



# Animal Welfare Institute

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April 6, 2023

Mr. Marcus Graham  
Deputy Administrator for Field Operations  
Farm Service Agency  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Dear Deputy Administrator Graham:

I am writing on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) regarding the impact of extreme weather events on agriculture operations and the high animal mortality that may occur as a result, and to determine what actions the agency is taking to ensure producers are better prepared to reduce losses. AWI was founded in 1951 as a nonprofit public interest organization dedicated to reducing animal suffering and promoting the welfare of animals, including those used in agriculture. Understanding the devastating impact extreme weather can have on farmed animals, AWI has for years advocated common-sense disaster preparedness requirements to better protect animals from the consequences of these events.

Recent devastating natural disasters provide a mere glimpse of what will likely become the norm as the impacts of climate change accelerate. As I'm sure you're aware, the impact on agriculture has been significant; millions of farmed animals have been killed, livelihoods have been destroyed, and billions of dollars has been spent on recovery and relief. According to data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, USDA's Economic Research Service, and USAspending.gov, over \$500 million in compensation has been distributed directly to producers since 2008 under just one of the USDA's various disaster assistance programs, the Livestock Indemnity Program.

Leading agricultural and animal health entities, including the USDA itself, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the World Organisation for Animal Health, as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, all recognize the importance of emergency planning and recommend the development of disaster preparedness plans for farms to help mitigate the impacts of extreme weather. Additionally, most animal agriculture industry groups, including the National Pork Board, the National Chicken Council, and the National Turkey Federation, among others, require or recommend disaster planning as a component of their auditing and certification programs.

For the past several appropriations cycles, Congress has recognized that millions of farmed animals die as a result of adverse weather events, and has directed the USDA to work with producers who wish to develop disaster plans in order to prevent livestock deaths and injuries.<sup>1</sup> This directive is critical given the absence of federal laws and regulations that require these plans to be in place, even for those seeking federal relief or compensation. Further, in a recent hearing held on February 9th, 2023 before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, the USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, Robert Bonnie, emphasized the significant resources the USDA expends in the aftermath of natural disasters, particularly as it relates to surging staff to impacted areas and building incident management teams for disaster recovery. Devoting resources to proactive disaster preparedness as Congress has instructed would help ease this burden while also saving animal lives.

As the agency within the USDA that administers disaster assistance programs, has state and county offices across the country, and works directly with producers, it seems the Farm Service Agency (FSA) is in the best position to carry out this directive and provide technical assistance to farmers for developing comprehensive disaster preparedness plans. To better understand how the FSA has reacted to the Congressional directive mentioned above, AWI respectfully requests a response to the following questions:

1. Does FSA, or the USDA more generally, have the necessary expertise and resources (both in terms of funding and personnel) to carry out this directive?
2. Since 2019 when this directive was first issued, has the agency seen an increase in interest from producers in developing disaster preparedness plans?
3. What actions are being taken to proactively notify and demonstrate to livestock and poultry producers that FSA personnel serve as a resource and can provide technical assistance in developing a site-specific, comprehensive disaster preparedness plan?
4. What actions are being taken, or what tools are being utilized, to identify high-risk or particularly vulnerable operations or geographic areas where extreme weather is likely to cause high livestock and poultry mortality? Is routine, proactive outreach being conducted to high-risk operations prior to extreme weather events?

Thank you in advance for your consideration; we look forward to your response. Please feel free to contact me at [dena@awionline.org](mailto:dena@awionline.org) or (202) 446-2146 to arrange a meeting with AWI to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Dena Jones  
Director, Farm Animal Program

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<sup>1</sup> H. Rep. 117-392 (2022) Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023; H. Rep. 117-82 (2022) Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022; H. Rep. 116-446 (2020) Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021; H. Rep. 116-107 (2019) Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020.