

Disaster Preparation for Farms



While farmers share many of the same challenges after flood events as other businesses, like the loss of electricity and lack of access to markets, farmers must consider the effects of flooding on their most valuable asset – farmland. Flooding of farmland creates unique problems – the cost to remove silt and debris, contamination of current crops as well as the loss of land from erosive flooding.

The financial and emotional costs of recovering from flooding and other types of farm disasters are high. One proven way to reduce the impact of disasters is to be prepared.

In addition to planning ahead, farmers can best protect the land and crops from flood damage by planting cover crops or trees and shrubs along riverbanks to reduce the effects of flood scour and erosion. Trees, shrubs, and deep-rooted grasses planted along the river as a buffer between the water body and the crops help to retain the riverbank and reduce soil loss.

Use the following list to help prepare for minimizing farm losses in a flood disaster.

Crop-related Preparations

- ➔ Harvest early vegetable crops that can be harvested and are in floodplain fields. (The edible portion of any crop that comes in contact with flood water is considered adulterated and may not be sold.)
- ➔ Hoop houses in the flood way should have the sides elevated to allow the flow of flood waters.

Power and Food/Water Preparations

- ➔ Check monthly to see that your generator is in good working order. Consider purchasing a generator if you currently don't have one.
- ➔ Purchase sufficient amounts of fuel to operate your generator and other equipment on the farm.
- ➔ If a generator is required for emergency agricultural purposes (i.e. milking cows, cooling milk tanks, poultry house ventilation, etc.), notify town officials. Ensure a transfer switch is properly installed (disconnect the house or barn from the grid) in order to use a generator.
- ➔ Charge batteries on cell phones and cameras.
- ➔ Pump and store adequate supplies of drinking water for humans and animals in the likelihood of power outages. A 36-hour reserve is recommended.

Livestock Preparations

- ➔ Check feed inventory and order extra if needed.
- ➔ Move feed, including round bales to higher ground, or to a more accessible place in case floodwaters close roads or limit access.
- ➔ Move livestock and poultry to higher ground out of the way of floodwaters.
- ➔ Mark animals with an identifier so they can be easily returned if lost.
- ➔ Store medicines in a secure location safe from flooding.

Equipment Preparations

- Remove hoop houses from flood prone areas (floodplain maps are available at most town offices, or click here http://floodready.vermont.gov/assessment/vt_floodready_atlas).
- Move equipment to the highest, open ground possible away from floodwaters.
- Secure hazardous substances, e.g., fuel and propane tanks, fertilizers, and pesticides, so they are safe from flooding.

General Preparations

- Create a farm map and include buildings and structures and the contents of each, access routes (include farm roads, lanes, fences, gates), locations of livestock, locations of all hazardous substances, and electrical shutoff locations.
- Develop a response plan to address manure, fuel, fertilizer, pesticide, or other chemical spill.
- Make a list of important phone numbers ahead of time in order to make calls following a storm. Include contact information for all employees, suppliers or service provides, e.g., livestock or milk transport, feed delivery, fuel delivery, town Emergency Management District, county extension agent, insurance agent, county Farm Service Agency and private veterinarian.
- Develop an emergency plan and test the plan to ensure that its workable, updated, and employees are properly trained.
- Annually review your insurance coverage. Consider coverage for “all-hazard” situations (e.g., flood, hail damage).
- Listen to local news and weather reports for any potential flood warnings in your area.



Additional Assistance

For more detail on emergency preparedness for agricultural operations go to <http://readyag.psu.edu/>