

Prepare

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN A FARM BUSINESS TO PREPARE FOR SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS?

The aim of the PREPARE step in the PRR framework is to ensure a business has procedures and arrangements in place well in advance of any severe weather event to manage risks; is ready to respond immediately and effectively if an event is imminent; and is positioned to rebuild and recover after a disaster event.

Some of the ways to prepare for severe weather events are a standard part of good farm management so growers are likely to have many of these suggestions in place already. It is worthwhile to review these points, though, as there may be opportunities to revise and refine management strategies or consider additional measures.

Good preparation helps you respond efficiently and recover quickly. Preparation involves both making plans and implementing actions to manage unavoidable risks.

PLAN

Thinking through potential risks and possible responses, and talking with key team members about ideas and options is a good start. Putting your thoughts on paper helps further refine your ideas. Writing up plans and procedures enables the plan to be implemented by your team, and is especially important in case you are not on site when a severe weather event strikes.

Formal written plans or documents that you might consider preparing include

- **Business plan**
If severe weather / natural disaster risks are not already identified and addressed in your business plan, consider doing so when the plan is next reviewed
- **Disaster / emergency response plan**
This is a legal requirement for all workplaces
- **Evacuation plan**
This is a legal requirement for all workplaces
- **Farm map**
A record of farm layout, access roads, farm buildings, contaminated sites
- **Contingency plans especially for transport, communication and power**
- **Business Continuity Plan**

You need to choose an approach that best suits you and your business. Templates will be developed and posted on the Growcom website.

PRACTICAL PREPARATIONS

There are a number of practical actions you can take to prepare for severe weather events and the possibility of natural disasters.

Insurance

- Get the best cover you can afford and make sure you know what is and is not covered
- Make sure your insurer/broker visits your farm to properly scope the necessary cover and provide an accurate quote
- Review insurance arrangements annually
- Maintain liability cover for pollution and environmental damage.

Financial management systems and cash reserves

- Ensure you have systems in place that enable you to make financial plans, establish budgets, monitor and control costs, actively project and manage cash flows, identify 'break even' prices, and regularly review the financial performance of the farm business
- Industry Recovery Officers and Farm Financial Counselors who have worked with growers following recent disaster events have said that many farm businesses do not have adequate systems in place. This leaves farm businesses extremely vulnerable to failure in general – and particularly following a disaster event.
- If possible, build up financial reserves by putting away cash (for example in a Farm Management Deposit scheme) to draw upon if the business is impacted by natural disaster.

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Farm administration and data management

- Identify essential business information, records, certificates, documents, data and procedures– scan and save these to portable external hard drives, USB drives or smart phones
- Consider storing copies of some essential business information off-site or in a cloud data storage/back-up service
- Identify essential hardware, software, and computer programs – keep proof of ownership records, back-ups and re-installation instructions
- Maintain inventories of stock and equipment.

Emergency kits and emergency supplies

- Prepare and maintain emergency kits for
 - Business
 - Household
- Maintain first aid kits
- Keep your pantry stocked with enough food and water to allow your family to survive if isolated for up to 14 days. Access the recommended pantry list <http://health.qld.gov.au/disaster/html/adult-pantry-list.asp>
- Encourage staff members to maintain their own household emergency kits, first aid kits and pantry stocks
- Keep supplies of sandbags, plywood and plastic sheeting for emergency waterproofing or flood mitigation.

Communication networks and alert systems

- Being a member of a community or industry organisation is a good way to keep connected with vital information and support networks.
- Make sure you are included in local or industry databases and ensure your contact details are up to date.
- Prepare an emergency contact list and review it at least annually.
- Register for weather alerts / warnings
 - Check services available through the Bureau of Met or your regional council
 - Other alert services include www.weatherzone.com.au/pro/

Alternate power supplies

- Consider options for alternative power sources to essential aspects of your business (such as cold rooms) to switch to when the electricity supply is down
 - If feasible and affordable, invest in diesel-powered generators or research hire options
 - Have an electrician install power boards / switches that allow you to switch easily from electricity to generator power
 - Investigate other back-up power options such as solar panels
 - Powerbanks are a handy option for recharging mobile phones and tablets. Ensure they are kept charged ready for a power-out
 - Keep a supply of spare batteries for smaller appliances / equipment
 - Consider increasing fuel stores in the lead-up to storm/ cyclones season.

Family and staff

- Train family members and staff in disaster preparedness, emergency responses and evacuation procedures. In larger teams, cross-train staff to ensure more than one person is capable of fulfilling key emergency response roles.
- Designate and train an alternative decision-maker to step up if the owner/manager is not on-site in the event of a severe weather/emergency situation
- Regularly test/practice emergency procedures
- Encourage staff to prepare their own household emergency plans.

Pets and livestock

- Think though how you would look after your animals in an extreme weather event or if you were required to evacuate from your property.

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Farm equipment, machinery and infrastructure

- Maintain an inventory of farm equipment, machinery and infrastructure
- Think through how you would secure/relocate gear if there was time to shift it before a storm/flood event.

Farm access

- If appropriate/feasible, ensure access roads and farm roads are maintained at a standard adequate for use by emergency vehicles.

Transport contingency arrangements

- Discuss transport contingency plans with your usual freight carrier
- Consider and plan for alternate transport routes to use in the event usual routes to market are closed/inaccessible
- Consider how consignments could be re-configured for smaller trucks/vehicles if load limits were applied to roads along usual routes to market
- Consider options for use of alternate transport modes, such as rail or sea in the event of disruptions to road transport
- Investigate alternate markets that can be accessed via alternate transport routes.

Local and regional markets

- In response to recent natural disaster experiences, some growers have joined forces to revitalize local and regional markets
- Regional Food Networks can help build up a strong base of local customers and as these regional markets grow, increasing volumes of regional produce can feed into them – making growers less exposed to transport disruptions to Brisbane and interstate markets
- A good example is the Taste Paradise initiative in Tropical North Queensland <http://www.tasteparadise.com.au/>