

Texas Dairy Matters

Higher Education Supporting the Industry

PREPARE FOR UNEXPECTED

Ellen R. Jordan, Ph.D.
Extension Dairy Specialist
Department of Animal Science
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

Floods, tornados, hurricanes, blizzards and ice storms wreak havoc whenever they hit, but these weather disasters aren't the only crisis dairy farmers must be prepared to manage. Today's fast-paced, connected world has created a whole new environment where an event on an individual dairy may rapidly impact the entire industry.

Word of an animal disease outbreak, a milk-borne pathogen that results in human illness or death, an undercover video alleging animal abuse or a manure spill spreads like wildfire through both social and traditional media. Quickly, the reputation of not only an individual farm, but of the whole dairy industry can be damaged.

Although you can't predict what crisis may occur, take time to prepare your farm for managing the most likely events and you'll be better prepared to handle any crisis that arises.

- Start by identifying WHO should be part of your crisis response team. Your herdsman, veterinarian, and nutritionist may all play a role depending upon the circumstances. Define the roles and responsibilities of each member of your crisis team.
- Identify other groups that may be impacted by a crisis on your farm. This includes all your employees, neighbors, suppliers, consumers, government agencies, processors, and other industry



groups. Although the list will vary depending upon the circumstances, developing a communication plan for these groups in advance facilitates notification and response.

- Contact your local emergency management coordinator, law enforcement agency, and fire department in advance, so they know who you are and can familiarize themselves with your operation. They will be better prepared to assist you in a crisis if they've been on your farm previously.
- Next, review the different crisis types that might occur. Select two or three that either are more likely to occur or may cause the most damage. For example a blizzard may be fairly likely for those that live in the Panhandle, while the aftermath of a hurricane may cause flooding in East and Central Texas. A disease outbreak that results in large numbers of dead animals and quarantine may not be as likely, but creates a widespread industry and government agency response.
- Create a step-by-step response plan detailing what must be done on your farm and who is responsible.
 - Who needs to be contacted both on your farm and outside the farm gates?
 - Are government entities needed or required?
 - What about the marketing cooperative, processor, neighbors, industry?
 - What are you going to do when media call?
 - Who is going to communicate and what message do you want to deliver?
 - Conduct a practice drill to test your system.

Once the initial crisis is handled, how are you going to recover? Depending upon the crisis, there may be a need to address the emotional toll the events have taken on family members, employees and even the surrounding community. Your banker may have been on your crisis management team, but surely needs to be involved in the recovery. The quicker you can return to normal business, the better. Also, review what went right and where you could have handled things better.

Preparing for the unexpected should be part of every farm's management plan. You don't have to make the preparations alone. The Texas Extension Disaster Education Network (*EDEN*) has many resources (texashelp.tamu.edu) available for disasters of all types and for home owners as well as businesses. In addition, your check-off dollars have funded crisis preparedness material preparation by Dairy Management Inc.

<http://texasdairymatters.org>

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