Protecting Dairy Cattle during a Hurricane

Food and Water

Hurricanes cause abrupt changes in the environment for cattle, sometimes resulting in a lack of feed and water. Water for cattle is essential, particularly in hot weather. A cow’s daily water intake will increase as much as 100% in high temperatures.

The threat of a hurricane might even require livestock to be moved to a different environment. Remember, cattle must have access to grass pasture. If finding a secure location with access to pasture is impossible, you must bring in hay for the cattle to eat.

Cows

Avoid using grain or concentrate feed because this creates complications such as grain overload, bloat and lactic acidosis. Under hurricane conditions, cattle can be maintained on grass and hay only.

Calves

Calves less than 8 to 10 weeks of age will require milk or milk replacer fed at least once daily. Most cattle will not nurse calves unless the calf has been with the cow since birth. Since the dairy calves have usually been separated at a very early age from their mothers, relief workers will be challenged by the labor-intensive process of feeding milk to dairy calves.

Shelter

Florida’s subtropical climate can be particularly stressful to cattle, whose comfort is best when temperatures range between 41 to 78°F. The combination of solar radiation, elevated ambient air temperature and high humidity can be life threatening. To relieve the heat stress, the following procedures are suggested:

- Provide access to shade, such as trees or portable structures.
Temporarily allow access to ponds or standing water so that cows may cool off.

**Emergency Medical Care**
Having proper supplies available will facilitate emergency medical care and management of your cattle. You will need horses and riders to round up stray cattle, as well as restraint equipment:

- Portable chutes and corrals
- Lariats
- Rope halters

Veterinary assistance will most likely be required for trauma cases and other problems. Depending upon the severity of the medical situation, euthanasia may be the most humane treatment option. Because controlled substances may be required to euthanize, plan carefully and consult your veterinarian.

**Milking Procedures**
Depending upon local conditions and facility damage caused by the hurricane, it may not be possible to continue milking. Although this results in some discomfort to the cow, it is not life threatening. To discontinue milking, however, can predispose cows to mastitis. Mastitis must be handled individually.

Prolonged discontinued milking (several days to more than a week), along with lack of feed and water will cause the udder to cease producing milk.

Using portable milking facilities operated by generators to milk a limited number of animals is a feasible method to prevent mastitis and to preserve the udder’s milk production. Another option is moving the lactating cattle to other farms or facilities.

In the worst of conditions, you may decide to dry all cows off and not try to milk them. In this case, administer dry treatment to all quarters of all cows.