

Cattle Assessment On-Site During Emergencies



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KEYWORDS

• Beef cattle • Disaster • Assessment • Veterinary • Emergency

KEY POINTS

The veterinarian's role and responsibilities may include the following:

- Identification of injured cattle, potential chemical exposure issues, site-specific hazards, and associated potential threats to cattle health and well-being.
- Prioritization of cattle health needs based on clinical observation and/or hands-on assessment of cattle.
- Identification of potential human and animal health hazards and subsequent communication to assessment team members as well as other decision makers.
- Provision of objective and factual information to assist in prevention, treatment, mitigation, and response to diseases affecting beef cattle to responsible regulatory officials or other decision makers.

INTRODUCTION

A disaster is defined as a sudden calamitous event bringing great damage, loss, or destruction (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Disasters can vary widely in scope, severity, and duration. Disasters may be limited to a sudden, brief event in a limited area or individual farm or encompass large geographic areas such as in a drought. Although natural or weather-related disasters are typically thought of as a disaster, some disasters can be caused directly by human activity, such as toxic spills, arson, or nuclear power plant failures, or exacerbated by human efforts, such as poorly designed flood control levies, dams, or mismanagement of natural resources resulting in catastrophic wildfires. No matter the cause, a disaster creates an emergency: a

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situation that presents an immediate risk to health, life, and property requiring immediate action.

Veterinary assessment of the condition and needs of livestock and their owners in an emergency is an essential element of the disaster response. The emergency response for livestock has 4 critical components: assessing the need for and attending to the immediate medical needs of injured or affected livestock, determining the resources available to meet the needs including feed and facilities, identifying any ongoing threats or potential hazards to livestock health and welfare, and appropriate documentation of damages and actions by responders (**Boxes 1 and 2**). Veterinarians may also be asked to communicate findings to owners, agents, or employees associated with the site and the cattle.

This article discusses the veterinarian's role in the assessment of cattle operations during disasters and other types of emergencies. Veterinarians play a key role in the assessment of cattle operations during emergencies and disasters.

In the public health realm, the term "assessment" has been defined as: "The evaluation and interpretation of short and long term measurements to provide a basis for decision making and to enhance public health officials' ability to monitor disaster situations."¹ When this definition is applied to the on-site assessment of beef cattle during emergencies, it may be modified as:

The evaluation and interpretation of short- and long-term measurements to provide a basis for decision making and to enhance responders' ability to protect, monitor, and improve the health and welfare of beef cattle impacted by natural disasters and other emergencies.

Human safety must always be prioritized first when undertaking an assessment during an emergency or disaster involving beef cattle. Appropriate planning and preparation are required to successfully conduct assessments. Before performing an assessment, the assessment site should be stable enough to conduct the assessment with minimal risk to human safety. If possible, the assessment team should develop a safety plan and a briefing from a safety officer before beginning the assessment. It is critical that the team clearly understands the goals and mission of the evaluation. The assessment group should prioritize their activities and plans around accomplishing the specific goals of the assessment within the scope of the assignment. The group should understand who to report to, what their defined area of work responsibility is, and what timeframe is required (operations period). For example, if the assignment is to perform a general assessment of conditions and the surrounding environment, then veterinary triage and treatment will be beyond the scope of the work assignment. The assessment group should work within the Incident Command System whenever possible and should clearly understand the chain of command before undertaking the assessment. Observing the chain of command and communication is particularly important when the assessment will occur in austere environments when communication with decision makers may not be reliable. Plans for communication and data collection should account for mobile telephones and other portable technology that may not be functional in the altered environment. Refer to **Box 3** for a suggested list of supplies to procure before arriving at the assessment site. The mission objectives and type of disaster will affect the supplies needed as well as the risks to human safety, training required before assessment, speed of assessment, and protocols.

When conducting cattle operation assessments during emergencies, it is critical to evaluate immediate as well as anticipated needs, available resources, deficiencies, and vulnerabilities of the affected beef cattle population (**Fig. 1**). Information gathered

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