

# Feeding and Watering Beef Cattle During Disasters



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## KEYWORDS

• Emergency • Disaster • Nutrition • Cattle • Management

## KEY POINTS

- Emergency nutrition and management of cattle comprise 2 phases: survival and maintenance.
- The basic elements of feeding and management essential for survival of cattle following a natural disaster are water, feed, rest, and recovery.
- The secondary objective is to maintain the current condition of cattle and reduce the potential for negative production outcomes.
- General recommendations for both survival and maintenance following natural disasters, including flooding, blizzards, and wildfire, are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to provide a general overview of feeding, watering, and managing beef cattle following select natural disasters or emergency situations. The authors rely primarily on personal experience in relating successes and failures in managing livestock-related emergencies; however, the experiences and research of others are cited when appropriate.

No 2 natural disasters or emergencies that impact livestock are alike, and each situation will have unique challenges. Animal care, feeding, and nutrition in the wake of a natural disaster or emergency require a general understanding of animal nutrient requirements, feedstuffs, creativity, and perseverance.

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGING DONATED FEEDSTUFFS

One the most challenging aspects of feeding and caring for livestock in emergency situations is the logistics associated with the management and allocation of donated feedstuffs. Incident-response personnel should identify a central person of contact

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that has some knowledge of feedstuffs, animal needs, and livestock producers in the area. A location for use as a receiving point and staging area for donated feeds should also be identified as soon as possible after the event. The staging area should be large enough to accommodate large volumes of hay and have covered storage available to accommodate bagged feeds or concentrates. The staging area should be accessible also from major roadways; it should be marked with obvious signage, and it should have available the heavy equipment necessary to handle various types of feeds on hand. An effort should be made to allocate and direct feedstuffs directly to producers, when possible, to ease pressure and space constraints at the staging area. Although difficult, the name and location of the feedstuff donor, any pertinent information regarding the donated feedstuffs (eg, identity, nutrient analysis, and nitrate content), and the name and location of the recipient of donated feedstuffs should be documented. If any problems (ie, toxicities, contamination, or presence of noxious or invasive forage species) with specific feeds become known at a later date, the recipients of those feeds can be notified immediately so that steps to mitigate unintended consequences can be taken. Donated feeds will vary considerably in terms of type, form, quality, and nutrient composition. Incoming feedstuffs should be allocated based on the relative nutrient requirements of animals being cared for and the resources available to the recipient to handle and store different types of feedstuffs. Producers should be put into contact with University Extension professionals, nutritionists, or veterinarians to seek advice regarding the use of unfamiliar feedstuffs or feeds that may have unique characteristics (ie, heat damage). Donated hay should also be monitored for contaminants (ie, foreign objects) that may injure animals or damage hay-processing equipment.

## GENERAL WATER AND FEEDING MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Maintaining cattle on limited resources for any duration of time is inherently difficult and requires skillful management. Immediately following a natural disaster (ie, 2–3 days; the survival phase), the most basic needs for survival of cattle (ie, water, feed, rest, and recovery) are of primary importance. Once the survival phase has been addressed, the secondary objective is to maintain the present condition of cattle (ie, the maintenance phase) and to reduce the potential for negative production outcomes, such as severe body weight loss or pregnancy loss.

### *Survival Phase*

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#### **Key survival phase considerations**

##### *Water (First priority)*

- 1.0 to 2.0 gallons per 100 lbs body weight
- Introduce slowly if cattle have been without access for >12 hours
- Provide tank space for 10% of animals, allowing 1 linear foot of tank space per head

##### *Feed (second priority)*

- Offer 1.0% to 1.5% body weight per day of long-stemmed moderate-quality forage (grass hay preferred)
- Restrict grain and other supplements to 0.5% body weight per day
- Limit intake of unfamiliar feeds

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