

Assessing and Caring for Cattle After Wildfires

Livestock caught in the path of the wind-swept fires across the state of Texas could suffer death, severe damage from burns and smoke inhalation. Often times, it takes days, maybe even weeks after fires to assess the livestock injuries.

Locate and secure the cattle, provide adequate water and forage, and then consult your veterinarian. That's the first steps. But experts from Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory have put together a list of other considerations and steps to take when determining livestock damage.

Feed and Water

- If they can be moved to unburned ground, it is best. Provide fresh water and then rotate their feeding area to prevent the build-up of pathogens.

- Make sure they have adequate forage, appropriate supplements and good water.



Assessing damage

- Check surviving cows and calves for signs of exposure to flames, heat and smoke. There could be cows with potentially scorched udders. Cows that suffered scorched udders from burns or excess heat may develop mastitis and will probably not allow calves to nurse. Calves should be monitored closely to detect any that are not able to nurse their dam.

- Analyze cattle for secondary problems that lead to infections and further problems, i.e. burned eyes, feet, udders, sheaths and testicles, as well as smoke inhalation with lung inflammation and edema.

- It may take 10 days to two weeks for the damage to start showing on feet. The cattle will start sloughing the hoof wall and become crippled.

- To assure the welfare of the affected animals, veterinarians need to be consulted. If, in the event the animal is not going to be able to be treated, decisions concerning sending them to market need to be made immediately, before secondary complications develop.

- Damage can also be done by livestock inhaling smoke. Smoke can move for miles and cattle that are not near the flames or heat could suffer some damage, such as irritation to the lining of the respiratory system, including nasal passages, trachea and lungs. This can lead to inflammation, edema and emphysema, with the severity determined by the duration of inhaled smoke.

- In addition, the lining of the eyelids and eyeballs can be irritated and lead to secondary infections which can be fatal.

Continued Monitoring and Action

- Monitoring should continue for weeks after the event. Secondary complications could be indicated by a cough or cloudy eyes in the animals.

- Before secondary complications of infection occur, immediate slaughter for human consumption may be the most appropriate, humane procedure. Prior to slaughter, an antemortem inspection by veterinary meat inspectors will determine safety and wholesomeness for human food.

For more information on care of animals and pastures after wildfires, AgriLife Extension has posted information on the Texas Extension Disaster Education Network or EDEN at <http://texashelp.tamu.edu/004-natural/fires.php>

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