



Protecting Farm Animals During Severe Storms



Severe storms in recent years have taken a devastating toll on millions of farm animals living in impacted areas. For example, nearly 6 million chickens and turkeys, and over 8,000 pigs perished in North Carolina as a result of Hurricane Michael in 2016 and Hurricane Florence in 2018. Excessive flooding and high winds during severe storms damage animal housing facilities, cause power outages, and create other problems that put farm animals at an increased risk of injury and death.

Disaster preparedness and emergency planning are critical for helping farmers and ranchers protect these animals and mitigate the impacts of severe weather events. While creating these plans may initially require significant investments of time, resources, and training, in the final analysis they can save both lives and money. State and local departments of agriculture, emergency management/services agencies, agriculture extensions, and local veterinarians can serve as valuable resources to aid in the development, implementation, and execution of emergency plans for both large and small producers.

The Animal Welfare Institute offers the following tips to protect farm animals during severe storms:

- Develop an evacuation plan that identifies options for temporary placement of animals, the means of transportation, and viable routes—including multiple alternate routes in case the primary route is impacted. In such planning, it is important to consider which animals would be at the highest risk if they were to remain in place. Ensure all farm employees receive training for evacuating animals and are prepared to carry out their individual roles.
- When possible, evacuation of farm animals should begin at least 96 hours prior to the storm's predicted landfall.
- When evacuation is not possible, animals raised outdoors should be moved and confined to higher ground, away from areas prone to flooding. Ensure the area is clear of any objects or debris that may cause injury if



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high winds are expected. Ideally, the area should also be free of overhead power lines. Animals should not be restrained or tied outdoors.

- Regularly test backup generators and prepare to have an adequate supply of fuel to run the generators in the event of a power outage. This will ensure ventilation and electric feeding systems will continue operating throughout the storm. Make arrangements for hand feeding of animals in the event backup generators fail or are not available.
- Prior to a forecasted storm, stock up on extra feed and ensure it is accessible throughout the storm, especially if a farm employee will not be on site. Ensure that a clean water supply is also accessible.
- If a poultry facility is located in an area prone to flooding, ensure the birds have access to high areas to perch.
- After the storm, work with a veterinarian to triage animals and treat those that may be suffering from injuries or illnesses.