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What
The U. S. Department of Agriculture
Can Do

WHEN NATURAL DISASTER STRIKES

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



What
The U. S. Department of Agriculture
Can Do

WHEN NATURAL DISASTER STRIKES

Natural disaster can strike without warning. It is important for you to know where to get emergency help.

This leaflet explains how the Department of Agriculture (USDA) can help you in a disaster.

The Department has authority to:

- feed the hungry.
- assist farmers whose crops have been destroyed or damaged, or whose livestock have been left without food.
- make emergency loans and otherwise aid the farmer whose property has been damaged or destroyed.
- help to restore and conserve disaster-stricken land and water resources.
- dispense valuable information on disaster problems.
- battle forest fires and take other emergency actions in the national forests.
- help finance the restoration of rural power and telephone service.
- make payments for losses suffered on federally insured crops.

Relief operations can be started when a disaster is declared by the President or the Secretary of Agriculture, or on the initiative of the Office of Emergency Planning.

County disaster committees established by USDA report on the extent of damage and the kind of assistance needed. State committees evaluate and relay information to Washington. Frequently local Department employees make a field investigation.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY



Calamities of nature drive people from their homes, isolate them, and often leave them without food. The Department is prepared to release surplus food to relief agencies such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and civil defense organizations. Supplies can be diverted from stocks donated for the school lunch or welfare programs for quick distribution. State agencies can release food without prior approval of USDA.

Field officials of the Food Distribution Division of Agricultural Marketing Service may visit the scene to determine how much food is needed.

Relief agencies may apply to State agencies that distribute surplus food or to the division's area field office. Individuals should apply to relief agencies.

Example: A powerful storm lashed the middle Atlantic coast in March of 1962. More than 190,000 pounds of food was given to 8,000 persons in coastal areas of Virginia, North Carolina, and Delaware.

EMERGENCY LIVESTOCK FEEDING

The farmer in time of disaster may find that his livestock have been displaced, stranded without food, and possibly mixed in with other herds. His feed supply may have been spoiled. The Government can help him until he can resume caring for the livestock.

Government-owned grain can be donated or sold at reduced prices to farmers in a stricken area. Grazing or the harvesting of hay on land diverted from crop production under USDA programs also can be authorized.

Make your requests to the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) County Committee, generally in the county seat.

Example: After Hurricane Carla hit the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast in 1961, some 479,000 bushels of feed grains valued at \$556,000 were donated to State governments for livestock owned by victims of the storm. In addition, about 5,700 acres of land diverted under Federal farm programs were opened for temporary grazing.

To facilitate the movement of hay and feed into an area, or of livestock to other areas where there is pasture or forage, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) can seek to obtain freight rate reductions. These can be made at the discretion of the railroads, which may propose tariff changes for approval by Interstate Commerce Commission.

The ASC County Committee or other local USDA officials may be asked to certify that farmers are entitled to such assistance. If a rate reduction is approved, the farmer can contact the local railroad freight agent for information.

Example: Drought scorched the Northeast in 1962. With assistance from AMS, railroads made possible a 25-percent reduction in freight rates on hay shipped to 95 counties in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

LENDING MONEY

The toll taken by natural disaster may leave the farmer or stockman in need of money to repair buildings and equipment, to buy feed for livestock, to clear away debris, or otherwise resume normal operations. Perhaps his crops have been damaged or destroyed.

Emergency loans can be made in areas where the Secretary of Agriculture finds there is a need for credit that cannot be met by local institutions.

The Farmers Home Administration's (FHA) nearest field office, usually in the county seat, is the place to apply.

Example: After Hurricane Carla battered farms in 38 Texas counties in 1961, FHA came to the aid of farmers with 1,400 loans for a total of \$8 million. This enabled hard-pressed producers to buy feed, seed, or fertilizer, to replace or repair damaged property, and to meet other costs of returning to normal operation.

DAMAGED LAND AND WATER RESOURCES



Floods, wind erosion, drought, and other calamities can ruin the land's production capacity and damage water resources.

The cost of emergency conservation measures to rehabilitate such damaged farmland can be shared by the Government under the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP). The Secretary designates counties for cost-sharing assistance.

You can get such aid through the local ASCS office. The county ASC Committee accepts and approves applications for funds and approves payment on completion of the emergency conservation activities.

Example: Flooding damaged 1,500 acres of irrigated land on 40 farms in Irion County, Tex. ACP assistance enabled farmers to restore damaged ditches and relevel 330 acres of irrigated land in a joint effort. The Government paid up to 80 percent of the cost to each farmer.

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) gives technical help for the restoration and conservation of disaster-damaged resources. Under the Great Plains Conservation Program, SCS offers financial and technical assistance.

In small watersheds subject to flood damage or other water problems, SCS can assist local organizations and agencies—both farm and nonfarm—in planning and carrying out projects for flood prevention, erosion control, sediment reduction, water supply, and drainage.

Example: In Harrison County, W. Va., recurrent flooding of Monongahela River tributaries washed out crops, damaged property, and carved gullies in the earth. Damage in one 5-year period exceeded \$500,000. Local groups, with the help of SCS, developed the Salem Fork Watershed project for a municipal water reservoir and stream channel improvement. The program included conservation measures on farms in the area: Planting trees and improving grasslands, building farm ponds, diversion terraces and grass waterways.

In flood emergencies, SCS has engineers who can supervise the building of emergency levees, bridges, and dikes. They and other technicians can help with reclamation of land overlaid by sand and other flood debris.

Make requests for flood prevention help to any local, area, or State office of SCS.

INSURED CROPS

When insured crops are destroyed or damaged by causes beyond the farmer's control, the Department provides immediate indemnity payments for such losses.

Contact the county or State office of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC).

Example: Drought, heat, and grasshoppers threatened total destruction of crops in western North Dakota in 1961. Showers and cooler weather helped some crops to recover and averted a crop catastrophe. Despite the improvement, FCIC payments were more than \$6,800,000 to cover losses of insured farmers.

ADVICE ON DISASTER PROBLEMS

The disaster victim often is confronted by problems he has never encountered. Information on how to cope with them is a most valuable aid.

The Federal Extension Service offers advice on cleaning up damaged property, sanitary measures, water supply and sewage disposal, insect infestation, feed and water for livestock, substitute planting for damaged crops, grain storage, and other subjects.

For information, contact the county extension agent, home demonstration agent, or director of extension at the State land-grant college.

Example: Hurricane Carla touched off the mass flight of some 500,000 persons from gulf coastal areas. County agents knew what to do. They directed helicopter rescue crews to farm families isolated by flood and sent medical aid to bedridden persons. They were instrumental in clearing trees and other obstacles from highways because they knew where to get winch trucks. They helped to find food and shelter for refugees.

FOREST DISASTERS

The Department can furnish skilled manpower, organized teamwork, and technical advice when fire, flood or other calamity strikes in or near the national forests.

The Forest Service suppresses fires, conducts rescue operations, removes avalanche debris, and takes other actions needed in a disaster. It cooperates with many States in the prevention and control of forest fires and pests.

Make requests for help to the nearest district ranger, forest supervisor, or regional forester.

Example: A severe earthquake and landslide shook western Montana in 1959, killing nine persons and isolating some 250 campers below the Hebgen Dam. The midnight tremor was felt in an eight-State area. Smoke-jumpers of the Forest Service, armed with radios, parachuted into the canyon below the dam to give medical aid and prepare the way for helicopter rescue groups. They helped to remove the injured and to evacuate campers and fishermen who had been trapped. They helped search for missing persons.

RESTORING ELECTRIC POWER

Severe storms can tear down power lines and otherwise disrupt electric and telephone service. Rural Electrification Administration (REA) is equipped to give technical help, advice, and credit to help restore such service.

REA borrowers normally maintain reserves to cover disaster losses. But in a severe disaster the reserves may be inadequate to meet unexpected needs. Occasionally,

too, a system that is not a borrower turns to REA for help.

Rural electric and telephone systems may apply to REA, Washington 25, D.C.

Example: A tornado struck Udall, Kans., in 1955 destroying most of the Udall Telephone Co. facilities in the town. The company applied for its first REA loan. The agency quickly granted a \$153,000, 35-year loan to enable the firm to build a new central office and plant.

CONTROLLING DISEASE AND INSECTS

Livestock and plant diseases, some of which can be spread by insects, can cause disaster and economic loss to farmers if they are not quickly brought under control.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has veterinarians, plant pathologists, and entomologists skilled at crop and livestock protection methods. Pest and disease control programs are usually carried out in cooperation with State officials.

Contact the local ARS representative or the county agent for help.

Example: The African red tick, which can spread several dangerous animal diseases, was found on zebras, camels, and other African animals in an outdoor zoo at Boca Raton, Fla. ARS specialists were called in. In cooperation with State officials, they examined more than 300 zoo animals and eradicated the insect by repeated applications of pesticides on the 130-acre compound.

FEEDING BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

Blizzard, flood, and drought can play havoc with the food supply of wildlife and migratory birds. When these creatures are threatened by starvation, Commodity Credit Corporation can donate bulk grain to State agencies and to Interior Department regional officials for feed.

State agencies should contact the Grain Division of Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service in Washington.

Disaster relief operations of USDA serve to train officials who will be responsible for similar work in a nuclear attack. Many disaster services 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 shall be made responsible for the corresponding function in a disaster. The Department's natural disaster assistance is coordinated under the Secretary's assistant for defense mobilization.

PUBLIC LAW 875

The President can bring all the resources of the Federal Government to bear in a disaster situation by declaring a major disaster under Public Law 875. He can use emergency funds provided for this purpose.

The Office of Emergency Planning surveys the situation and prepares for the President a description of the stricken area.

The governor of a State requests from the White House a declaration under the major disaster law. The governor must certify to Department and agency heads the needs for certain types of aid. For example, he would inform the Secretary of Agriculture of a need for livestock feed in specific counties.

All disaster services of the Department can be provided under this law, when that is necessary. However, most of the services also can be made available without action under Public Law 875.

Washington, D.C.

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