



FOREST SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Hurricane Preparation and Recovery in Florida

Forage Producers Guide



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This is 1 of 23 guides to help Southeastern U.S. producers of economically important agricultural commodities build resilience to, prepare for, and recover from hurricane impacts. All guides can be found on the [USDA Southeast Climate Hub Hurricane Preparation and Recovery Commodity Guides website](#).

Disclaimer: Information in this document was provided by USDA and various university Extension staff and based on shared experiences preparing for and recovering from hurricane impacts; however, individual producer situations will vary. This guidance should not be interpreted as required actions by regulatory or insurance agencies. **STATE OR LOCAL GUIDANCE/REGULATIONS AND INSURANCE POLICIES SUPERCEDE THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS GUIDE.** Check with your local Extension agent; county, State, or Federal contact; consultant; or insurance agent regarding the appropriateness of these recommendations to your specific situation.

Pesticide Statement: Pesticides used improperly can be injurious to humans, animals, and plants. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

Apply pesticides so that they do not endanger humans, livestock, crops, beneficial insects, fish, and wildlife. Do not apply pesticides when there is danger of drift, when honey bees or other pollinating insects are visiting plants, or in ways that may contaminate water or leave illegal residues.

Note: Some States have restrictions on the use of certain pesticides. Check your State and local regulations. Also, because registrations of pesticides are under constant review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, consult your county agricultural agent or State Extension specialist to be sure the intended use is still registered.

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 **Southeast Climate Hub**
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Hurricane Preparation and Recovery in Florida

Forage Producers Guide

This guide will focus on:

- Preparing forage crops, conserved forage, and grazing areas for potential hurricane damages
- Alleviating hurricane damages on forage crops and grazing lands

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Introduction

Preparing for and recovering from hurricane events



People who live and work in the Southeastern United States are unfortunately familiar with the devastation and loss of life and property that can accompany a hurricane event. While hurricanes have always been a threat to the Southeast, with an average of over two strikes per year since 1900, the threat posed by hurricanes is growing. Recent studies suggest that as ocean temperatures continue to rise, hurricane intensity is increasing. Hurricanes of the future will likely be slower moving, higher category hurricanes that produce destructive winds and flooding.

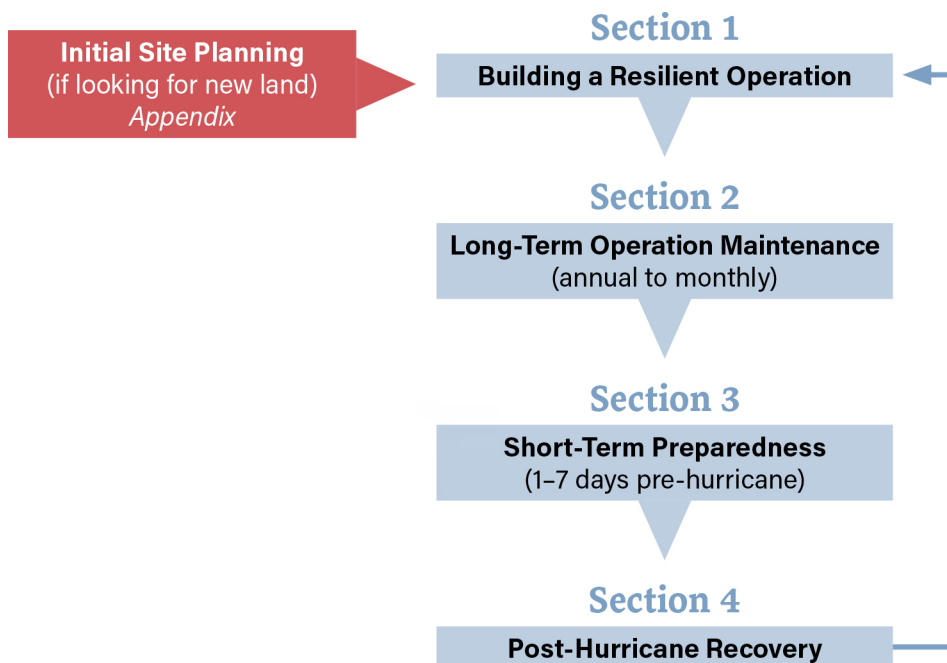
To help producers remain resilient and productive in the face of this threat, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Southeast Climate Hub developed this guide containing steps that can be taken to prepare for and recover from hurricane events. This guide is separated into four primary sections:

- The **Building a Resilient Operation** section outlines a range of considerations and systems that producers can put in place to increase their resilience to hurricanes.
- The **Long-Term Operation Maintenance** section lists specific pre-hurricane actions and periodic checks to be done on an annual basis (before hurricane season) and monthly basis (during hurricane season).

- The **Short-Term Preparedness** section lists specific actions to be done in the week before a hurricane arrives.
- The **Post-Hurricane Recovery** section outlines activities that producers can take to minimize their losses following a hurricane. It begins with actions immediately following a hurricane that are focused on safety and continues with ongoing actions a week out and a month out.

The guide also includes an Appendix with two customizable templates for a **Farm Emergency Plan** and an **Emergency Contacts List**. Directions on what to include in these two documents is outlined in the **Building a Resilient Operation** section. Their use is described in the **Short-Term Preparedness** section. Both the plan and list should be periodically reviewed, as mentioned in the **Long-Term Operation Maintenance** section. The appendix also includes an **Initial Site Planning** guide that can be referenced if purchasing or leasing new land, and **Resource Links** to helpful Federal, State, and Extension websites that are also referenced throughout the guide.

The flowchart below shows the layout of this guide and how it is intended to be used. Note that after recovering from a hurricane, producers should start back at the **Building a Resilient Operation** section, and incorporate guidance and any lessons learned into their operational and emergency management plans.



Layout and use of the hurricane preparation and recovery guide.

SECTION 1

Building a Resilient Operation

Systems that are recommended to be put in place well before the arrival of any hurricane to increase productivity and reduce your risk of damage and recovery time

Agricultural operations in the Southeastern United States can implement a range of measures to increase their resilience to hurricanes and tropical storms. Contact your local Extension office and other State and Federal resources for further information.

Personal safety

For safety tips and resources that facilitate informed decision making before, during, and after a hurricane strikes, see the Ready.gov [Hurricanes website](#) and U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) [Hurricane Safety Tips and Resources website](#).

Recordkeeping, documentation, and insurance

- The importance of pre- and post-hurricane documentation cannot be overstated. Assistance for disaster recovery may not be available until months or years after a hurricane. Therefore, it is important for purposes of insurance compensation and recovery assistance to do thorough recordkeeping of the damages and losses sustained on your farm as well as your cleanup and recovery efforts.
- The worst time to find out that you do not have enough insurance, or the right insurance, to cover your damages is when you need help recovering. Regularly review your insurance policies with your agent to be sure you have adequate coverage, including flood insurance, for your facilities, vehicles, farm buildings and other structures, and crops. Be aware that there are limitations on how soon insurance coverage will take effect. Generally, insurance policies will not cover damage if the policy was not in place before a hurricane has formed.
- Establish an inventory system so that you know exactly what's on your farm at all times for potential insurance claims and disaster recovery assistance. It is critical to have a documented inventory (e.g., photos, videos, and lists) of your house, farm buildings, vehicles, and valuable equipment on your farm *before* a disaster occurs. Maintain accurate records of harvest, equipment inventories, and supplies purchased. This inventory and documentation will be essential for filing insurance claims after the hurricane. Keep copies of this inventory

in multiple places such as on your computer, offsite in a safe location, and on a cloud-based server using an established procedure to update and transmit the information weekly.

- Take these records with you when evacuating for hurricanes:
 - Inventories and documentation for insurance and disaster recovery
 - Farm Emergency Plan
 - Emergency Contacts List
- For more information, see:
 - USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) [Crop Insurance website](#) for news and insurance information, including the [Hurricane Insurance Protection—Wind Index \(HIP-WI\) Endorsement](#)
 - RMA [Agent Locator](#) to search for approved insurance providers
 - U.S. Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [Flood Insurance Program website](#) to learn more about flood insurance options for qualifying home and business owners

Infrastructure

Buildings

- Consult topography and flood maps when building new facilities.
- Locate buildings above the 100-year flood zone whenever possible, and construct buildings and other structures to a minimum wind rating of 140 miles per hour (mph), preferably 180 mph. For more guidance on protecting farm structures and buildings from winds and flooding, see the FEMA [Compilation of Wind-Resistant Provisions](#) and [Design Guide for Improving Critical Facility Safety from Flooding and High Winds](#).

Power and backup power

Circuit breakers

- Know the location of the main circuit breaker/breaker box. The box is generally located inside of buildings. Additional breakers may be located outside.
- Ensure that the breakers, including the main breaker, are correctly labeled. Correct labeling will help you ensure power is cut to the appropriate appliances or to the entire building.

Backup power

- Create a Backup Power Plan, and store it with your Farm Emergency Plan (see “Emergency planning” below).
- Check with local, county, and State codes for any requirements to supply backup power during short-term emergencies.

- To provide power when the main power goes out, supply critical operating areas with a standby generator wired with a transfer switch. Several types of generators and diesel-powered pumps are available. Ensure that your generator is capable of supplying the power required by the irrigation pump to convey water to the entire area. Install generators with enough fuel storage for at least 2 weeks or more of full operation.
- Post the operating procedures near each generator. Consult your owner's manual for specific safety, maintenance, and operational recommendations.

Roads

- The primary driveway into the farm should have adequate drainage to prevent flooding. The road should be well packed with a solid base that will hold up to heavy equipment and trucks during extreme conditions. For more information on maintaining unpaved roads, see the USDA [Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance Practices for Dirt and Gravel Roads](#).
- If you do not have a secondary entrance to your farm, construct one if possible to provide alternative access from a different road in the event the primary entrance is blocked.
- If the farm is in a location where all roads leading in and out may flood, purchase or make arrangements to rent or borrow a boat that can safely navigate the floodwaters to gain faster post-hurricane access to your property.

Water management

Total water management is essential, including irrigation and drainage systems, and must take into account the water table and soil drainage.

Drainage

- Increased sand content improves drainage, whereas higher silt and clay contents reduce drainage. In soils prone to developing a hard pan, perform deep tillage using a subsoil implement such as a ripper-bedder, or strip tillage to help improve soil percolation and reduce the time that water stands in flooded areas.
- Develop surface and subsoil drainage including a system of canals, ditches, beds, and/or drain tiles. Ditches between beds must have enough capacity to accommodate and channel excess water.
- Consider creating water retention areas to reduce overall flooding during low- to moderate-intensity hurricanes.
- Make sure culverts are properly designed regarding size and location.

Irrigation

Locate irrigation pumps in elevated areas to reduce flooding risks to the pumps and install them with a backflow prevention device to avoid contamination in case of power loss. Keep the roads to pumps accessible so that it is easy to service generators or diesel-powered pumps after a hurricane.

Water table depth

- The amount of flooding will be determined by your land's topography, the amount of precipitation received, and the pre-hurricane water table. The higher the pre-hurricane water table, the more likely that flooding will occur for a given amount of precipitation. The chance of flooding can be estimated by measuring the pre-hurricane water table and considering the effects of varying precipitation amounts:

A general rule of thumb is that 1 inch of rain will cause the water table to rise about 10 inches in fine-textured soils, 6 inches in most of the flatwoods sandy soils, and 4 inches in coarse sands. It may take 4 to 6 days for the water table to return to its desired levels following rains of 1 inch or more. For example, if the water table is at 50 inches, 6 inches of precipitation will cause localized flooding on fine-textured soils, but no flooding would occur on sandy soils.
- For more information about water management, see:
 - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education's *Building Soils for Better Crops* [Irrigation](#) and [Drainage](#) chapters
 - University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension [Water Management for Agriculture website](#)

Trees and windbreaks

- Remove trees that could potentially blow down and block the entrance to the farm.
- If land is elevated and unprotected, consider creating windbreaks along the edge of fields. This is particularly valuable if adjoining land has bare soil and can prevent or reduce sandblasting of plants during a hurricane.
- Trees and shrubs used as windbreaks should be native species that will develop strong, deep root systems and be hardy enough to resist breaking during high winds. For example, red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) resists strong winds very well. Keep trees or shrubs pruned and free of dead or dying branches.
- For more information about how windbreaks can protect crops and provide economic, environmental, and commercial benefits, see the USDA National Agroforestry Center [Windbreaks website](#).

Debris disposal

- Create a plan for salvage operations including a method of debris disposal. Learn what materials and the specifications regarding composition of materials the landfill nearest your farm will accept, and identify alternatives if needed.
- For more information about debris disposal following natural disasters, see the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [Dealing with Debris and Damaged Buildings website](#), including their [Disaster Debris Recovery Tool](#).

Crop concerns

Pasture location

Separate pastures from forested areas. Having scattered trees for shade on the pastures is important, but avoid areas densely populated with trees because falling trees can kill livestock. In addition, too much shade will reduce forage production.

Variety selection

When choosing forage species, consider species' tolerance to floods and, where relevant, the increased soil salinity that follows saltwater intrusion.

Flood tolerance

Flood damage to pastures following a hurricane can vary depending on the time of year, temperatures, soil texture, flood duration, and water movement. Flood duration of 1 day or less usually has low impact on plant survival, and damage to plants is usually less water is moving compared to standing, stagnant water, and when plants are not completely covered by water.

Varieties that tolerate temporary water logging

- Pasture plant species with good potential to survive flooding include bahiagrass, Bermudagrass, dallisgrass, eastern gamagrass, limpograss, and switchgrass, while those able to survive extended flood damage are small grains, annual ryegrass, and most forage legumes. Tall fescue has a moderate potential to survive flooding, as long as water submersion lasts no longer than 1 or 2 days.
- Plan your forage crop varieties according to the specific ecological conditions within the farm. Areas prone to temporary water-logging conditions after hurricanes should be planted with forage species tolerant to these conditions. Limpograss is the principal forage species tolerant to temporary flooding (while not being invasive) and adapts well to south-central Florida and along the Gulf Coast.

Soil salinity tolerance

Flooding from seawater brought onto land from high winds can cause salt buildup in soils, and excessive accumulation of soluble salts suppresses plant growth. Soil salinity is a major concern when attempting to plant winter annuals such as ryegrass in the fall months into areas that have received some level of saltwater intrusion. The capacity of forage plants to grow satisfactorily in salty conditions depends on the plant's physiological condition, its stage of growth when salt content rises, and its rooting habits. In general, seedlings are much more susceptible to salt injury than mature plants.

Determining soil salt content and evaluating species' tolerance

- While salinity threshold values for seedlings of most forage species are not currently available, an estimate for seedling ryegrass is 1,800 parts per million.
- To get an idea of how various forage species may germinate and grow in areas affected by saltwater intrusion, send soil samples to a public or private soil testing laboratory for determination of salt levels.
- If a laboratory is not available, before planting large acreages of forage crops, you may perform a simple experiment yourself:
 1. Take soil samples in the top 3 inches from several locations in the field suspected of having high salt content.
 2. Mix the soil samples together in a clean plastic pail.
 3. Place small amounts of soil in smaller containers such as milk cartons, cottage cheese containers, or small boxes.
 4. Sprinkle a teaspoon of seed in each container of soil and cover seeds with $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of soil.
 5. Wet the soil with water (but do not saturate it).
 6. Within 7 to 10 days, any symptoms of injury will be apparent. Possible symptoms include no germination, partial germination, slowed emergence, or seedlings that appear to be dried out. You can use this information to make decisions relative to planting small to large acreages of winter annual forage crops.
- Talk to your local Extension agent if you have concerns about salinity levels in your fields.

Varieties that tolerate saltwater intrusion

- Areas susceptible to saltwater intrusion should be planted with more salt-tolerant forage crops (see table below). Pasture plants commonly grown in the Southeastern United States vary in their tolerance to salty conditions. Bermudagrass is generally considered to have a high salt tolerance, with some research indicating that Bermudagrass can tolerate salt concentrations of up to 5,000 parts per million for extended periods.
- Other perennial forage species such as bahiagrass and carpet grass are not as salt tolerant as Bermudagrass, but they are still considered to be relatively salt tolerant. Most cool-season forage species such as tall fescue, annual ryegrass, wheat, and barley are considered moderately salt tolerant. Most clover species, including white, red, arrowleaf, and crimson, are considered to be salt sensitive and should be avoided in hurricane-prone locations where saltwater intrusion is a possibility.

Relative Salt Tolerance of Forage Species

Relative salt tolerance	Crop	Scientific name
Tolerant	Bermudagrass	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>
	Seashore paspalum	<i>Paspalum vaginatum</i>
	St. Augustine grass	<i>Stenotaphrum secundatum</i>
Moderately tolerant	Annual ryegrass	<i>Lolium multiflorum</i>
	Barley	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>
	Cereal rye	<i>Secale cereale</i>
	Perennial ryegrass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>
	Oats	<i>Avena sativa</i>
	Meadow fescue	<i>Schedonorus pratensis</i>
	Rescuegrass	<i>Bromus catharticus</i>
	Sudangrass	<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>
	Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>
	Tall fescue	<i>Schedonorus arundinaceus</i>
	Wheat	<i>Triticum aestivum</i>
	Zoysia grass	<i>Zoysia japonica</i>
	Moderately sensitive	Alfalfa
Bahiagrass		<i>Paspalum notatum</i>
Clover		<i>Trifolium</i> spp.
Carpetgrass		<i>Axonopus</i> spp.
Common vetch		<i>Vicia sativa</i>
Corn		<i>Zea mays</i>
Cowpea		<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>
Creeping bentgrass		<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>
Creeping red fescue		<i>Festuca rubra</i>
Dallisgrass		<i>Paspalum dilatatum</i>
Eastern gamagrass		<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>
Foxtail millet		<i>Setaria italica</i>
Limpograss		<i>Hemarthria altissima</i>
Weeping lovegrass		<i>Eragrostis curvula</i>
Sensitive		Annual bluegrass
	Centipede grass	<i>Eremochloa ophiuroides</i>
	Kentucky bluegrass	<i>Poa pratensis</i>

Adapted from: Ayers, R.S.; Westcot, D.W. 1976. Water Quality for Agriculture. FAO Irrigation and Drainage Paper 29. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 97 p.

Planting dates

- To ensure that any hurricane damage to your crop is covered by your crop insurance, plant your crop before the final planting day for crop insurance in your State. This may vary by county and year, so use the RMA [Actuarial Information Browser Tool](#) to determine the final planting date for your crop. While the late planting period continues beyond the final planting date, check with your insurance provider for details that may apply if you plant during this time period. Look closely at insurance policies to determine specific details, as requirements can change.
- Exact date of planting will vary from State to State and environmental conditions. Productive stands can be obtained with plantings made as late as December 31. In late planting studies in Gulf Coast States, it was possible to form a stand in January and February; however, productivity and the number of grazing days were reduced for the season compared to planting done in October.

Storage

Conserved forages (i.e., hay, haylage, silage) must be kept on higher ground to avoid flooding. Hay should preferably be stored in a hay barn.

Emergency planning

- U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require an employer with more than 10 employees to have a printed copy of an emergency action plan readily accessible to all employees. (If you have 10 employees or fewer, the emergency plan may be reviewed orally.) For more information about emergency action plans, see the OSHA [Agricultural Safety Fact Sheet](#).
- Consider bringing together a disaster planning team, which could consist of the farm owner and engaged family members, the farm manager, an insurance representative, local Extension agent, and other individuals.

Farm Emergency Plan

- Your Farm Emergency Plan details how your operation will respond in the event of a hurricane, prepare for a worst-case scenario, and ensure continuity of operations.
- Create your Farm Emergency Plan. See [Appendix: Farm Emergency Plan](#) for a sample plan that you can customize for your operation. It should document the physical layout of your farm and include a checklist of tasks necessary to:
 - Secure the facilities, fuel supplies, chemical supplies, and equipment
 - Disconnect water, electricity, and gas service
 - Ensure that critical supplies are well stocked
 - Securely store computers and important or irreplaceable items

- Make sure all of your employees know the formats (electronic or hard copy) and locations where the Farm Emergency Plan is stored.
- Consider creating a “hurricane suggestion box” where employees can place ideas for training and planning they believe would increase the operation’s resilience and safety in the face of a hurricane, based on their previous experience.

Maps and signage

Prepare or update maps for all facilities, including locations of alternate entry/exit routes, electrical equipment (with shut-off options), fuel storage tanks (both above and below ground), propane tanks, compressed gas (for welding, etc.), and chemical spill equipment.

Hurricane tracking apps

Download one or more computer and mobile device applications (apps) that model hurricane track predictions, send alerts, and track hurricane impacts. Given the rapid advance of mobile technologies, check for new options each year prior to hurricane season. The NOAA [National Hurricane Center website](#) is a good source for keeping up to date on the latest hurricane activities. For more information about emergency alerts, see the Ready.gov [Emergency Alerts website](#).

Roles and responsibilities

- Designate an Emergency Response Team for your farm. Members of the team should be:
 - Thoroughly trained and physically capable of performing assigned duties
 - Knowledgeable about the hazards found on the farm
 - Trained in decision making regarding when to take actions themselves and when to wait on outside emergency responders
- Define a chain of command with clearly defined primary and secondary roles and each person’s responsibilities. Some individuals may not be reachable after a hurricane, so alternative levels of authority need to be established to resolve critical issues quickly. In your Farm Emergency Plan, list who will be responsible for each task and how they’ll report fire, flooding, building collapses, and other emergencies. Identify procedures to be followed by the people who remain to handle critical operations.

Communication

Emergency Contacts List

- Develop and maintain a list of all people connected with your operation that should be contacted in an emergency. See [Appendix: Emergency Contacts List](#) for a template that you can customize. The Emergency Contacts List should include names, phone numbers, and other pertinent information (email addresses, locations, etc.) for individuals (owners, family members, employees, employee family members), emergency responders, State and local agencies, contractors and suppliers, and anyone else who is on your farm on a regular basis or provides crucial emergency services.
- Keep copies of your Emergency Contacts List (hard copies as well as electronic copies) in multiple locations, including your home, office, and vehicle, and with all family members and key employees. It is a good idea to have this information stored on your and your employees' cellular devices.

Lines of communication with local businesses and officials

Establish communication with your local law enforcement and fire departments, electricity and gas providers, and other key groups to help them understand the nature of your business so that they can respond as needed in the event of a hurricane. Let them know the number of employees typically onsite, the potential impact of the hurricane on crops, and the potential hazards that could lead to environmental contamination in the event of a flood or structural damage.

Post-hurricane communications

- Purchase a battery-powered or hand-crank radio to stay up to date about conditions beyond your property in case you lose electricity for an extended period of time.
- Consider ahead of time the locations where producers and others could meet if all communication lines are down (e.g., a local feed or equipment supplier).
- Contact a local AM radio station to see whether it could serve as a communication channel in the aftermath of a hurricane.
- For more hurricane-related communication recommendations, see the U.S. Federal Communications Commission [FCC and FEMA: How to Communicate Before, During and After a Major Disaster website](#).

Equipment operation

- Train personnel in the safe operation of unfamiliar equipment (such as generators or drainage pumps) that they may have to use in case of a hurricane.
- Make sure that appropriate employees are prepared to set up your backup generators. They should refer to your Backup Power Plan for information about where generators and generator fuel can be found, where they should be placed in preparation for a hurricane, and how they are to be connected to the electrical loads they will power.

Drones

Consider getting an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) (i.e., drone) pilot license and purchasing a UAV. Small UAV quadcopters or hexacopters that can be equipped with visual or RGB cameras are relatively inexpensive (\$500 to more than \$2,000). Use of UAVs will help with damage assessment if accessing fields directly is impossible or unsafe. For regulations and information about operating a UAV, see:

- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Aviation Administration [Unmanned Aircraft Systems website](#)
- University of Florida IFAS [Preflight and Flight Instructions on the Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles \(UAVs\) for Agricultural Applications](#)

Chemical safety

Take the necessary steps to prevent chemical spills from storage tanks containing fuel, herbicides, pesticides, or other potentially dangerous liquids.

Basic emergency response skills

Train all members of your Emergency Response Team in the use of various types of fire extinguishers, first aid, and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

SECTION 2

Long-Term Operation Maintenance

Periodic checks of systems already in place
(described in the previous section)

Prior to hurricane season

Contact your local Extension office and other State and Federal resources for further information specific to your circumstances.

Annual review of emergency planning tasks

Farm Emergency Plan review and reassessment

- Review your Farm Emergency Plan with your employees to ensure that they are familiar with all elements. Make any necessary additions or updates.
- Review your Emergency Contacts List with your employees and update it with current names and contact information.
- Review items provided in the “hurricane suggestion box,” and add them to your Farm Emergency Plan or training list as relevant.

Employee training

- Identify key tasks that employees will need to complete during hurricane preparation and recovery operations.
- Once each year, provide training for all employees that will participate in the key tasks identified above.

Personal health and safety tasks

- Make sure you and your employees have up-to-date tetanus shots.
- For information and links to time-specific guidance for preparing yourself and your home, see the Ready.gov [Hurricanes website](#).
- Download the FEMA [Mobile App](#) to learn emergency safety tips and receive real-time weather alerts, important disaster planning reminders, information about shelters and recovery centers, and more.

Recordkeeping, documentation, and insurance

- At the time of renewal, review your insurance policies with your agent to be sure that you have adequate flood insurance and coverage for vehicles, buildings and structures, and plants.

- Keep records of harvest, equipment inventories, and purchases of supplies up to date. Long-term records will help to establish a production baseline from which losses can be determined. Be sure that copies of each are in a safe location chosen in the Building a Resilient Operation section above.

Infrastructure

Buildings and facilities

Inspect all buildings and all facilities for structural soundness. Perform maintenance on facilities and infrastructure to repair items such as loose roofing materials or improperly/inadequately grounded electrical equipment to reduce hazard risk during a hurricane.

Drainage

- Clean out culverts and ditches and other drainage areas especially before and during the peak hurricane season. Keep ditches clear through a good maintenance program including chemical weed control. Regrade areas of the property that are prone to flooding to improve drainage.
- Check any new construction areas, housing developments, or DOT projects nearby to see whether they are affecting your land's drainage. Determine where the water is draining now, and address any new drainage needs before hurricane season begins.

Maintenance of trees, windbreaks, and roads

- Do strategic tree pruning to reduce potential damage to forage-storing facilities and equipment barn.
- Maintain the fence lines with as few trees as possible, as trees are a major cause of damage to fence lines.
- Maintain windbreaks with regular pruning, especially if they are close to aerial power or telephone lines. To learn more about proper pruning practices, see:
 - Inland Urban Forest Council [A Practical Guide to Proper Pruning of Trees and Shrubs](#)
 - University of Florida IFAS [Pruning Shade Trees in Landscapes website](#)
 - OSHA [Line-Clearance Tree Trimming Operations website](#)
- Evaluate roads for any repairs or improvements needed before a hurricane arrives.

Generators

- Do routine annual maintenance on backup generators. Replace old stored fuel with new, fresh fuel. Replace fuel filters, test all generator circuits, and make sure you have all necessary supplies on hand, including spare belts and fuel filters.
- Ensure that all essential equipment functions when powered by the backup generator.

Emergency equipment and supplies

- Maintain an ample supply of emergency medical supplies and have raincoats and boots available for employees.
- Maintain a supply of drinking water and dry and canned food sufficient for at least 2 weeks for employees who become stranded at the farm or who need to return to the farm before utility and emergency services are restored.
- Maintain an ample supply of weather-proofing supplies such as tarps and sandbags; fencing supplies; plumbing supplies; lumber, construction tools, nails, and rope; portable lights; batteries; and battery-powered or hand-crank radios.

Forage

Make sure you have enough conserved forage (e.g., hay, baleage, silage). You may need to use a large amount of it during the hurricane season if the fences are down and you need to keep the cattle confined in a smaller area.

Monthly considerations during hurricane season

See [Appendix: Resource Links](#) for local Extension offices and other State and Federal resources which you may consult for further information.

Weather monitoring

During the June to November hurricane season, pay regular attention to long-term weather forecasts. Check your weather tracker daily if a hurricane is forecast to move closer to your area.

Equipment and supplies

- Check list of equipment and supplies for repairs that may be needed after the hurricane.
- Note supplies that take longer to deliver and order early to ensure they are available after a hurricane. Stockpile chemicals that are essential for your operation.
- Make sure that sprayers, tractors, and harvest equipment are in good working order to ensure that the crop can be harvested as efficiently as possible when conditions allow.
- Contact your equipment manufacturers to establish procedures for dealing with damaged equipment. Make sure you won't invalidate your warranty if you attempt repairs yourself.
- Refresh emergency medical supplies, water, and dry and canned food supplies.

- Make sure that you have a full stock of inputs that you typically use such as fertilizers, haying supplies, lubricant, herbicides, pesticides, and other crop inputs.
- Obtain sufficient quantities of plywood to protect windows and doors and store in a dry area. As the hurricane gets closer, plywood may be scarce or unavailable.

Fuel

- Consider fuel needs for tractors, generators, and farm vehicles. Any fuel stored onsite poses a contamination risk if storage tanks are not adequately protected from flooding, especially if stored at a low elevation; however, if secure storage facilities are available onsite, arrange for fuel deliveries several days prior to the expected hurricane impact.
- If pumping water from a well, calculate your generator's fuel usage, and make sure that you keep at least a 2-week supply of fuel on hand at all times.

Forage

Make sure you have enough forage mass in the grazing lands and conserved forage during hurricane season. If a hurricane hits, it will be difficult to find feed and other supplies to purchase.

SECTION 3

Short-Term Preparedness

Bracing for the hurricane: specific actions to be done in the week before a hurricane arrives

1-7 days before a hurricane is forecast to strike

First and foremost, take whatever precautions necessary to protect your family, your employees, and yourself. After that is accomplished, focus on protecting your farm. Once forecasters have put your area in a hurricane's path, there are a number of precautions you should take to prepare.

Employees' roles and responsibilities

- Review your Farm Emergency Plan with all employees and discuss each person's responsibilities.
- Continue to monitor hurricane track and strength updates. Listen closely for evacuation orders in your area.
- Determine whether individual employees plan to evacuate or stay during the hurricane. For those who evacuate, establish a schedule for checking in after the hurricane so that they know the extent of the damages and when it is safe to return. For employees who stay, be sure they have safe lodging, sufficient food and water, and an established plan for checking in.
- Ensure that all managers know their responsibilities prior to, during, and after the hurricane. Handling the hurricane damage is too much work for one or two people.
- Ensure that personnel have training in first aid and key personnel know how to operate emergency equipment they may be unfamiliar with (e.g., a chainsaw to remove trees blocking roads).

Communications

Ensure that all communication equipment is available and working properly. Cellular phones are good for communication, but ensure radios are available and in good conditions of use. Keep mobile devices fully charged. Have rechargeable battery packs or charging cables for your vehicle to maintain communication. Texting may be a more valuable form of communication than calling when the phone networks may be overwhelmed.

Food, water, and cash

- Make sure your operation still has at least a 2-week supply of drinking water as well as dry and canned food.
- Provide a storage container for potable water and label it as potable—for human consumption—as distinct from water for agricultural use. Washing lines require potable water, and if county or city water is the primary source of water for a packing shed, be sure to have water on hand in case municipal water becomes unavailable.
- Secure cash reserves for purchasing supplies after the hurricane. In widespread power outages, credit and debit cards will not work, and many vendors do not accept checks.

Recordkeeping, documentation, and insurance

- Ensure that important documents are in a safe, dry place and that duplicates are in alternative locations offsite.
- Document the condition of the facilities and the maturity or salability of the crops. Take photographs and video (where helpful), as this will aid with insurance claims and disaster recovery assistance. If crops are damaged or lost, these records will help with the damage assessment and post-hurricane claims. Check with your insurance agent regarding how crop loss and damage estimates are calculated.
- If you have insurance through FEMA's [National Flood Insurance Program](#), your policy may cover up to \$1,000 in loss-avoidance measures such as installing sandbags and water pumps to protect insured property. Check with your insurance provider to confirm. Keep copies of all receipts and a record of the time spent performing the work and submit these documents to your insurance adjuster when you file a claim to be reimbursed.

Equipment

- Ensure that all emergency equipment is ready (e.g., compressors and heavy machinery).
- Make sure chainsaws are in good working condition. Stock up on fuel mixture and bar and chain oil. Sharpen the chain, keep the saw file and saw wrench close at hand, and make sure you have a spare chain.
- Move all non-critical farm equipment to higher elevations or store in secure buildings.
- Move pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers to a secure place, on high ground above any potential flooding if possible.
- Ensure that tanks containing fuel, fertilizer, and other liquids are kept full and tied down.

- Make sure that equipment you will need after the hurricane, such as tractors with front-end loaders or skid-steer loaders, is fully fueled and operational.
- Unplug computers and other electronic equipment to protect from electrical surges and store these items safely.

Infrastructure

Backup generators

Connect your backup generators with water pumps and essential buildings, and test to make sure generators are fully operational, with full fuel tanks, and portable fuel storage tanks. Your generators may have to run for several days until the power company can restore electricity. Review the owner's manual for the maximum run time and other unit specifics.

Fuel

- Fuel up all vehicles and equipment, as gas will become scarce when the hurricane hits. Make sure all essential equipment has at least a 2-week supply of fuel.
- Be sure the supplier understands how much you use daily and that it is necessary for farm operations. If secure storage facilities are available onsite, arrange for fuel deliveries several days prior to the expected hurricane impact.
- Service stations will not be able to supply fuel if they do not have electric power for the pumps, so make sure portable fuel storage tanks are full.
- Any fuel stored onsite poses a contamination risk if storage tanks cannot be adequately protected from anticipated flooding. Move them to higher ground or secure in place.

Electricity and gas shut-off

Consult your Farm Emergency Plan and follow procedures for disconnecting electrical power and gas to some or all buildings and any non-critical equipment in danger of being flooded.

Buildings and grounds

- To secure building components:
 - Check on the security of roofing, siding materials, windows, and doors.
 - Make sure all other building components are tied down securely.
- Secure objects around your farm so that they don't blow away or become hazardous projectiles.
- Tighten artificial shades to minimize wind destruction and further damage to fence lines.

Trees

Inspect fences and prune trees that are endangering facilities and fence lines.

Drainage

- Check drainage ditches and culverts and remove any debris.
- Pump down all water from ditches to the maximum extent possible.

Irrigation

If possible, store irrigation equipment in an enclosed, safe place.

Supplies

Review inventories and order any additional supplies that can be delivered before the hurricane.

Crop

- If weather permits, harvest forage crops to feed animals during the hurricane, and store in a dry area.
- If crops are in an area that will likely experience total loss due to flooding, consider harvesting crops ahead of time to conserve as hay. If conserving the forage is not practical, consider putting the animals out to graze before total losses occur.
- Contact your local USDA [Field Office](#) to discuss how early harvesting may impact available recovery assistance, and your bottom line, after the hurricane.
- Move hay bales to higher ground.

1 day before the hurricane strikes

- Perform a final verification of the hurricane track and strength. Listen closely for evacuation orders for your area.
- Obey all mandatory evacuation orders. Failure to do so can put you and your workers at risk and could tie up rescue resources. Do not require your personnel to be present on the farm, since they also have to prepare themselves and their families.
- Make sure your employees have evacuated to secure areas at least 1 day prior to hurricane impact. If some staff will remain onsite, confirm that they have access to structures on high ground or elevated slabs or pylons that can withstand hurricane winds and rain, sufficient stores of clean water and food, medical supplies, working radios or cell phones, and sufficient power sources. Those workers remaining onsite will likely need to rely on mobile communication with evacuated supervisors and colleagues, since local radio and television communications often black out for several hours as a hurricane passes. Local first responders may also be unreachable at the time of hurricane impact.
- Personnel remaining onsite must monitor water levels in low-lying areas so they can exit the farm before roads are flooded.

SECTION 4

Post-Hurricane Recovery

Activities that can be taken to minimize losses immediately after, a week after, and a month after a hurricane

Immediately after the hurricane has passed

Safety

- Make safety your first priority. Do not rush back into a facility until you are sure it is safe. Use extreme caution due to the potentially injurious situations presented by weakened trees and damaged structures, equipment, and electrical and gas systems.
- Continue to watch the weather forecast. Are waters still forecast to rise more than they are now? Some floodwaters peak up to a week after the hurricane.

Electricity and gas

- Avoid downed power lines as these may still be live and present an electrocution hazard. Operate on the assumption that all downed power lines are live. Remember that a downed power line on a fence may energize the fence.
- When restoring electricity to buildings that have flooded, use extreme caution and consult with an electrician and your power provider. See the Alabama Cooperative Extension System guidance on [Restoring Electrical Service website](#).
- Natural gas or liquid petroleum (LP) gas leaks can cause deadly explosions. Check for natural gas or LP gas leaks, and if a leak is suspected, turn off the gas, evacuate the area, and notify your gas company and local law enforcement. Tell employees to stay clear.

Ground water

After a flood event, ground water should be used with caution if contamination is suspected anywhere in the general vicinity.

Roads and buildings

- Before entering buildings, check for levee breaches, rising or incoming water, and evidence of fire or structural damage. Check for water leaks and other damage inside.
- As soon as it is safe, clear debris from roads. Cordon off areas that are unsafe.

Security

Watch your farm for unwelcome visitors like looters. Secure your equipment and farm entrances, and make sure your security cameras are operational.

Recordkeeping, documentation, and insurance

- Do not begin cleaning up or repairing until you have thoroughly documented the damage. Contact your crop insurance agent as soon as possible to decide on the best plan moving forward regarding damage to your plants. (See “Within a week following hurricane impacts” below regarding post-hurricane documentation.)
- If you have experienced flooding and have flood insurance through the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program, see their [How do I Start My Flood Claim? website](#) for information about starting a claim.

Within a week following hurricane impacts

Personal health and safety

Take care of yourself during recovery. Disasters and the recovery period afterward take a toll on human health. Disaster recovery takes a long time and can be very stressful. For guidance to help you through this difficult time, see:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Disaster Mental Health Resources website](#)
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension [Tips for Handling Family Stress After Disasters](#)

Communications

The local supply/seed stores are often natural sources of information if the power is down and electronic communication is limited. In addition, radio stations have generators that allow them to transmit if their towers are not damaged.

Recovery assistance

Before beginning cleanup, talk with your insurance company and consult with disaster assistance program agents to learn about available programs, eligibility requirements, and application procedures. (See “Disaster assistance” below for more information about assistance programs.)

Documentation of damage

- Many disaster assistance programs will become available after the disaster, perhaps even years later, and an operation can only receive assistance for damage that was documented. For instance, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), administered by USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), can provide funding and technical assistance to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. The work must be documented, and farmers must receive authorization from their local USDA office in advance.
- It is fine to accept partial payment initially if agreeable with your agent. This should not affect your eligibility for additional payments due to losses that become available later.

Photos and video

Take photos or video first, before beginning any cleanup or repairs. Photograph and take video of damaged crops and property, with written notes describing what is in the pictures and where they were taken. This “after” documentation will be used with your pre-hurricane, “before” documentation to clearly show your losses.

Drones

If you own and have a license to operate a UAV (i.e., drone), utilize it now to take aerial photographs of damage to your fields. Some local Extension offices might have access to drones and personnel with a drone pilot license to assist you.

Written records

Keep a notebook with you throughout the recovery period. Describe the work you did and record all expenses. Keep a running log of names and what was discussed during conversations with insurance, State, and Federal agency contacts to create a valuable, third-party record of your recovery efforts that can be used later as documentation for disaster assistance programs. You may not remember everything that was discussed at these meetings, so have a second person involved in the conversations if possible so that one can ask questions and the other can take notes.

Disaster assistance

- Communicate early and often with recovery assistance contacts. Check in with them throughout the recovery process. Note that assistance will vary from one hurricane to the next and one budget year to the next.
- Call your local [FSA Office](#) to report any losses or damages and inquire about available assistance programs, application procedures, and deadlines.
- Check in with your local Extension office, USDA agencies, and your State Department of Agriculture to see what assistance may be available following the hurricane.
- Consult the following resources:
 - FEMA [Disaster Recovery Center Locator](#) and [Individual Assistance website](#) to find the closest recovery center and other resources to assist you during your recovery
 - USDA [Disaster Resource Center website](#) for updates on emergency designation areas and available assistance programs
 - Farmers.gov [Protection and Recovery website](#), including the five-step [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#) to learn which USDA disaster assistance programs are available to assist you with your recovery
 - U.S. Department of Labor [Disaster Unemployment Assistance Program website](#)
- To learn more about USDA Disaster Assistance Programs that may be right for you, see:
 - [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP)—FSA program that provides assistance for eligible farmers who suffer losses or are prevented from planting agricultural commodities that are not eligible for protection by Federal crop insurance

- [Emergency Farm Loans](#)—FSA program that provides eligible farmers and ranchers low-interest loans to help them recover from production and physical losses
- [Disaster Set-Aside Program](#)—FSA program that allows eligible FSA borrowers to skip an annual installment payment and move it to the end of the loan repayment period
- [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) (EWP) Recovery Assistance—USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program that provides financial and technical assistance to quickly address serious and long-lasting damage to infrastructure and land
- [EWP Floodplain Easement Program](#) (EWPP-FPE)—NRCS program option for converting land to permanent easements for the purpose of improving flood plain management and reducing the threat to life and property
- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP)—Year-round NRCS rehabilitation program with funding authority to provide financial assistance to repair and prevent excessive soil erosion caused or impacted by natural disasters
- [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP)—FSA program with technical assistance through NRCS that helps eligible farmers and ranchers repair damage to farmlands caused by natural disasters

Insurance claims process

Begin the insurance claims process (Federal, private, or both). Accurate losses of inventory and equipment may not be fully documented yet, but start the paperwork now since insurance claims can take months to resolve following hurricane events.

Infrastructure assessment and repairs

- Assess damage to equipment and infrastructure and create a prioritized list of needed repairs.
- Gather quotes from qualified vendors to make repairs to facilities and equipment. Vendors are often overwhelmed in the months following a hurricane, so making contact soon after the hurricane is important for an expedient response.
- Monitor fuel levels in backup generators and order additional fuel as needed.

Floodwater contamination

“Floodwater” refers to the overflow of external sources of water such as rivers or canals and not to direct precipitation that may pool in or near your fields or facilities.

Food and water supply

All water should be tested prior to use for drinking, cleaning food contact surfaces or produce, or production activities. Ground water sources should be submitted for microbial and chemical testing, regardless of whether the wellhead was flooded, to ensure that the aquifer was not contaminated and to monitor wells for coliform contamination. This is particularly critical for drinking water and water that will come into contact with food. Some growers on municipal water systems, particularly those a substantial distance from the distribution center, may be advised to submit a microbial water test (after boil water advisories are no longer in effect) to verify the integrity of the distribution line to their farm or operation. If a surface water source was flooded, water should undergo microbial and chemical testing prior to reuse for production activities. If microbial levels exceed acceptable levels, a water treatment system (e.g., ultraviolet [UV] light, peroxyacetic acid) may need to be used until subsequent tests indicate the levels have stabilized.

Crops

Soil contamination

- If floodwater entered your fields, consult with your State Department of Agriculture and industry and/or Extension specialists for guidance on how to proceed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends determining the source of floodwaters (and the likelihood that they carried human pathogens), letting fields dry before reworking, and testing for pathogens. Other specialists suggest a 30- to 60-day wait period to reduce bacterial contamination of soil. Chemical contamination may require a longer waiting period depending on the chemical and the level of contamination.
- Collect soil samples throughout the previously flooded portions of fields and test them for known contaminants and general chemical contamination. For more information about soil testing, see:
 - University of Florida IFAS Extension [Soil Testing website](#)

Crops for animals consumption

If your crop was intended for animal feed, see the FDA:

- [Crops Harvested from Flooded Fields Intended for Animal Food: Questions and Answers](#)
- [Center for Veterinary Medicine \(CVM\) Updates website](#) and scroll through the updates for resources to help animal food producers affected by hurricanes

Crop

Diseases, pests, and weeds

- Diseases may develop if the crop has been flooded for 3 or 4 days.
- If your fields have been flooded with off-farm water sources, be aware of weed seeds that have not traditionally been a problem on your farm but could have been carried in, and be aware of the management implications from this in subsequent seasons.
- Examine pastures and hayfields and remove dangerous debris such as strands of barbed wire, chemical bottles, insulation, and trees.
- Certain tree species—including buckeye (*Aesculus* spp.), wild cherry (*Prunus* spp.), and oak (*Quercus* spp.)—can potentially cause diseases in livestock that consume their leaves or nuts. Make sure that livestock do not have access to downed trees of these species.
- Monitor pastures and hayfields for the approximate amount and duration of flooded conditions to determine when livestock can be reintroduced or fields replanted.

Damage to hay

- Inspect forage that has not been harvested for wind damage and debris from flooding or wind. Evaluate options for harvest and use.
- As soon as it is safe to do so, inspect stored hay for possible contamination by debris and for flooding, as water has a very detrimental effect on hay quality.
- For hay that was stored in a barn or in a covered stack, allow time for the hay to dry before recovering. In some cases, the hay may need to be unstacked to facilitate drying.
- If hay stored in storage barns has flooded, it should be removed as soon as possible because it will start to heat and could easily catch fire. Hay that has been flooded with more than about a foot of water will have significant damage. The amount of rotted hay, mold, and possible contaminants in flooded hay makes it of little value and potentially hazardous to feed to livestock. This hay could be used for erosion control or be composted, but depending on how much water was absorbed, it will likely have little feed value.
- Dispose of any hay that was severely damaged by flood and determined to not be suitable for feeding through burning or composting. Avoid feeding moldy hay, as it can lead to illness or diminished animal production and fertility.

Within a month after hurricane impacts

Recovery assistance and insurance claims

- After many natural disasters that result in widespread damage, additional programs often become available to aid with agricultural losses. These programs are not guaranteed, however, and are generally handled on a case-by-case basis depending on the hurricane's impact. In addition, some programs require additional processing time for a special appropriation from the U.S. Congress and Presidential approval.
- While a special allocation may not be immediately available, it is important to document losses and to illustrate to your legislators the impact of the hurricane on your operation. This information will help promote policy decisions and additional allocations that may become available.
- Continue to follow up on the insurance claims process. Begin filing for any additional State or Federal disaster assistance programs for hurricane recovery.
- See the USDA [Disaster Resource Center website](#) for updated information about FEMA aid and other disaster programs.
- Continue to document everything and keep a record of conversations with agency contacts. This creates a valuable, third-party record of your recovery efforts that may be used later as documentation for assistance programs.

Organic certification

If your farm is organic, it is important to consider how the hurricane impacts may affect your certification. Temporary variances from some organic practices are possible, so contact your certifier to determine whether your practices qualify. It is most important to report prohibited substances that may have infiltrated your farm during the hurricane.

Infrastructure and equipment

- Continue to gather quotes from qualified vendors to make repairs to facilities and equipment. Vendors are often overwhelmed in the months following a hurricane, so making contact soon after the hurricane is important for an expedient response.
- Monitor buildings for water damage or mold development, and monitor wells for coliform bacteria.
- Continue to refill fuel tanks and check backup generators until full power is restored.
- Perform general and preventative maintenance on any equipment that was flooded. Keep all receipts for parts and labor, as well as a list of any equipment that is determined to be unusable.

- Examine drainage ditches and canals to determine to what extent they were silted in by floodwaters and need repair and cleaning of debris. Clean and/or repair drainage ditches onsite. Contact water management agencies about canals.

Pasture recovery

Severely damaged pasture will require patience for adequate recovery. These stands could fully recover with proper weed control, proper soil fertility, and deferred grazing.

Weed control

Monitor forage stands for possible introduction of new weed species. It is important to identify all weed species present and possibly control via mowing or herbicide application.

Assessing soil fertility and salt content

Symptoms of salt injury and rate of recovery

- The symptoms of salt injury in plants resemble drought—both are characterized by water stress (wilting) and slower growth. As salt concentration rises, water becomes increasingly difficult for the plant to absorb. Severe injury caused by prolonged exposure to high salinity results in stunted plants and tissue death. If the salt concentration is high enough, a plant can die from water stress even in moist soil.
- The rate of recovery of pasture plants after saltwater intrusion is dependent on how fast the salts can be leached out of the root zone (the top 6 inches of soil). Rainfall is a major factor in reducing salinity because it leaches the salts from the soil: 5 inches of rainfall will remove about 50 percent of the soil salts. Therefore, frequent rainfall events in the weeks and months after a hurricane will help to expedite pasture recovery.
- Collect soil samples and have them analyzed by a soil testing laboratory for nutrients and contaminants, such as salt. If soil nutrients such as phosphorus or potassium are deficient, consider making a fertilizer application to correct deficiencies. Links to university soil testing laboratories can be found in the “Within a week following hurricane impacts: Floodwater contamination” section above.

Deferred grazing

Producers should delay grazing until the plants have recovered and should not overgraze the pastures that have been affected by the hurricane. The forage plants should have several inches of residual growth prior to the onset of winter.

Caution about adding wood debris to agricultural land

Following recent hurricanes, farmers have been approached by contractors wishing to spread chipped and shredded tree debris on their land, often paying hundreds of dollars per acre to do so. While these additional dollars may be very helpful at this time, you will need to consider how this influx of carbon will likely require additional nitrogen inputs to maintain crop productivity in the future. If you are approached about considering this type of contract, ask lots of questions, know exactly what is going to be applied and at what rate, and factor in additional nitrogen fertilizer costs. If you want help determining the impact of a land application for your specific operation, contact your local Extension agent. Like many other farming decisions, this all comes down to how much income it will produce versus the additional management it will require. For more information, see the University of Florida IFAS Extension [Considerations Before Contracting for Chipped or Shredded Wood Debris Application on Agricultural Land](#).

APPENDIX

Farm Emergency Plan

Hurricane preparedness can have a direct effect on your farm's profitability and long-term survival. For agricultural operations in hurricane-vulnerable regions, it is critical to have a Farm Emergency Plan in place outlining key tasks and different people's roles and responsibilities as you brace for the hurricane. Your Farm Emergency Plan can save valuable time in a chaotic situation when multiple challenges clamor for immediate attention, helping you prioritize your actions and recover from the hurricane as efficiently as possible.

Use this sample plan to customize for your operation. Preparation for these tasks—putting the systems in place—is described in the main guide (see “Emergency planning” in the Building a Resilient Operation section). Though there is some overlap with the tasks listed in the Short-Term Preparedness section, this sample plan is intended to be a document you can use during an actual emergency.

Before the hurricane

Tracking the hurricane

Use your hurricane tracking app. The NOAA [National Hurricane Center website](#) is a good source for keeping up to date on the latest hurricane activities. Learn more about emergency alerts at the Ready.gov [Emergency Alerts website](#).

Emergency Response Team

- Gather the members of your farm's Emergency Response Team, who have been thoroughly trained in their respective tasks and are knowledgeable about the hazards found on the farm.
- Review the chain of command and individuals' primary and secondary roles and responsibilities.
- Discuss modes of communication as well as alternatives in case any communication channels become unusable during or after the hurricane.
- Review your farm's Emergency Contacts List.

Employees' status and location

Review procedures to account for all employees after an emergency evacuation. Determine who will evacuate and who (if anyone) will stay during the hurricane. For those who evacuate, establish a schedule for checking in after the hurricane. For those who stay, be sure they have safe lodging and sufficient food and water and establish a clear plan for them to check in.

Maps and emergency escape routes

Using the map of your farm with all buildings and contents, review emergency escape routes and hurricane preparation procedures for each building, facility, and area of the operation.

Emergency equipment and supplies

Locate the following equipment and supplies:

- Emergency medical supplies
- Raincoats and boots
- Weather-proofing supplies such as tarps and sandbags
- Fencing supplies
- Plumbing supplies
- Lumber, construction tools, nails, and ropes
- Portable lights, batteries, and battery-powered or hand-crank radios

Food, water, and cash

- Make sure there is at least a 2-week supply of dry and canned food and drinking water (at least ½ gallon per person per day) stored onsite if personnel will be staying onsite.
- Secure cash reserves to use for purchasing supplies after the hurricane.

Facility security

- Ensure that important documents are in a safe, dry place.
- Check on the security of roofing and siding materials and windows and doors, and make sure all other building components are tied down securely.
- Secure outside objects around your farm, so that they don't blow away or become hazardous projectiles.
- Protect greenhouses (if applicable).
- Check drainage ditches and culverts around your facilities for debris.
- Pump down all water from ditches.

Equipment

- Ensure that all emergency equipment is ready (chainsaws, compressors, heavy machinery, etc.).
- Move all non-critical farm equipment to higher elevations or store in secure buildings.
- Move pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers to a secure place, on high ground if possible.
- Make sure that farm equipment you will need after the hurricane, such as tractors with front-end loaders or skid-steer loaders, is fully fueled.
- Be sure your backup generators are fully operational. Fill the fuel tanks and portable fuel storage tanks.

Fuel

- Make sure you have a minimum of a 2-week supply of diesel and gas. Be sure the supplier understands how much you use daily and that it is necessary for farm operations. If secure storage facilities are available onsite, arrange for fuel deliveries several days prior to the expected hurricane impact. Consider fuel needs for tractors, generators, and farm vehicles.
- Any fuel stored onsite poses a contamination risk if storage tanks cannot be adequately protected from anticipated flooding. Move to higher ground or secure in place.
- Since fuel may be unavailable if service stations have no power, make sure portable fuel storage tanks are full.
- Ensure that tanks containing fuel, fertilizer, and other liquids are kept full and are tied down.

Backup generators

- Retrieve backup generators and fuel, and place them where needed.
- Connect generators to critical electrical loads as outlined in your Backup Power Plan.

Electricity and gas shutdown

[Outline the shutdown procedures for electricity and gas, according to instructions you are given by your utilities and other experts.]

[Outline the shutdown procedures for specific equipment.]

Service or equipment to be shut down	Procedures for shutdown

Crop

[Add actions specific to your crop.]

Immediately after the hurricane

Safety

- Make safety your first priority. Do not rush back into a facility until you are sure it is safe. Use extreme caution due to the potentially injurious situations presented by weakened trees and damaged structures, equipment, and electrical and gas systems.
- Continue to watch the weather forecast. Are waters still forecast to rise more than they are now? Some floodwaters peak up to a week after the hurricane.

Electricity and gas

- Avoid downed power lines as these may still be live and present an electrocution hazard. Operate on the assumption that all downed power lines are live. Remember that a downed power line on a fence may energize the fence.
- When restoring electricity to buildings that have flooded, use extreme caution and consult with an electrician and your power provider. See the Alabama Cooperative Extension System [Restoring Electrical Service website](#).
- Natural gas or liquid petroleum (LP) gas leaks can cause deadly explosions. Check for natural gas or LP gas leaks, and if a leak is suspected, turn off the main property gas line, evacuate the area, and notify your gas company and the authorities. Tell employees to stay clear.

Roads and buildings

- Before entering any buildings, check for levee breaches, rising or incoming water, and evidence of structural fire or damage.
- As soon as it is safe, call in the employees needed for inspection and clearing debris from roads.
- Cordon off areas that are unsafe.

Security

Watch your farm for unwelcome visitors like looters. Secure your equipment and farm entrances, and make sure your security cameras are operational.

Insurance and documentation

- Do not begin cleaning up or repairing damage until you have thoroughly documented the damage. Contact your crop insurance adjuster as soon as possible to decide on the best plan for moving forward with potential damage assessment, cleanup, and repair.
- If you have experienced flooding and have flood insurance through the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program, see their [How do I Start My Flood Claim? website](#) for information about starting a claim.

Emergency Contacts List

You may customize this for your operation. Delete items that do not pertain to your commodity or location and add companies or organizations specific to your commodity.

Individuals

Name(s)	Role(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
	Owner(s)		
	Members of the Emergency Response Team		
	Other key employees or managers		

Emergency Services

Organization	Name(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
Emergency medical responders			
Hospitals			
Fire department			
Law enforcement			
Emergency management agency			

Utilities, Roads, and Trees

Organization	Name(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
Electric utility or cooperative			
Natural gas utility			
Water utility			
County road department or State Department of Transportation			

Insurance Companies

Organization	Name(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
Commodity insurance companies			

Contractors and Suppliers

Organization	Name(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
Electrical contractor			
Plumbing contractor			
Mechanic			
Fuel supplier			
Generator servicing			
Equipment dealer			
Equipment rental company (emergency generators, lifts, etc.)			

Federal, State, and County Organizations

Organization	Name(s)	Phone number(s)	Notes
State Department of Agriculture			
Local Extension office			
County emergency management agency			
County Health Department			
USDA Farm Service Agency			
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)			
U.S. DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)			

Initial Site Planning

Considerations when deciding on a new location to establish or purchase land for forage production

Hurricane risk

No model or long-term forecast can determine when and where hurricanes will strike during any given hurricane season; however, return period maps have been developed to give a good indication of relative hurricane risk. Return period maps display the number of years between hurricane events and help quantify the vulnerability of coastal areas to hurricanes. To learn more about your area's hurricane return period, see the NOAA [What are the chances a hurricane will hit my home? website](#).

It is important to remember that return period maps represent a long-term average and that even if the average return period for a hurricane is 25 years, hurricanes can still occur at one spot on successive years or even in the same year. It is also important to understand that while most data show only where hurricanes have made landfall, hurricanes can also move hundreds of miles inland causing significant wind damage and flooding.

Use NOAA's [Historical Hurricane Tracks tool](#) for a map and dates of hurricanes that have impacted your area in the past 150 years. The timing and track of historic hurricanes may be different than those for future hurricanes and should be used with caution.

Site characteristics

Topography

- When planning for long-term preparedness, evaluate a potential site for your operations with an eye toward reducing the risk of surface flooding or coastal storm surge. It is unlikely that all risks can be avoided. However, the negative considerations of an elevated open site are often less than those of low-lying areas susceptible to flooding.
- Land should be gently sloping with adequate drainage. Avoid steeper slopes if possible and terrace them if necessary.
- If possible, choose a site that has higher elevation areas so that farm equipment can be easily moved to avoid flooding.

- Separate pastures from forested areas. Having scattered trees for shade on the pastures is important, but avoid areas densely populated with trees because falling trees during hurricanes can kill livestock. In addition, too much shade will reduce forage production.

Flood risk and storm surge

- Assess historic and predictable patterns of flooding to determine which areas are at the highest risk of damage during extreme weather.
- Consult the following Federal and State resources for estimating flood risk:
 - FEMA [Flood Map Service Center website](#) (for official flood maps)
 - Florida residents should contact their county government
- Determine proximity to bodies of water at risk for storm surge. In some areas, storm surge can cause flooding many miles inland from the coast. See the NOAA [National Storm Surge Hazard Map](#) to assess your risk and plan a safe evacuation route.

Roads and utilities

- Choose a site with good roads that will allow multiple escape routes when evacuating from hurricanes and tropical storms that can cause rising floodwaters, storm surge, or downed trees.
- Plan to have utilities and other critical infrastructure permanently constructed on higher ground to avoid equipment and infrastructure damage during flooding.
- Search for areas with resilient electrical grids. Avoid relatively isolated sites with limited access to electrical utilities.

Natural windbreaks

Choose a site with natural windbreaks, such as wooded areas surrounding your pasture land.

Resource Links

Extension, State, and Federal websites

Florida

Extension Websites	Purpose
Forages *	Resources to help farmers improve forage management and productivity
Extension Office Locator *	Contact information for Extension agents in your county
Disaster Preparation and Recovery *	Resources to help prepare for and recover from hurricanes and other disasters
Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)	Information and program resources to help with hurricane preparedness and recovery

*University of Florida IFAS Extension

State Websites	Purpose
Florida Governor's Office	News and information from the Governor, including evacuation orders and emergency declarations
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	Main source for answers to your agriculture-related questions
Florida Division of Emergency Management	News and resources to help you prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies, including hurricanes
Florida Emergency Response Team	Disaster assistance resources for residents

State (FSA and NRCS) and Federal

State Websites	Purpose
USDA FSA Florida USDA NRCS Florida	Focus on State FSA and NRCS resources, including financial and technical information sharing

Federal Websites	Purpose
Ready.gov Hurricanes	Resources to help individuals prepare for and recover from hurricanes
U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA)	News and announcements related to agricultural commodities and disaster recovery programs
USDA Disaster Resource Center	Resources to help you build long-term resilience to and recover from hurricanes and other disasters
USDA Office Locator	Contact information for USDA offices in your county, including FSA, NRCS, Rural Development, and Conservation Districts
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Assistance with securing loans, receiving payments, and applying for disaster relief programs
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Financial and technical assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners
USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA)	Assistance with Federal crop insurance and managing risk
USDA RMA Agent Locator	Contact information for local RMA offices in your county
U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)	Resources to view historical, current, and predicted hurricane activity and warnings in your area
NOAA National Hurricane Center	Current and forecasted tropical cyclone activity, educational resources, and advisory warnings for your area of interest
NOAA National Weather Service Weather-Ready Nation	Latest news, information, and technology to enable informed decision making before, during, and after a hurricane strikes
U.S. Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	News and information to help you prepare for and recover from hurricanes and other disasters



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