaccinations will be less effective in cattle that are still under the influence of cortisol due to stress."

Additionally, Daly cautions that any sort of transportation, processing or weaning will add to the stresses already encountered by cows and calves going through the blizzard, or faced with moving through snowbanks or muddy lots. Thus, he suggests it's best that calves get a break from any processing, weaning or long-distance transporting for seven to 14 days following the weather event.

SDSU Extension Cow-Calf Field Specialist Warren Rusche adds that if at all possible,

ranchers should consider delaying marketing until the calves have had time to recover from the added stress load.

"Feedlots or backgrounders who purchase calves who have undergone these conditions should do all they can to minimize stress and provide as much TLC as possible. Feeders should consult with their veterinarian concerning timing of arrival vaccinations and possible preventative strategies," he concludes.

Editor's Note: *Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Whitewood, S.D. This article was compiled for The Cattle Beef Weekly (CBW) and the Angus Journal.*

Make Plans for Range Beef Cow Symposium XXIII Dec. 3-5

The Range Beef Cow Symposium (RBCS) will be hosted in 2013 by South Dakota State University at the Rushmore Convention Center in Rapid City, S.D., Dec. 3-5.

The RBCS is a biennial educational event designed as "in-service training for cow-calf ranchers." The event will feature well-known speakers who will provide updates on production topics in the areas of beef industry issues, genetics, reproduction, range and forage management, cattle health, beef nutrition, and more.

The Range Beef Cow Symposium began in 1969 as a joint effort of the Extension services from South Dakota State University, Colorado State University, the University of Wyoming and the University of Nebraska. The symposium regularly attracts more than 900 ranchers and industry-affiliates. It includes a two-and-one-half day educational program, bull-pen sessions with the speakers each evening and a trade show with displays from the beef industry.

This year's program will include such topics as policy and trade issues, pregnant cow nutrition, limit-feeding high-energy diets, post artificial insemination (AI) nutrition, managing cow costs, using technology to improve efficiency, understanding how to use DNA tools, optimal range management, and many other topics.

Additionally, former 2011 Miss America Teresa Scanlan will share her experiences advocating for agriculture as Miss America, and beef "spokesrunner" Dane Rauschenberg will motivate the audience to "Ignore the Impossible."

Many companies within the beef industry attend this symposium and set up vendor booths. Their participation keeps the cost minimal for producers and provides producers with an opportunity to discuss products, equipment, nutrition, genetics and services available for their cattle business.

In addition, the bull-pen sessions are said to be the most valuable part of the symposium. This is a time for attendees to have in-depth discussions with the speakers and an opportunity to ask questions. The majority of the symposium speakers on Tuesday and Wednesday will be present in the evening following their presentations.

The *Angus Journal* editorial team coordinates an online event coverage site for the RBCS, which will be updated with the 2013 information by Nov. 1. Visit <http://rangebeefcow.com> before the conference for a schedule and travel information. During and after the conference, visit the site's Newsroom for summaries, PowerPoint presentations, proceedings papers, audio and additional references provided by speakers. Sponsorship and live streaming is provided by *LiveAuctions.tv*.

You can register online with a credit card at iGrow.org through the iGrow Marketplace: <http://igrow.org/product/range-beef-cow-symposium-registration/>. The refund policy allows substitutions only. If you are unable to attend, you may send someone in your place by notifying Cindy Lanham at 605-394-2236.

For additional information, contact Ken Olson, SDSU Extension beef specialist, 605-394-2236 or kenneth.olson@sdstate.edu; or Julie Walker, SDSU Extension beef specialist, 605-688-5458 or julie.walker@sdstate.edu.



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