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# FLOODING AFFECTING NUTRITION AND DIETS OF LIVESTOCK

AUBURN UNIVERSITY, Ala. – Flooding and increased rainfall in north and central Alabama are causing major problems for livestock producers. In addition to the obvious affects, producers must also take into consideration the affects the flooding is having on the nutrition and diets of livestock.

Landon Marks, an Alabama Extension regional agent of animal science and forages, said flooding in pastures is causing issues for producers. to have some impacts. We were already saturated from the fall and winter precipitation," Marks said. "Some of the issues producers are seeing are flooded pastures. having to move cattle, or any livestock for that matter, to higher ground and just not being able to use the full amount of acreage they would normally have." Marks suggests that livestock producers consider adding more hay or feed feeding sites in concentrated feeding lots. This reduces competition around feeding areas and allows all cattle to receive appropriate nutrition

"We knew that we were going

## NUTRITION

during an already difficult situation.

Dr. Kim Mullenix, an Alabama Extension animal science specialist, said an animal's energy requirements are different during



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times of flooding.

"Energy requirements of animals during a flood event are increased due to an increase in their maintenance requirements," Mullenix said. "Extra energy is expended trying to get out of water, walk in mud, etc." Mullenix suggests that producers follow the steps listed below to ensure that their livestock are receiving the proper nutrition during this time.

- Supplement cattle with a high energy, easily digestible feed for 3 to 5 days after being moved to higher ground to help rebuild their energy reserves.
   Also, provide free-choice hay or adequate pasture along with supplementation.
- Provide a complete mineral supplement containing calcium, phosphorus, and trace minerals such as copper, zinc, and selenium. Calcium

and phosphorus are the minerals needed in the largest amounts by beef cattle. Mineral supplementation is especially important given the elevated level of stress for cattle during this time. "Adequate nutrition is needed to support proper immune function, and will help cattle respond better should vaccinations be needed," Mullenix said.

# **HAY**

Dr. Leanne Dillard, an Alabama Extension forages specialist, said even if hay was not submerged in water, heavy rains will likely decrease the quality of hay stored outside or on the ground. "Hay that is submerged by as little as 1 ft., has little usable forage remaining," Dillard said. "The amount of rotted hay, mold and possible contaminants in flooded hay, make it of little value and a

potential hazard to livestock." According to Dillard, hay that has been submerged in less than 1 ft. of water may have some useable forage.

"Producers should use this hay with caution and should only be fed to cattle," Dillard said. "Feed the dry hay, but do not force the cattle to consume the wet and rotting portion of the bale." If hay in storage barn was flooded, it should be removed as soon as possible. This hay will begin to heat which creates the possibility of spontaneous combustion. Hay that is not fit for livestock should be disposed of by burning or compositing.

# **PASTURE**

Dillard said pastures that were flooded will likely be severely impacted. Mullenix said there are a few steps producers can take to minimize the damage to pasture and the creation of mud.

- Identify areas in the pasture that are well-drained and tend to dry out faster when feeding hay.
- When checking cattle, minimize vehicle traffic. Use smaller vehicles such as an ATV, etc. or check cattle on foot where possible.
- Setting out round bales prior to feeding on firm ground, then fencing them off with electric fence and moving to new bales as needed one-by-one may be a way to reduce mud. Several trials have noted that this works especially well in stockpiled fields where cattle can both graze and eat hay as needed.

For more resources on flooding, visit the Alabama Extension website at www.aces.edu.

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# CARING FOR LIVESTOCK AFTER SEVERE WEATHER

## **FEED AND WATER**

First, producers need a plan to ensure their animals have a supply of feed and fresh water.

Dr. Soren Rodning, an Alabama Extension veterinarian, said that water is a critical need for livestock.

"Cattle can survive several days without feed and even weeks to months with limited feed," Rodning said. "However, water is a more critical need for livestock. Cattle could survive

a few days without water because of the moderate amount of water in their rumen, but this water quickly runs out and needs to be replaced."

Rodning stresses that livestock need daily access to fresh, clean water. Livestock may experience dehydration and digestive upsets if they drink water with high salinity levels.

# **DISEASE AND INJURIES**

Assessing the condition of livestock after a storm is extremely important. Injuries and diseases are major causes for concern.

"Severely injured or sick animals may require veterinary treatment or euthanasia. In dairy cattle, mastitis might be a problem, especially if their milking routine is disrupted," Rodning said. "If animals need treatment, inspect working facilities for damage before using them."

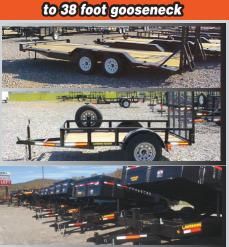












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## **POISONING**

After a storm, cattle might have access to toxic chemicals or plants that they would normally not have. Rodning said producers must act fast to prevent their livestock from consuming these chemicals or plants.

"A storm may damage chemical storage buildings as well as fences. This may allow cattle to access these toxic chemicals, which can lead to sickness or death," Rodning said. "Toxic plants, such as wild cherry or red maple trees, are also a threat. Producers must make sure that the storm did not blow these plants into pastures or in reach of livestock."

# **TEMPORARY FENCING**

Storms often damage fences. Temporary fencing is an option to utilize until repairs are complete. These types of fences are not permanent, but are a quicker, temporary option to keep your livestock in the pastures.

Dr. Kim Mullenix, an Alabama Extension animal science agent, said that temporary fences can be taken down and used multiple times.

"These fences are normally used for short periods of time and then removed and stored until they are needed again," Mullenix said. "They are easy to build, take down and cost less than permanent fences. While they do not take the place of permanent, exterior fences, they can beneficial in grazing systems to allow short-term access to pasture areas."



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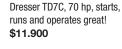
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