

OFF THE CUFF

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WEEK of November 25

You can always expect the unexpected. The question is have you planned for it? Through the work of folks at Penn State University they have developed a workbook farmers can use for disaster preparedness and response of their farms. Here a look at how it can help.

The ReadyAG© : Disaster and Defense Preparedness for Production Agriculture workbook is designed to help farm and ranch owners plan for and manage disasters that can occur on their operation such as power outages, drought, flood, severe snow or ice storms, but also catastrophic events, for example tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, disease outbreaks, and other events, including acts of terrorism or a nuclear accident.

We encourage you to review this workbook with family members, employees, and with emergency personnel in your community. The intent of ReadyAG© is to help farmers and ranchers become better prepared for disasters, so they can continue to be viable even in the face of disastrous events. The ReadyAG© preparedness process directs farmers and ranchers to take a critical look at their agricultural operation, guiding them to determine areas that need improvement, thus helping them to become better prepared for any event that could disrupt their operation. The ReadyAG© workbook contains questions for farmers and ranchers to consider and answer about various segments of their agricultural operation that may be vulnerable or at risk for disasters.

The preparedness and planning GENERAL worksheets are divided into four sections. The majority of functions on your operation will fit into these major areas. Your operation may be unique and include additional areas of concern. We encourage you to identify any additional or unique functions within your agricultural enterprise and address the vulnerability and risk associated with those production and management functions that are not included in this workbook.

All producers should complete the GENERAL section, and the commodity section that represents your operation.

FACILITIES and MATERIALS. This section represents the structures, equipment, supplies, and other real property associated with your farming enterprise. All buildings, fields, orchards, animal areas, plant nursery area, feed storage and handling equipment, vehicles, equipment, supplies, product handling, and storage areas would be included in this section. The variety of supplies, materials, raw ingredients, feed, feed additives, fertilizer, pesticides, medicines, water, and other items and areas required for normal function of your agriculture business should be included in this section.

PEOPLE. This section includes anyone who has access, provides some service or function for you, works for you, or otherwise moves onto and from your agricultural enterprise. Included would be all employees, family members, service personnel, sales persons, delivery people, veterinarians, consultants, Extension Educators, customers, the general public, and invited and uninvited visitors.

PLANNING and PRACTICE. This section represents what takes place at your location. It includes the day-to-day activities, the routine function, and those activities that occur only at certain times such as harvest, or shipment of animals to another facility or to market. The activities of your business and the management for production practices are included such as use of footbaths for animals or visitors, use of quarantine areas, limited access to facilities, and the development and use of other security practices. REVIEW and UPDATE. This section includes the items and practices that you should periodically check, review and update. Included would be insurance, how product and people move on your operation, locks, doors, gates, lights, security cameras, electronic monitoring equipment, gauges, inventories of pesticides, medicines, chemicals and other hazardous materials, worker protection standards training, pesticide training, first aid training, lists of critical contacts and phone numbers, emergency response plans, and other important functions and areas of concern that should be evaluated on a regular basis.

By taking a critical look at each of these areas, you can determine the areas and functions that need improvement to help you become better prepared for any event that could disrupt your operation. The intent is to help you become better prepared for all disasters, so you can continue to be a viable even in the face of disastrous events. The investment of time and resources to plan is significantly less than the costs of a disaster on those who are not prepared. Although it is not possible to plan for all possible scenarios, the plans and activities that you develop will help to reduce your level of risk and, therefore, improve your sustainability.

You can download the workbook at <http://readyag.psu.edu/>