

FACT SHEET:

Animal Health and Welfare during Natural Disasters

by: Animal Health & Production Division



Animals are an integral part of the society and also get affected by Natural disasters, here are some of the points that Livestock owners should keep in mind during these times of adversities.

Livestock Health (including welfare)

There will be possibilities of many livestock diseases propping up at these times which will eventually lead to losses. Some which may include:

1. Foot Conditions

Animals such as goats, sheep and cattle that are in these flood areas can be exposed to the bacteria which cause foot rot (*Fusobacterium necrophorum*) and foot abscess (*Bacteriodes nodosus*) conditions. These bacteria lie dormant awaiting the favorable conditions, such as flooding, to cause the foot condition.

The feet of the livestock are soaked and softened by being in the water hence making it easier for the bacteria to penetrate and cause the condition.

Apart from this, since the animal's nutrition (protein) is not optimum due to the grass being covered by the water and silt/mud, the opportunity for the bacteria to thrive will be higher as the immunity levels are challenged due to starvation and hypothermia (cold).

Advice:

- Move the animal to higher grounds in sheltered areas and if possible check/observe for any lameness or limping.
- Contact your nearest Animal Clinic for a Locality Livestock officer to have a look at your herd.
- Copper sulphate paste could be applied to the feet to harden the skin of the feet to prevent infection.
- A prophylactic/preventative dose of penicillin injection can be given to the animals. Please contact your nearest Locality Livestock officer or the Principal Veterinary Officer, if you need to.
- Provide your animals with plenty of grass and clean water.



2. Diarrhoea

The incidence of diarrhoea is going to increase as the flood levels are going to recede. This will be due to lack of quality and clean food material available for the livestock to graze and as mentioned above will lead to a challenged immune system due to starvation and hypothermia. The diarrhoea could be due to two reasons - internal parasites and bacterial infections. These two diarrhoea causing agents will be plentiful in numbers as the immune system is challenged. The diarrhoea caused by these two agents is different in nature.

Advice:

- Farmers and livestock owners are advised to contact the nearest Animal Health Clinic for ascertain the type of diarrhoea, if any, is present.

Hint: smelly pasty diarrhoea is caused by bacteria.

- There are Antibacterial, Antidiarrhoeal drugs and Anthelmintic drugs available in clinics throughout Fiji.
- A locality livestock officer should be contacted promptly to prevent any losses of livestock.
- As a general rule all livestock should be drenched (oral medication for stomach worms every 21 days.
- Provide your animals with adequate food and water.
- Animals should be moved to higher grounds in sheltered areas. And returned at least 7-10 days after the flood waters have receded.

3. Leptospirosis

This disease is as important for humans as it is for animals because humans can also contract Leptospirosis. The flood waters coming in from the interior and mountains, where the feral/wild pigs live, will bring in the leptospira bacteria (spirochaete) down to the farming areas. Leptospira loves stagnant water.

Advise

- Keep animals away from flood affected areas for at least 7 days after the flood waters have receded.
- Immediately advise your local livestock officers if any jaundice (Yellowing of the mucus membranes) or blood in the urine is noticed.
- Wash your hands properly with soap and clean water, after handling any dead animals.
- For humans
 - Please ensure that you are wearing covered shoes/gumboots when wading through stagnant/pooled water.
 - Wear gloves if you have to work in water logged areas.
 - Avoid swimming/bathing in pooled/stagnant water
 - Boil all drinking water.

4. Hypothermia (cold)

Leaving your animals out exposed to the rain and flood waters will lead to the animals being exposed to cold eventually leading to pneumonia and death. Remember that these animals will not have eaten for a time period and are immune suppressed.

Advise

- Move your animals to higher grounds out of the flooded areas.
- If possible, move your animals into shaded areas where they can get some shelter from the rain and the wind.
- Ensure that the animals get adequate feed (cut grass) and water.
- Contact your nearest Animal Health Clinic for assistance.

Others to take note of:

1. Dispose off all dead carcasses either by burying or burning. Don't throw in the rivers or streams as you will be spreading the disease, if any.
2. Report all deaths/sickness in livestock (cattle, horses, goats, sheep, chickens, Ducks, dogs, cats etc.) to your nearest Animal Health Clinics promptly.

Caring for Animals in Natural Disasters

General considerations:

1. Ensure that your animals have access to clean food and water. This can be in the form of pasture on paddocks located on hills, supplements and drums/water troughs.
2. Keep animals away from flood waters, as this can be a source of contamination or toxin.
3. Be careful when handling animals, particularly livestock and horses, as they may be frightened or disoriented.
4. Be aware of animals that stray on the roads for your own safety.
5. Monitor your animals and take note of any injuries etc. Contact your nearest Veterinarian or Para-veterinarian.
6. Animals found starving should not be allowed to suffer, ensure that they are fed or relocated. Otherwise, contact your nearest Veterinarian or government Para-veterinarian to humanely euthanize the animal.

Displaced and Lost animals

During flooding and heavy rainfall, animals may become displaced or lost when homes, boundaries or sheds are damaged.

1. For lost and found companion animals, you can contact Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) or a government veterinary clinic in the Animal Health & Production Division.
2. If you find a stray livestock on your property that cannot be identified, contact your nearest Animal Health & Production office.
3. Ensure that your animals have proper identification; brands for cattle and horses, dog license tags, goat and sheep ear tags etc.
4. Animals affected by natural disasters may be easily frightened or traumatised. Be careful when returning them and only do so after major activities have been conducted e.g. debris clearing, removal of uprooted trees etc.

Care for Companion Animals during Natural Disaster

1. Ensure that your pet can be identified by collar tags or dog license tags, and ensure that the dog license is valid.
2. Bring your pets into your compound or a sheltered space in advance of any natural disaster.
3. Dogs and cats can become frightened of unfamiliar noises, ensure that they are confined to a safe and dry place.
4. Have food and water available for your pets and avoid feeding them any contaminated food or water.

