

Don't let your farm become victimized

PART TWO OF A SERIES

We expect an automobile accident in our town from time to time, but we do not expect to be a victim of one.

It's the same with terrorism and natural disasters. A national study of farmers after September 11, 2001, showed that 75 percent of the farmers surveyed thought an agricultural terrorist attack would likely or very likely hit the United States in the future, but only 14 percent thought their farm was likely or very likely to be targeted.

When we think of disasters, we frequently think of widely-publicized events such as hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis. However, disasters come in many forms and the costs associated with smaller, local disasters such as floods, fires, hazardous material spills, and other natural disasters make up the greatest disaster costs each year in the U.S.

Farmers, suppliers of agricultural inputs such as feed and veterinary services and other small businesses are all affected when disasters strike agricultural communities. Consider the following real world examples:

- In the early hours of May 31, 1998, windstorms blew a full silo onto an Ottawa County tie-stall barn, which prevented the dairyman from milking his cows. Fortunately, the farmer was able to make short-term arrangements with a neighbor to milk his cows.
- On New Years Day, 2005, 14,000 gallons of 10-34-0 liquid fertilizer spilled on a farm when storage equipment failed. The farmer faced cleanup expenses and lost fertilizer. If secondary containment were in place, much of the spilled product could have been reclaimed.
- In 2001, the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom cost more than \$6 billion. Nearly 25 percent of farms in the UK were affected.

Protecting your business

Statistics collected by the National Archives and Records Administration show that 43 percent of companies struck by a disaster never resume operations, while 29 percent of those that resume business fail within two years. Therefore, it is very important that each farm business assess its operation for vulnerable points and take steps to reduce risks before problems occur. The idea is to either prevent an emergency or disaster from impacting a farm business, or reduce the impact should a disaster occur.

Prevention

How much time should you put into fine tuning your on-farm emergency prevention

efforts? Answering the following questions, adapted from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Independent Study Course "Livestock in Disasters" may help determine what is right for your farm:

- What are the greatest emergency threats facing your business and what are you already doing about them?
- How many plants, acres or animals could you afford to lose, or what decrease in production or sales could you withstand and still remain viable?
- How much do you depend on closely timed pick-ups and deliveries – some of which may need to cross interstate or international borders?
- How would a large-scale disaster impact the local businesses on which you depend?
- Have you or farms in your area experienced on-farm theft or been targeted by "activists" or disgruntled workers?
- How would your business be affected if consumers lost confidence in the products you sell?
- Have you ever met with your county's emergency manager to discuss the types of resources available to you in disasters?

Conducting a self-assessment

Emergency management experts generally recommend the following steps for developing a farm protection strategy:

- Conduct a self assessment of your farm
- Develop & implement an action plan
- Stay informed and reevaluate your plan periodically

The first step in a self-assessment is determining the risks or threats that your business faces. You can systematically evaluate the current state of your business with the help of employees, local law enforcement officials, veterinarians, Extension agents, and insurance providers who can look at your operations from various perspectives.

The check list on this page can help you identify potential treats to your business. Add others as you deem necessary by considering the operational functions on your farm such as agrichemical storage, livestock feeding, milking, green house plant production, packing operations, and transportation. Evaluate the level of risk and assign a rating of low to high for each item.

Consider what functions would be affected and how quickly they would need to be restored following an emergency to avoid serious impact on your business. For example, on a dairy farm, critical points include milking, feeding, herd health, feed storage, and shipping milk. For a greenhouse business, critical points may include temperature and ventilation control, planting or transplanting, watering, disease and insect control, or shipping, to name a few.

Thinking through prevention for new threats may be difficult, but consider that most farms



are familiar with emergency situations involving temporary loss of power and restriction of travel due to weather. Build on this foundation. How would you deal with the loss of power and supplies for weeks and what impact would such a situation have on your farm business and the families that are involved? Experts recommend concentrating first on protecting the most critical operations from the obvious risks and working from there.

Start with prevention measures for those that would be most devastating and that you rate "high risk."

Develop an action plan

The second step is to determine what measures will prevent potential threats or risks. Emergency management experts say building on existing preventive programs is likely the most cost-effective way to develop "all hazards" preventive strategies that work for your operation. Examples of sound preventive programs include:

- The Michigan Emergency Tube, available through the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)
 - Biosecurity programs to protect plant and animal health
 - Meeting existing requirements such as the SARA Title III requirement for reporting extremely hazardous substances
 - Agricultural chemical and application equipment security
- Some protective measures may take time to put in place.

Because resources are limited, experts recommend layering security controls around those critical operations that you feel are most vulnerable. Physical security measures do not always need to be complex. A simple approach can summed up in six words - "Light It, Lock It, Limit Acces." Examples of low cost security measures include:

- Locking doors of crucial farm buildings, especially at night or when everyone is away from the farm. Keep in mind that locks may not prevent all entries, but broken locks tell you that someone entered
- Installing motion-activated lights near crucial farm buildings
- Training and supervising your employees to make sure physical security and biosecurity procedures are followed.

Stay informed and re-evaluate periodically

The third step is to periodically reassess risks and make corrective changes when new threats are identified or when preventative measures can or should be upgraded. Remember, preventive strategies need to be reviewed, re-evaluated and revised as conditions change – at least annually.

Farm level risk assessment

The first step in emergency preparedness is determining the risks or threats that your business faces. The check list below can help you identify what treats are likely for your business. Add others as you deem necessary. The second step is to determine what measures to consider to prevent their occurrence. A third step is to periodically reassess risks and make corrective changes when new threats are identified or when preventative measures can or should be upgraded.

Thinking through preparation of new threats may be difficult, but most farms are familiar with emergency situations involving temporary loss of power and restriction of travel due to weather. Build on this foundation.

How would you deal with the loss of power for weeks and what impact would such a situation have on your farm business and the families that are involved? Start with prevention measures for the mostly likely threats (High Risk) and those that would be most devastating. We can't prevent everything, and some prevention measures are too costly. The next step would be to develop an emergency plan to minimize the impact of any events we cannot prevent. Emergency preparedness is our second line of defense. This will be the topic of the next article.

What threats are on your radar screen?

1. ASSESS RISKS. Review the list of potential threats to the farm business and assign a level of risk (L=low, M=medium and H=high) in the blank space to the left of each risk.

Potential threats from within the farm from accidents or disgruntled employees:

- ___ Feed contamination
___ Pesticide/ Fuel Spill
___ Product contamination (milk, fruit, etc)
___ Other

Potential threats from outside the farm from foreign or domestic terrorism:

- ___ Introduction of animal diseases
___ Introduction of plant disease
___ Feed contamination
___ Product contamination (milk, fruit, etc)
___ Loss of power
___ Loss of critical supplies
___ Loss of markets
___ Other

Potential threats from natural causes:

- ___ Tornadoes
___ Ice and snow storms
___ Fire
___ Flooding
___ Accidental introduction of animal disease
___ Accidental introduction of plant disease
___ Other

2. IMPLEMENT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES.

Indicate to what level each measure or control has been implemented (0 to 10) where 10= fully implemented.

Threats from within the farm from accidents or disgruntled employees:

- ___ Human resource management training
___ Procedures to prevent and contain spills

Threats from outside the farm from foreign or domestic terrorism:

- ___ Farm security to reduce theft and tampering
___ Trained family, employees, neighbors in surveillance
___ Biosecurity program
___ Inventory control for critical supplies
___ ID alternative suppliers and markets
___ Other

Threats from natural causes

- ___ Installation and testing of generator system
___ Financial and production records backup stored off farm
___ Other

Test your livestock biosecurity

The following is a test to help farmers self-evaluate their methods for preventing disease from entering their livestock operations. Award yourself 0 for No answers and 10 points for Yes answers.

Do you have purchased animals examined, tested and vaccinated before taking ownership?

Yes No

Do you segregate purchased animals or returning animals for 21-30 days?

Yes No

Do you discourage visitors?

Yes No

Do essential visitors wear clean footwear and outer clothing?

Yes No

Do you clean and disinfect shoes and clothes after visiting other farms?

Yes No

Are vehicles that enter the farm clean and disinfected?

Yes No

Do you actively control rodents and other damaging pests?

Yes No

Do you have an active bird control program?

Yes No

Do you have an active insect control program?

Yes No

Are your animals kept from fence line contact with neighboring animals?

Yes No

Do you control exposure to surface water?

Yes No

Do you raise all your own feed?

Yes No

Do you routinely disinfect equipment?

Yes No

Do you routinely disinfect housing facilities?

Yes No

Do you use a veterinarian to consult on animal health issues?

Yes No

TOTAL _____

Did your score fall between 0 and 50? If so, you need to consult with your veterinarian to develop a biosecurity program NOW! Did you score between 60 and 100? Not bad, but you can do better! Talk with your veterinarian about how you can improve your biosecurity program. Did you score 110 or higher? Great job. Stay vigilant and always look to improve.