

Rescue Feeding Cattle and Horses in Hurricane Affected Areas

Cattle and horses that have been in a hurricane and have not eaten for several days should NOT be fed anything except grass or hay for a few days at the rate of about 2% of their body weight (about 20 lbs for most mature horses and cattle, 10 lbs for smaller animals). The hay should not be moldy, but it can be wet. Wet hay may contain fire ants and should not be fed if at all possible.

Cattle can be fed nearly any type of hay, but hay made from haygrazers, Johnsongrass or milo (sorghum) stubble should not be fed to horses. If there are hay rings to feed the hay in, cut and remove the strings to keep the horses and cattle from eating them. This should also be done if there are no hay rings, but there will a lot more hay loss due to trampling and defecating.

After a few days, cattle and horses can be fed small amounts of feed in addition to hay. Cattle and horses should start out at .1 - .2% (2 - 4 lbs) of feed (for mature animals, 1000 lbs and up); use half that much (1 - 2 lbs) for smaller animals. After a few days, this amount can be increased slowly until about 1% (10 lbs) of their body weight is being fed (in addition to the hay) within 10-14 days.

When possible it is best to feed horses 2-3 times per day (dividing up the feed amount equally) in order to avoid colic (stomach ache) and founder (swelling in the feet that causes severe lameness). Horses should be fed apart, if possible, to reduce fighting over feed. Put out more tubs or feed piles than horses. If possible, feeding in individual feeders is best.

Cattle can be fed once daily. If they are fed on the ground, spread out the feed in several spots to reduce loss in trampling and fighting over feed. As in horses, put out more piles, if possible, than head of cattle. Cattle that over consume feed will develop acidosis, bloat (a gas pocket in the rumen), and can founder.

Cattle and horses both require clean water. Cattle and horses in affected areas may have ingested contaminated water (with salt, petrochemicals, pesticides, etc) and need to be offered clean water. Some will refuse chlorinated water, so well water is preferable. Horses will sometimes drink flavored water (with soda water).

Both cattle and horses will require mineral supplementation and a good balanced (calcium to phosphorus) ratio is desirable as soon as feasible. This will satisfy their craving for salt and reduce their salt water drinking.

Since both the cattle and horses are stressed, it is important to make sure that they are not overfed "sack" feed whether it is "cubes" or "sweet or pelleted" feed. Fill them up with hay first, and then slowly add sack feed. Provide minerals if possible, and watch for signs of sickness.