

Procedures for Feeding Rescued 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 pounds for most mature horses and cattle, 10 pounds for smaller animals). The hay should not be moldy but it can be wet. However, 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 hay loss will be greater 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 0.1 - 0.2% of their body weight. This would amount to 2 - 4 pounds of feed for mature animals, 1000 pounds and up, half that much (1 - 2 pounds) for smaller animals. After a few days, increase this ration slowly, by about a pound a day, until an animal is consuming about 1% (10 pounds) of its body weight by the end of two weeks.

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 water contaminated with salt, petrochemicals, pesticides, etc.; they need to be offered clean water. Some will refuse chlorinated water, so well water is preferable. Horses will sometimes drink water flavored with a soft drink.

Both cattle and horses will require mineral supplementation, and a good balance between calcium and phosphorus (ranging from 8 to 12%) 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.