

# Prepare for the

## As fall approaches, tropical weather concerns grow. Producers advised to implement preparedness plans.

by Lynsey Meharg, intern

**A**merican author Mark Twain once said, “Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get.” As winter gets closer each day, cattlemen across the nation will face a number of weather conditions.

For livestock producers, preparing for less-than-ideal weather conditions can be more complicated than for the average American. From hurricanes in the South to snow and ice across the rest of the nation, cattlemen have to adapt and conquer treacherous weather. Being prepared for possible severe conditions is extremely important to recovering from a major disaster.

Not only do farmers have to provide for their families, they also have to have a well-thought-out action plan to care for animals, equipment and agricultural chemicals.

“Farmers and ranchers should understand the effect disasters have on family members and employees, as well as livestock, crops, structures, machinery, water and food,” says Heath Herje, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service agent in Cleveland County and author of a storm preparedness plan for Oklahoma producers.

When forming a storm-preparedness plan, Herje encourages producers to consider the safety of family members, co-workers and livestock, as well as emergency-response personnel who would assist in recovery efforts. Protecting crops, equipment, machinery, agricultural chemicals, water supplies and stores of food for animals is also of great importance. Farmers and ranchers who take the time to prepare before a storm are more likely to protect life and property, while also minimizing the recovery time before full productivity can be resumed.

### Getting started

The question is: How does a person begin planning for severe weather?

Gathering information such as cell phone and emergency contact numbers is a good place to start, he says. Including the contact information of family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors can prove useful during emergencies, when phone numbers may be difficult to locate. Cell phones and

other technologies can offer nearly real-time weather information.

“With cell phones, computers and similar technologies, there is no reason folks should not be weather-aware,” Herje says. “Paying attention to warnings and listening to the weather during storm season is critical. Having important documents, family heirlooms, and valuables all in one place, in a bag to grab and go, is a must.”

Additionally, medications (including electronic and hard copies of instructions) and documents such as wills, trusts, abstracts, deeds, birth certificates, social security cards, bank and savings account information, titles, and marriage certificates all take time and money to replace.

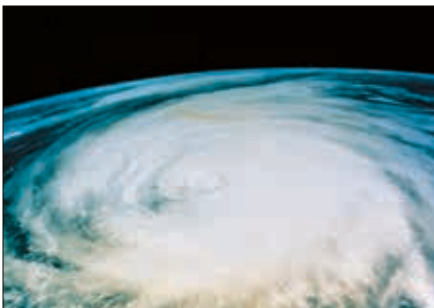
Without digital copies, personal items such as family photos may prove irreplaceable, he reminds. Taking the time to collect and secure all these items and information can save time and heartache when severe weather strikes.

After vital information has been secured, take an inventory of all farm assets — including livestock, potentially hazardous substances and equipment, Herje advises. This helps organization after an event.

Inventory your livestock. They may be killed, lost or stolen during an emergency situation. An inventory is important to your insurance agent if you file a claim. All animals should have identification tags with the numbers documented in both hard and electronic copies, as well as detailed descriptions of each animal. Maintaining a list of machinery, including make and model numbers, can also prove helpful.

In addition, establish escape routes to higher elevation in case of flooding, Herje advises. Make sure livestock have a good source of water and food and be sure to move hay, machinery, fuels, pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals out of flood-prone areas. Turn off electrical power to machinery, barns or other structures that may become damaged or flooded.

Prior to a storm, food and water for people and animals should be stockpiled and moved to a central and accessible location, he suggests. Tools needed during and after



# Storm

a storm should be purchased and stored in a dry location, along with trailers, panels and other livestock equipment. Cell phones and other communication devices should be charged, and spare batteries and power sources should be provided.

## Weather events

Traditionally, winter weather includes snow and ice, which makes the already labor-intensive job of farming even more strenuous. Preparing for ice storms and blizzards by securing a gas-powered generator in the event of power failure, as well as using propane or natural gas furnaces, will allow life to continue as normally as possible during a disaster, Herje says.

Trees located near or above power and telephone lines should be watched so damage to lines can be avoided or dealt with accordingly.

Be aware that ice and snow offer unique challenges and requirements. De-icers, shovels, salt, sand, spreaders, axes and sledgehammers should be purchased and stored with other emergency equipment. As with nearly any weather emergency, staying off the road is advised considering the likelihood of cars slipping on the icy roads or becoming bogged down in snow.

For residents of the southern United States, snow and ice storms are unlikely during the winter months; however, they are not without their meteorological challenges.

“All vulnerable coastal residents should make the same hurricane preparations every year, regardless of how active or inactive the seasonal forecast is,” says Bill Gray, founder of the Colorado State University (CSU) Tropical Meteorology Project and co-author of each Project forecast. “It takes only one landfall event near you to make this an active season.”

Predicting an above-average Atlantic Basin hurricane season in their press release, the CSU team called for 18 named storms during the hurricane season between June 1 and Nov. 30, 2013. Of those predicted 18 named storms, eight are expected to become hurricanes and three are expected to become major hurricanes with sustained winds of 111 mph or greater.

“While the tropical Atlantic remains warmer than normal, it has cooled somewhat in the eastern portion of the basin. However,

it appears that the chances of an El Niño event this summer and fall is unlikely,” says Phil Klotzbach, of the CSU Tropical Meteorology

Project. “Typically, El Niño is associated with stronger vertical shear across the tropical Atlantic, creating conditions less than conducive for storms.”

Producers may not consider the problems caused by a hurricane’s making landfall during sale season.

“Hurricane season in the southeast, especially during the month of October, presents not only management, but marketing challenges in the Gulf Coast, Atlantic and mid-Atlantic regions,” says David Gazda, Association regional manager covering Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. “Cattlemen in these areas must be able to quickly respond to rapidly changing weather conditions to secure livestock, ranch structures and dwellings, so a well-designed disaster preparation plan is crucial.”

“Since many of the bull and production sales also take place in the Southeast during October, consideration must be given in advance regarding sale-day site conditions and accessibility, means to notify customers of sale status, and an alternative sale date should inclement weather occur,” Gazda says.

## Recovery

Following a disaster, producers should account for all assets, including livestock, fuels, chemicals, machinery and equipment. This list should be compared to the inventory of items from before the event. Lost livestock should be reported and hazardous materials such as fuels, pesticides and fertilizers that have leaked should be reported immediately to emergency-response personnel. Take photographs of all damage, including machinery and equipment, for insurance or emergency-assistance purposes, Herje advises.

The aftermath of disasters can be just as dangerous as the weather itself. Cattlemen can reduce the safety risk to livestock and personnel by gathering and disposing of trash, limbs, wire and damaged equipment that could harm livestock, as well as clearing and repairing damaged fences and making sure livestock have water and food that have not been contaminated by pollutants.

Observing livestock for signs of disease such as pneumonia or foot rot is extremely important after natural disasters, he continues. All animals that die immediately

following a disaster should be necropsied by a veterinarian and disposed of immediately after. Rendering plants will process some dead animals, and those not processed should be buried away from bodies of water at least 3-4 feet deep and covered with quicklime to accelerate decomposition. After natural disasters, consult with a veterinarian so an action plan can be compiled for treatment and care of affected livestock.

Natural disasters are a stressful yet unavoidable part of life for farmers and ranchers; however, with proper preparedness livestock producers can perfect their own storm plan.



**Editor’s Note:** Lynsey Meharg was the 2013 editorial intern.

## Record death losses

As South Dakota livestock owners began to dig out from one of the worst blizzards to hit western South Dakota in recorded history, reports of animal losses were just coming in as this issue went to press.

“Producers and family members are busy trying to recover from the results of this terrible blizzard. At the present time, we don’t know if there will be any governmental program to assist ranchers. This may take awhile, because the federal shutdown has furloughed key local USDA staff,” said Julie Walker, SDSU Extension beef specialist.

Walker urged livestock producers to document death loss.

“We know that you don’t need another task during this difficult time, but it is critical that you document your losses,” she emphasized, adding that the lesson learned from the winter of 1996-1997 was the importance of good records in attaining disaster assistance through government programs.

As the snow melted, Walker encouraged South Dakota producers to record/document the following:

1. Number of dead animals
2. Time/labor for processing dead animals
3. Equipment used and amount of time
4. Pictures or videos

When taking pictures or videos, Walker emphasized making sure the date on your camera is set correctly and turned on. Show detail to substantiate the number dead.

Having a third party verify losses can be helpful, Walker added. However, it may not be practical in situations where travel and access are difficult or impossible. Taking pictures is a producer’s next best option.

— by SDSU Extension