



Weathering the Storm: Preparing for Natural Disasters on the Farm

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Farmers know all too well how quickly unexpected challenges can pop up.

And one of the biggest culprits for unexpected challenges on the farm is Mother Nature.

With such a large geographical area across different types of terrain, it's no surprise that Canada often experiences natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, droughts, and tornadoes. Though extreme weather is often considered part of the Canadian identity, the severity and frequency of these events are being exacerbated by climate change.

Just look at British Columbia's 2023 wildfire season. While the western province typically experiences an [average of 1,600 wildfires per year](#), between April and October 2023, British Columbia experienced [2,245 wildfires that burned approximately 2.8 million hectares](#) of land. With an estimated 386 evacuation alerts, it was the province's most destructive wildfire season to date.

So, what can producers do to prepare for natural disasters? Though we can't always predict what Mother Nature has in store, we can make plans to weather the storm effectively.

Emergency Preparedness on the Farm

Every producer needs to understand the potential disaster risks in his or her community. Whether or not your area has experienced a recent extreme weather, it's crucial to plan and prepare for these events, as they can occur with little warning.

Once you know the potential risks, the best way to get your farm ready for worst-case scenarios brought on by extreme weather is by having an emergency response plan in place. Having an emergency plan for your farm will enable you to take action quickly when disaster strikes to ensure the safety of people and livestock alike.

Since every farm is different, no two emergency plans will be exactly the same, but some key components include:



- Individual roles and responsibilities, including who will be in charge during an emergency.
- Communication and warning procedures.
- Contact information for workers and family members and emergency contacts such as neighbours, veterinarians, industry associations, suppliers, and insurance providers.
- Evacuation process and routes, meeting spot, and accountability procedures.
- Information on employee certification and training for emergency response work.
- Inventory of all animals on your farm, including their vaccination records and any identifiers (e.g., tags, tattoos).
- Identify safe locations for sheltering livestock if the property is compromised or you must evacuate.
- Farm property map indicating access and evacuation routes, meeting area, barriers (body of water, fence), central gas and electricity shutoff locations, explosive materials, locations of livestock, etc.
- Inventory of potential contaminants or hazardous materials stored on the farm.
- List of all assets on the property.
- Parameters for safe re-entry to the property.

Every farm should also have an emergency kit where supplies can be easily located. Items to consider including are:

- Supplies for quick and temporary identification of livestock.
- First aid kit.
- Emergency equipment in case of a power outage, like flashlights, headlamps, batteries, and a portable radio.
- Equipment to handle animals (e.g., halters, blankets, bolt-cutters).

While your emergency plan needs to be an easily accessible location and all employees know where to find it, you should also have a copy saved off-site or with an online storage service.

Keep in mind that an emergency plan is only effective if people know about the plan and their responsibilities in advance. That's why drills are crucial for an effective emergency response and should be held to a couple times during the year to test procedures and evacuation routes.



Extreme weather can be unpredictable, which is why having an emergency response plan isn't just a good idea, but essential for every farm to cope with emergency situations. Whether it's a winter storm, hurricane, wildfire, or flood, having a solid plan in place will help ensure the safety of everyone on the farm.

For more farm health and safety information, please visit agsafetyweek.ca.

CASA highlights the importance of safety on Canadian farms and encourages conversations about farm health and safety annually through CASW, which takes place during the third week of March. CASW's sponsors for 2025 are CN, the Canadian Canola Growers Association, and Syngenta Canada.

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families and agricultural workers. CASA is funded in part by the Government of Canada under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal, provincial and territorial initiative. For more information, visit www.casa-acsa.ca, find us on Facebook or LinkedIn, or follow us on X @planfarmsafety.