

Hurricane Irma in 2017 and Hurricane Michael in 2018 took a toll on many of us deer farmers in the state causing catastrophic destruction, animal displacement, flooding of deer pens, and manifested onset of diseases and the loss of livestock. Tackling a storm is no fun but worse yet, is tackling one when ill prepared.

Hurricanes are always a threat to Florida each fall. Most of us Floridians have some experience “manning” these storms but very few of us are truly prepared for that “direct” hit by a large storm resulting in catastrophic damage, power outages for weeks and the list goes on. These storms can be a huge disturbance in our operations, so having a plan in place can reduce the stress to both you and your livestock.

Below are some of the things to consider to protect your livestock before a hurricane is howling at your door.

1. Prepare for the safety of yourself and your family first! You can't help your livestock if you are not around to help them.
2. Stock up on feed, hay and health care supplies for 1-2 weeks. Remember, most feed stores will not be open in the aftermath of a storm.
3. Have a generator! You will need to run water to your livestock and or to pump water out of your pens among other things.
4. Stock up on fuel and fuel up all farm equipment and vehicles
5. Make sure all the livestock have proper ID's in case of displacement. And take inventory of your animals.
6. Clean debris in the deer pens and trim tree branches away from fence lines.
7. Remove any potential flying objects from your deer pens like fly traps, tarps, etc....
8. Fill all your water buckets to the top and fill as many other water pales and buckets you can around the farm.
9. Relocate animals to a safer location IF this is an option. In farms with preserves, this may be the time to release your animals in a soft release or preserve if in the path of a very destructive storm.
10. Have a written emergency plan in place before the storm. This plan should include contact information for your local State Agriculture Response Team (Extension Agent), Sheriff, Fire and Rescue, Veterinarian, Feed Mill or Feed Supplier, Health Department, Utilities and Waste Management.
11. If possible, have a satellite phone or access to one in case power and cell towers are down

12. Strap down all farm equipment such as feeders, trailers, irrigation pivots, etc.... And tuck away or remove any smaller items that can become flying objects.

13. Feed livestock well before the storm and offer probiotics, antibiotic feed additives and vitamins to their feed. Pull ALL feed right before the storm. Store all troughs in a safe location

14. HUNKER DOWN! DO NOT go out in the storm to check on your livestock! Your life is more valuable than theirs!

When the storm passes and winds have died down, this can be the time for you to go out and take a good look at your livestock and assess any damage to the pens or fencing. Please be aware of potential down power lines! Move animals away or out of flooded pens if possible. Of course, fix any down or damaged fencing as soon possible! Place Hay down in dry areas and wait to feed any grain until all the rain bands have passed.

Dealing with the aftermath of a storm can be just as stressful as experiencing the impact of the storm. Be prepared for dealing with the aftermath of flooding. Mosquito density will be at a peak, snakes are on the move, and beware of the floating fire ant piles in the standing water. But, by taking a proactive approach to hurricane planning, there is a greater chance both livestock and owners will “Survive the Storm”.

Have a Safe Hurricane Season! Laurie Cook DVM