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What the  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Can Do----

# WHEN NATURAL DISASTER STRIKES



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## WHEN NATURAL DISASTER STRIKES



Tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and many other natural disasters may strike without warning. It is important for you to know how and where to get emergency help. This leaflet explains how the U.S. Department of Agriculture can help you.

The Department can :

- Provide emergency food to victims of natural disaster from stocks already available in the States.
- Assist farmers whose crops have been destroyed or damaged, or whose livestock have been left without feed.
- Extend emergency loans and otherwise aid farmers whose property has been damaged or destroyed.
- Help restore and conserve disaster-stricken land and water resources.
- Battle forest fires and take other emergency actions in the national forests.
- Make payments for losses suffered on federally insured crops.

Assistance operations can be started when an area has been declared eligible for disaster relief by the President or the Secretary of Agriculture, or on the initiative of the Office of Emergency Planning.

County disaster committees established by the USDA gather information on the extent of damage and kind of assistance needed. State committees evaluate and relay this information to Washington.

## **USDA Help in Case of—**

### **SEVERE WINDSTORMS OR FLOODS**

When hurricanes, tornadoes, or hailstorms strike, or floods overrun the land, the Department of Agriculture can:

- Provide food from Consumer and Marketing Service donated supplies for emergency group feeding to assist the homeless, evacuees, or others affected by the disaster.

- Arrange Farmers Home Administration credit to eligible disaster-stricken farmers for operating expenses, replacing lost or destroyed livestock, and repairing or replacing damaged or destroyed buildings and farm equipment.

- Donate Government-owned feed grain for starving livestock through the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

- Sell Government-owned feed grain at reduced prices, through ASCS, to needy livestockmen unable to pay market prices.

- Permit, through ASCS, grazing or haying on land otherwise retired from crop production under Department programs.

- Approve ACP (Agricultural Conservation Program) cost sharing for authorized soil conservation practices.

- Give practical advice on necessary repairs and on cleaning up after storm damage.

- Make emergency loans and provide other assistance, through the Rural Electrification Administration, for repair and replacement of damaged rural electric or telephone facilities. In nearly all States, electric cooperatives have well-established plans whereby they assist a system hit by disaster.

- Make Federal Crop Insurance indemnity payments on insured crops damaged or destroyed by storms.

- Allow credit after hailstorms, through FHA, for reseeding land.

- Give assistance after floods, through the Soil Conservation Service, in planning and carrying out measures for flood prevention, erosion control, and drainage. SCS can also help with reclamation of land overlaid by sand and other flood debris.

The educational program of Cooperative Extension Service agents and specialists help people understand the danger of possible disasters. They make plans to minimize danger and loss, and they provide technical information after a disaster on problems involved in getting back to normal.

### **DROUGHT**

As drought conditions develop, the Department helps first with credit and grazing assistance.

If conditions grow worse, special feed programs may be authorized.

The Department, through ASCS county offices, can grant permission to harvest hay or graze cattle on land retired by Department programs.

ASCS county offices may be authorized to sell CCC-owned grains at reduced prices.

ACP can give help by cost sharing in restoring pastures.

FHA can arrange emergency loans to farmers whose needs cannot be met locally.

FCIC can make indemnity payments on insured crops damaged or destroyed by drought.

C&MS can seek freight rate reduction for moving hay or feed into an area or livestock to other pasture or forage.

Farmworkers and others whose income is seriously reduced may become eligible for family food donations or the food stamp program, where these activities are operating through local welfare agencies.

### **RURAL FIRES**

When fires break out in or near National Forests, the Forest Service provides leadership in fire control or helps local fire units.

After a fire, ASCS, SCS, and FS assist with flood control on burned areas by planting trees, seeding grass, and building reservoirs.

### **EARTHQUAKES**

After earthquake disasters the Department can provide emergency food for group feeding to assist the homeless, evacuees, and others.

It can arrange FHA emergency loans to disaster-stricken farmers for operating expenses, replacing lost or destroyed livestock, repairing or replacing damaged or destroyed buildings and farm equipment.

It can donate Government-owned feed grain through ASCS for stranded livestock.

It can sell Government-owned feed grain at reduced prices through ASCS to needy livestockmen unable to pay market prices.

### **PRESIDENTIAL DECLARATION OF DISASTER**

State and local agencies have primary responsibility for disaster relief. They are expected to use their own resources, facilities, and funds to the maximum extent.

Under the Federal Disaster Act, however, the President can bring all the resources of the Federal Government to bear in a disaster situation by declaring a major disaster. He can use emergency funds provided for this purpose.

If the stricken area warrants it, the Governor of a State asks the President for a declaration under the major disaster law. If the President finds that the situation calls for emergency action, he issues a declaration to that effect.

The Governor certifies to the Department and agency heads the need for certain types of aid, such as the sale of livestock feed at reduced prices in specific counties and donation of livestock feed in others. Emergency aid funds are provided to State and local government units who work with the affected individuals. These funds do not go directly to individuals.

## CIVIL DEFENSE

Disaster relief operations of USDA serve to train officials who will be responsible for similar work in a nuclear attack. Many services needed as a result of sudden natural disasters are much the same as those which would be needed in the event of enemy attack.

Where possible, an official charged with a specific defense task is responsible for the corresponding function in a natural disaster. The Department's disaster assistance is coordinated under the Secretary's assistant for defense mobilization.

## STEPS YOU TAKE TO GET USDA HELP

**Food.** State agencies distributing foods donated by the Consumer and Marketing Service for school lunch and needy persons can release these food stocks for emergency group feeding.

*To obtain this help*, contact your local agencies—disaster relief agency, civil defense, American Red Cross, or Salvation Army. Local school lunch or welfare offices have authority from the State agencies to release USDA-donated foods.

**Credit.** The Farmers Home Administration can make 3 percent emergency loans in authorized areas when needs cannot be met locally. Local FHA offices recommend to the State Director who recommends to the national office.

*To obtain this help*, contact your nearest field office of FHA. It is usually located in the county seat. If not, any USDA local office can direct you to the proper location.

(*Note:* Federal Crop Insurance policies are good collateral for crop loans from banks, Production Credit Associations, FHA, and other lenders.)

**Feed and Forage.** In disaster areas designated by the Secretary, emergency assistance may include either or both of the following:

1. Sale of Government-owned feed grains at reduced prices to approved livestockmen.
2. Seasonal grazing and haying on retired or diverted cropland with a reduction in diversion payments, or for a short period at no reduction in payment following a sudden disaster such as a tidal wave or severe flood.

When the President declares a "major disaster" area, Government-owned feed grains may be donated to prevent death of livestock.

*To obtain such help,* contact your local ASCS office. It is usually located in the county seat.

**ACP Emergency Cost Sharing.** The Government can share emergency conservation costs to rehabilitate damaged farmland. The Secretary designates counties for cost-sharing assistance.

*To obtain this help,* contact your local ASC Committee, usually located in the county seat.

**Soil Conservation.** The Soil Conservation Service can give technical help and, in the Great Plains Conservation Program areas, it can also offer financial aid. It can help plan and carry out flood prevention projects. During flood emergencies its engineers can supervise the construction of levees, bridges, and dikes.

*To obtain this help,* contact your local Soil Conservation District or area, or State office of SCS.

**Forest Disasters.** The Forest Service can help suppress fires, conduct rescue operations, prevent and/or remove avalanche debris; assist in flood, hurricane, and earthquake emergencies; mobilize its communications system for rapid action; and take other actions in or near National Forests or elsewhere as directed by the President.

*To obtain this help,* contact your nearest District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, or Regional Forester.

**Diseases and Insects.** The Agricultural Research Service has veterinarians, plant pathologists, and entomologists skilled at crop and livestock protection.

*To obtain their help,* contact your practicing veterinarian, State or Federal veterinarian, or county extension agent who will arrange for needed assistance.

**Insect Damage.** Federal Crop Insurance protects against loss from insect damage to the extent of the crop production costs. Insurance must be applied for before planting in counties where it is available.

*To obtain this help,* contact your nearest FCIC representative or the Crop Insurance State Director for your State. Any USDA local office can direct you to the proper location.



**Information.** The Cooperative Extension Service can advise on cleaning up damaged property, on sanitary measures, on water supply and sewage disposal, insect infestation, feed and water for livestock, substitute planting for damaged crops, grain storage, and other disaster problems.

*To obtain this help,* contact your county agricultural agent, home economics agent, or the director of extension at the State land-grant university or college.

## **PRECAUTIONS AGAINST NATURAL DISASTERS**

Precautions can be taken against natural disasters.

### **Insurance**

Carry machinery, building, and crop insurance (hail and all-risk).

### **Disease Control**

Report outbreaks of unusual plant and animal diseases to your county agent or veterinarian so that action can be taken to prevent such diseases from spreading.

### **Flood Control**

When floods threaten, strengthen embankments and levees, open drains and ditches, brace buildings, protect wells by sandbagging. As necessary, move household goods, feed supplies, and machinery to higher ground or upper stories of substantial buildings.

### **Drought**

Develop sources of emergency water for community and agricultural needs such as larger farm ponds or sediment pools at floodwater structures in upstream projects.

### **Fire Control**

Have an emergency plan for action in event of fire. Post fire-warning notices around woodlands. Remove dead trees and branches regularly. Discuss woods-fire problem with your local forest fire warden or State forester.

## **EXAMPLES OF HELP GIVEN**

When Hurricane Betsy devastated the Louisiana Gulf coast in September 1965, over 5½ million pounds of USDA foods were made available to help feed and rehabilitate nearly 320,000 victims

of the disaster—the largest emergency feeding activity in USDA's history. A few months later, when a typhoon struck American Samoa, over 300 tons of USDA foods were rushed from the State of Hawaii to assist the 12,000 victims.

A series of tornadoes struck 11 counties in southern Michigan with little warning April 11, 1965. The storms killed several people and thousands of livestock.

Many buildings containing hay, grain, mixed feeds and ensilage were destroyed or damaged.

The Governor certified the need for temporary grazing of land previously withdrawn from production under USDA programs, for a short-term feed grain donation program, and for the livestock feed program under which sales of CCC-owned grain could be made to eligible farmers at reduced prices. The Secretary of Agriculture approved the requests for all three programs.

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For several mid-June days in 1965 torrential rains threatened land protected by the 90 flood-water retarding structures in Colorado's Kiowa, Big Sandy, and Franktown-Parker watershed projects. The 1965 Kiowa area flood approached the severity of a 1935 storm which took seven lives and caused property damage in excess of \$2 million. The 1965 Kiowa flood caused total damage of \$72,000, one-tenth of the estimated damage that would have occurred without the Kiowa project. The Big Sandy project prevented an estimated \$500,000 loss. Similar protection was afforded property in the Franktown-Parker project area.

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In the summer of 1964, a forest fire burned 70,000 acres of critical watershed lands on the edge of Santa Barbara, Calif. The Forest Service rushed to reseed and repair the watershed ahead of fall rains that could have brought greater destruction from flooding than from the fire itself. More than 40 construction workers and engineers worked 12 hours a day for 2 months. By December 11, just ahead of the rains, 69,000 acres had been seeded and other repair work had been done.

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Disastrous floods in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri during the spring and summer of 1965 wiped out millions of dollars worth of crops. Farmers who had protected themselves with Federal All-Risk Crop Insurance were able to get back the production expenses on crops washed away by the flood waters.