The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team

Photo: Pensacola on January 21st . – The Palm Beach Post

North Florida Winter Storm 2025

On January 20th, 2025, from the panhandle to the Big Bend area of Florida, a historic winter storm moved through the area, bringing snow, ice, and a hard freeze. Emergency Support Function (ESF) – 17 and the Florida State Agricultural Response Team activated virtually to respond to the incoming winter storm. The winter storm brought record levels of snow and ice to the North Florida area with some parts of the state reaching 7 inches or higher of snowfall.

The ice and snow brought dangerous road conditions and damage to property and crop production. After the snowfall had ended the freezing conditions continued keeping the snow solid on the ground and unsafe road conditions by the way of black ice.

Florida SART Partners coordinated with animal and agricultural industry partners to prepare for the winter weather and monitor the conditions as the storm passed through the area. Many structures such as hay barns and sheds were damaged with roof damage due to the weight of the snow.

Crop farms and nurseries also experienced damage to their products due to the freezing temps and snowfall. Many livestock producers also experienced low amounts of winter forage for grazing and hay due to the snow cover of their pastures.

Continued, next page.

Special Features of this Issue:

- *Exotic Animals and Wildlife: Disaster Preparedness*
- *All-Hazards Incident Management Team Training*
- *Food Safety for the Big Game*

"After the critical incident passes, FWC captive wildlife investigators contact all facilities to assess any damage to facilities and the health and whereabouts of all animals in their possession."

— Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Read more on Page 3.

North Florida Winter Storm 2025 (continued)

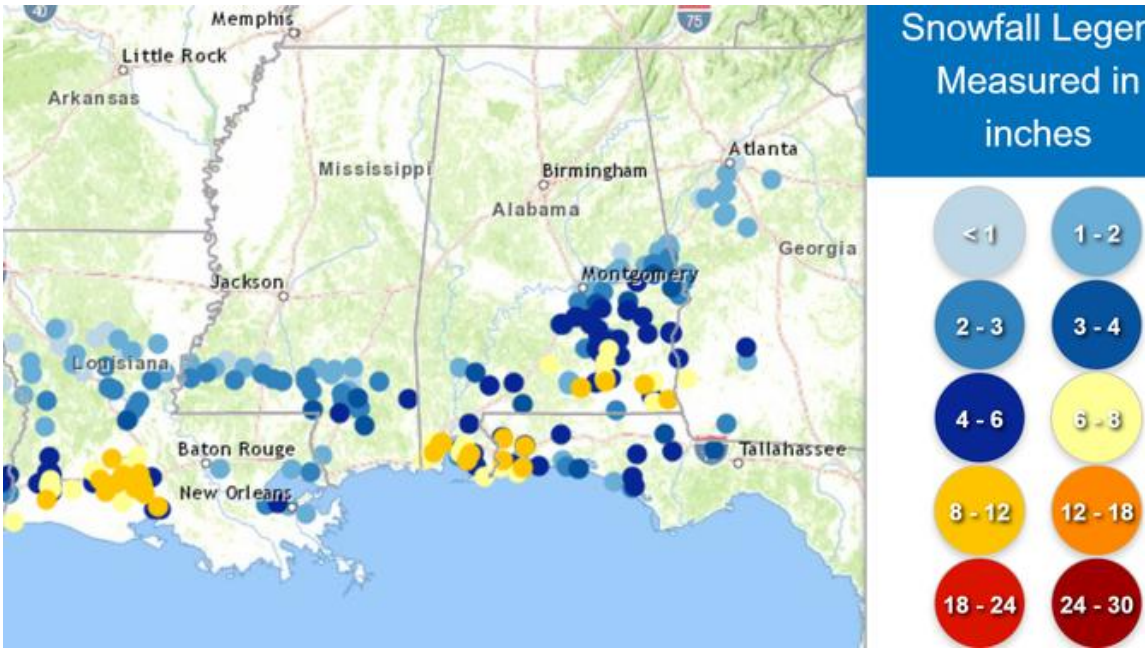


Photo: Snowfall accumulation map from 1/21/25. – Fox Weather

While the recent storm brought historical records of snow, the residents of North Florida survived the new frozen hazard. ESF -17 and Florida SART got to put to practice being prepared for all hazards that could impact the state!

Source:
https://www.tallahassee.com/story/money/2025/01/26/florida-outdoor-nurseries-devastated-by-winter-storm-snow-ice/77939131007/?utm_source=tallahassee-newsalert-strada&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsalert&utm_term=hero&utm_content=ptal-tallahassee-nletter11

https://www.tallahassee.com/story/money/2025/01/26/florida-outdoor-nurseries-devastated-by-winter-storm-snow-ice/77939131007/

Photo: @MyFDOT

Exotic Animals and Wildlife: Disaster Preparedness

When most people think about animal needs during a disaster, they think of companion animals such as dogs and cats, or livestock such as cows and chickens, but what about animals such as lions, captive deer, and rescued manatees? During the fall of 2024, Hurricane Milton brought a large storm system to land in the Tampa Bay area, where several exotic animal facilities, aquariums, and wildlife refuges exist. With hurricane impacts such as storm surges, wind damage, and power outages, how will these facilities respond and recover keeping in mind the special needs of exotic animals and wildlife?

SART Partners who specialize in response and recovery actions for exotic animal and wildlife facilities in Florida are the Florida Association of Zoos and Aquariums (FAZA) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). These organizations set up a network of facilities that house these animals and set up guidelines for creating an emergency plan for these facilities. Plans for evacuation of animals, animal veterinary care, supply requests, and repairs to animal enclosers are all vital parts of the plan that need to be very well established well before a disaster happens. These organizations also serve as liaisons through FL SART to the state organizations to request supplies and help that might be needed to support the recovery of these facilities.

Continued, next page.

Exotic Animals and Wildlife: Disaster Preparedness (continued)

Per FWC most wildlife should be left alone by the general public during or after a natural disaster such as a hurricane. However, the captive wildlife facilities are required by the FWC to produce and provide Critical Incident Disaster Plans to keep their captive wildlife license. "After the critical incident passes, FWC captive wildlife investigators contact all facilities to assess any damage to facilities and the health and whereabouts of all animals in their possession" – FWC website.

Wildlife and Storms Video

Floridians understand the importance of being prepared for hurricane season, and the impacts storms can have on our communities and our state's natural environment. Check out this video for helpful tips on how to avoid conflicts with wildlife after a storm.

No matter the type of animal in the FL SART has organizations ready to help with any kind of disaster. For more information, please visit both the FAZA and FWC websites.

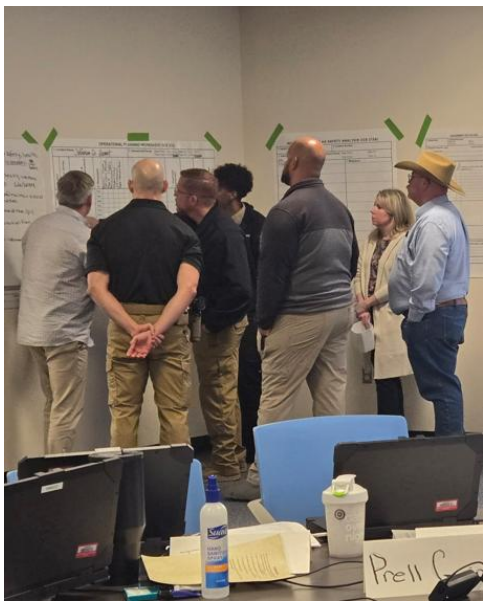
Thank you to our SART Partners for their support of all aspects of animals and agriculture in the State of Florida!

Sources:
Wildlife and Storms | FWC
About the Florida Association of Zoos & Aquariums - Florida Association of Zoos & Aquariums

All-Hazards Incident Management Team Training

This month, Florida's Office of Agriculture Law Enforcement (OALE) hosted the National Fire Academy's Type 3 Incident Management Team training in Tallahassee. Students attending the course were members of the OALE and Emergency Support Function-17 (ESF-17) Specialists. The course lasted a whole week and trained students on the various aspects and roles of an Incident Management Team (IMT).

The All-Hazards Incident Management Team course provided a unique opportunity for the students in a few ways. First, unlike many other courses, this training was predominantly hands-on learning. Students learned the material and skills by doing instead of solely lecture based. Second, the class was divided into two separate IMTs. For the duration of the course, the students rotated through each team position to get an understanding of each job. This also allowed the students to gain a better understanding of how the positions overlap in some responsibilities and are necessary to respond and recover from an incident.

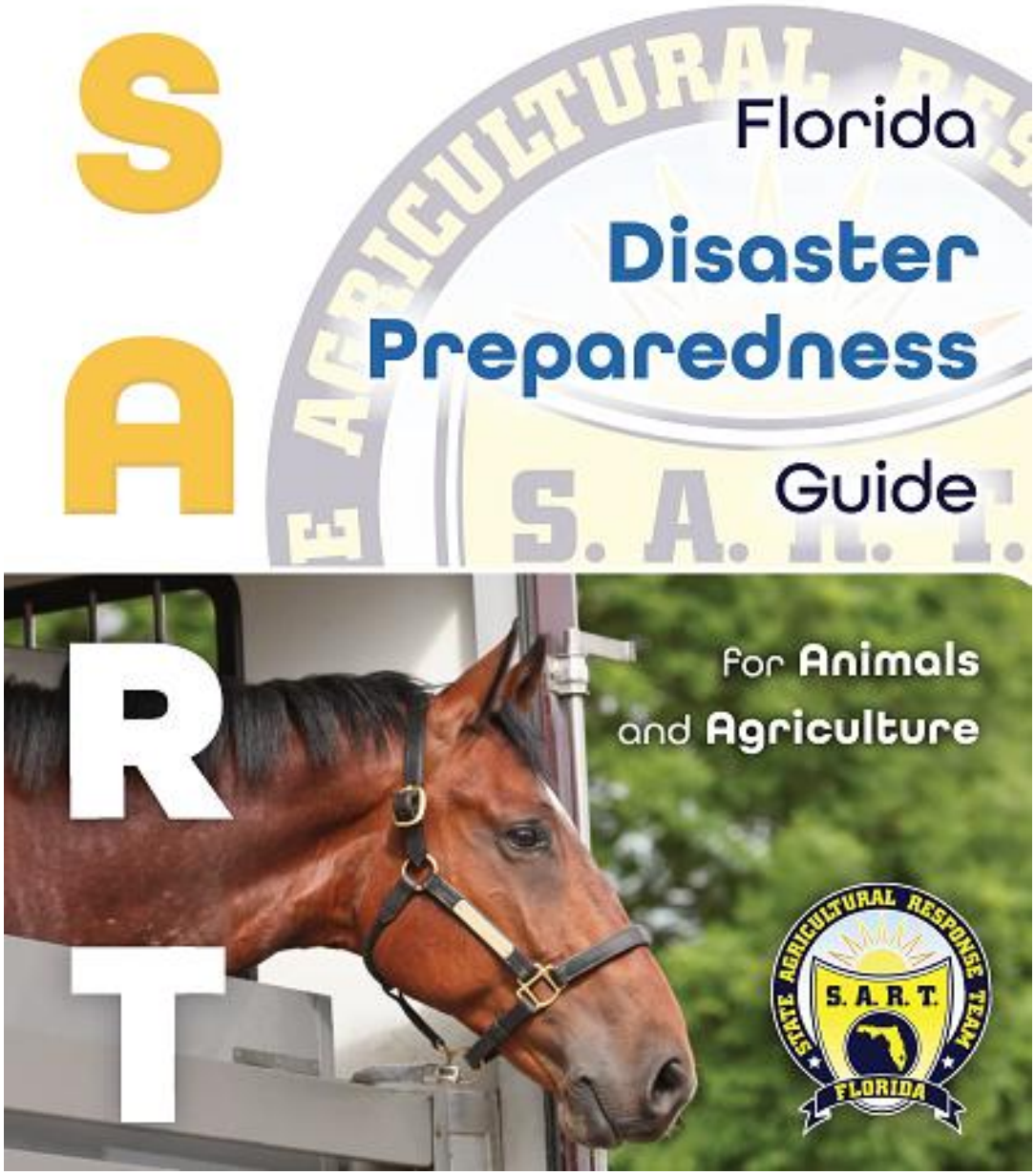


The course culminated with a full-day scenario where the IMTs simulated arriving at an incident and began operations. The skills taught in this course will add to the current skills the OALE and ESF-17 Specialists already have. It will also bring newcomers up to speed and better understand the purpose of an IMT and how they operate during times of emergency. For all of the students, these newly learned skills will be invaluable during the next agricultural emergency.

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture was developed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART). This guide explores the various animal and agricultural sectors in the state of Florida that are at risk from natural and man-made disasters, and what you can do to help prepare and protect animals and agriculture before a disaster strikes. The recommendations and resources in this guide are applicable to preparing for all hazards such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, disease introduction, hazardous material spills, and more.

This publication is available only to SART members. To access the Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture, visit the SART website at flsart.org, and navigate to the "Resources" tab. It may also be accessed directly at:
https://flsart.org/resource/DisasterPreparednessGuides/DisasterPreparednessGuides.jsp



Become a Volunteer of the Florida Veterinary Corps Today!

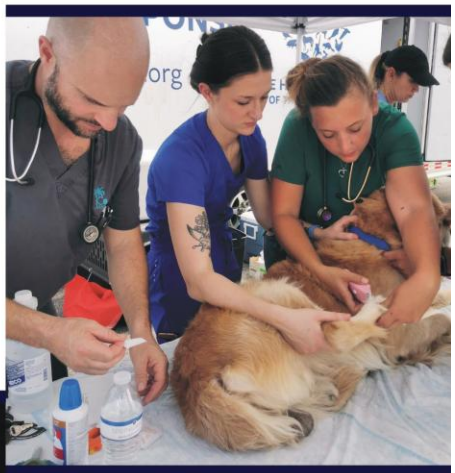
Florida veterinarians and veterinary technicians have volunteered to assist local and state emergency management officials in responding to animal emergencies. The Florida Veterinary Corps is recruiting more volunteers to help protect our state.

Become A Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Florida Veterinary Corps

Safeguarding Animal and Public Health in Florida



A cooperative effort of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team and its Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Veterinary Medical Association, and University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine.

Florida Veterinary Corps

What is the Florida Veterinary Corps?

- The Florida Veterinary Corps (The Corps) is a component of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART), established within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and a cooperative effort with the Florida Veterinary Medical Association and the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine.
- The Corps has been established to enlist veterinarians and veterinary technicians who are willing to volunteer their services in responding to animal emergencies in the state of Florida.
- During activation, Corps volunteers will work within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team.
- Corps volunteers will be kept informed as to the status of emergencies and the need for volunteers depending upon the specific emergency.
- Volunteers may serve in veterinary infrastructure assessment teams, triage or emergency animal treatment teams, and animal disease surveillance or control teams under an Incident Command System structure.

Obligation of Corps Volunteers

- Corps volunteers will serve only when activated within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team and adhere to all state regulations and rules.
- Complete the following four Incident Command System trainings to apply for The Corps. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides the independent study courses online, free of charge. The training is required for credentialing of emergency responders by the Department of Homeland Security. The courses are critical to train a professional volunteer Corps capable of responding as part of the state Emergency Support Function 17 and State Emergency Response Team.
  - IS-100.C: Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS)
  - IS-200.C: Basic ICS for Initial Response
  - IS-700.B: An Introduction to the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
  - IS-800.D: National Response Framework, An Introduction
- Corps volunteers will only be activated in response to specific emergency situations and may decline service at any time.

Rationale

- Protecting animal agriculture and household pets in Florida begins locally and requires cooperation, participation, and partnership.
- Federal or other outside assistance to deal with an animal disease emergency may not be available for hours or days.
- Animal agriculture in Florida is highly vulnerable to severe disruption and financial loss through natural disasters and exotic or zoonotic diseases.
- Counties and state agencies must be prepared to respond to animal disasters through planning and identification of human and material resources.
- Natural disasters are unpredictable and cannot be prevented.
- Florida has a high risk for introduction of a foreign animal disease.

Become a Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Be Sure to Check Out the FDACS and UF IFAS Partnership Video

The Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) teamed up to create a new video on their disaster response partnership.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

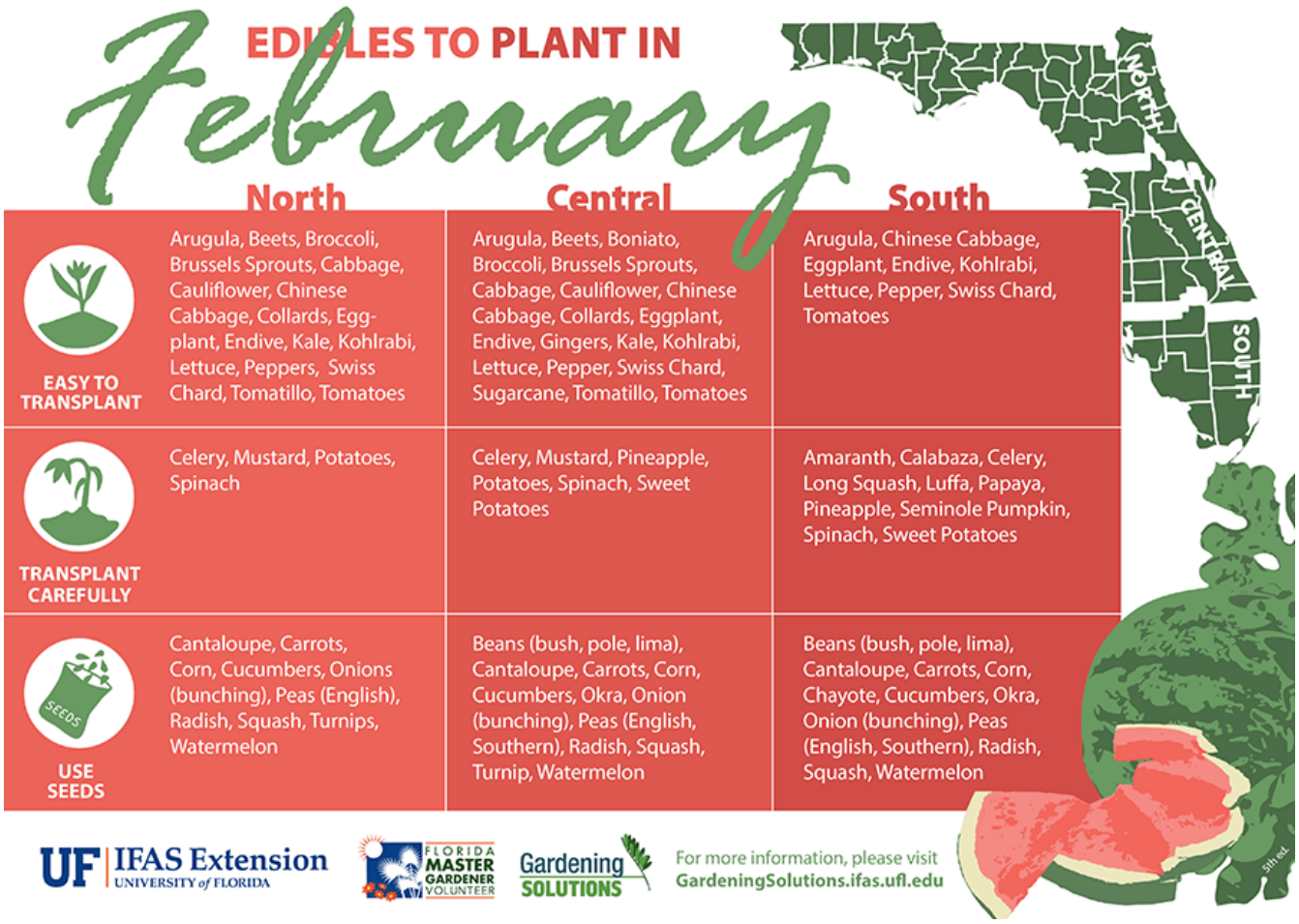
UF IFAS UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Published in December 2022 on YouTube, the video features interviews with LeiAnna Moorhead (FDACS Emergency Programs Manager), Dr. Saqib Mukhtar (UF/IFAS Associate Dean for Extension, Agriculture, and Natural Resources), and Dr. Angie Lindsey [Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)].

EDEN is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is a collaborative multi-state effort by cooperative extension services across the country to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters.

Dr. Lindsey highlighted the important connection that agricultural extension agents have throughout the State of Florida. "We learn so much from our Extension agents and the work that they're already doing throughout the state and the work that they do within their own communities for disaster preparedness, recovery, and response," said Dr. Lindsey.

To view the video for yourself, and to like or comment, please visit:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI1Xsjd-FCw



UF/IFAS Florida Gardening Calendars

The Gardening Calendar publications on the UF/IFAS Solutions for Your Life website gives Florida gardeners a monthly guide for what to plant and do in their gardens and includes links to useful gardening websites, all based on University of Florida research and expertise. Three different editions of the calendar provide specific tips for each of Florida's climate zones—North, Central, and South.

What to Plant in February - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

Counties, Is Your Contact Information up to date on the SART Website?

Please review your county emergency contact information at: https://flsart.org/resource/countyinformation.jsp.

If you need to make changes to your county contact information, please send a request to LeiAnna Moorhead at LeiAnna.Moorhead@FDACS.gov. During an emergency, ESF 17 and SART provides necessary food and water to affected areas to help protect animals, agriculture, and pets.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Training

Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FLSARC) continues a heavy summer courseload for communities throughout the state of Florida, offering our Level 1 and Level 2 Awareness and Operations courses for individuals wanting to learn more about temporary and emergency sheltering operations, AND to become FL SARC disaster responders! These courses are crucial to local and statewide sheltering support when disasters and emergencies strike. To date we've completed 23 classes this year, with over 200 students successfully graduating.

To become a SARC responder, you must have completed at least Level 1 Awareness, completed ICS 100, and have a current tetanus vaccination. To learn more about current course offerings and becoming a disaster responder, go to www.flsarc.org/training and www.flsarc.org/volunteers

More classes will be scheduled into summer 2025, so stay tuned!

SART Partners Meeting

The following meetings are by invitation only to primary representatives of SART partner agencies and are not open to the public:

- Monthly Virtual Meeting – February 26th, at 10:00 a.m.
- Monthly In-Person Meeting – March 26th, at 10:30 a.m. in Newberry, FL

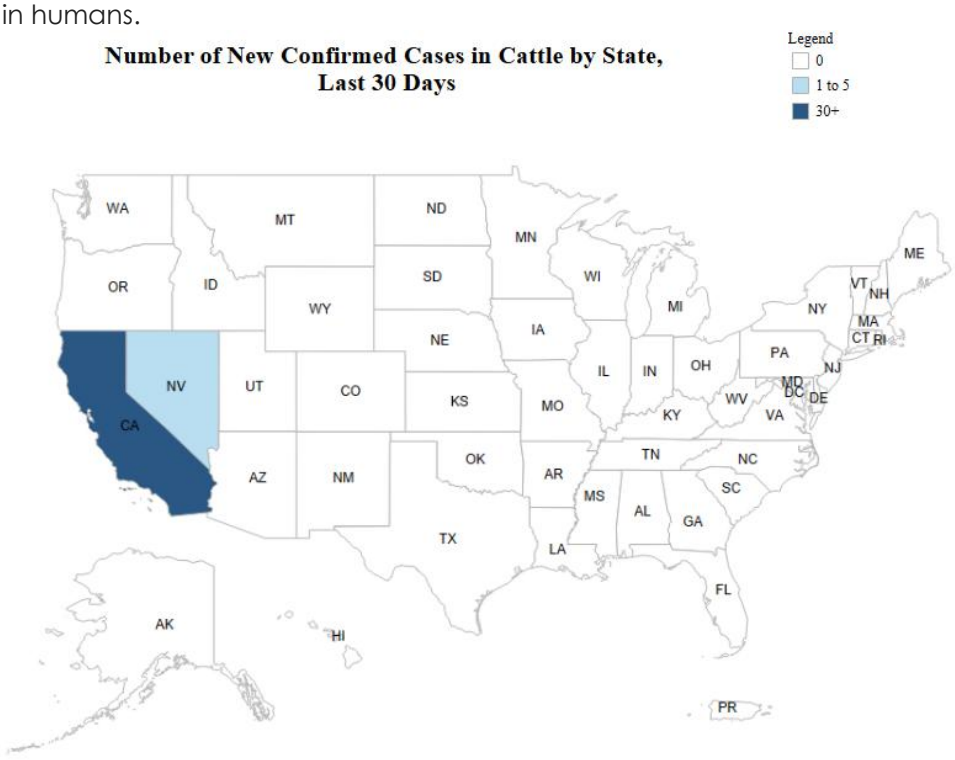
In the News…

- Commissioner Wilton Simpson Joins Multi-Agency Aviation Exercise Ahead of Wildfire Season (FDACS)
- FDEM Leverages Innovative Technology to Expand Public Safety Messaging Statewide (FDEM)
- Commissioner Wilton Simpson Highlights Prescribed Fire Awareness Week (FDACS)
- Agriculture and Aquaculture Producers Natural Disaster Recovery Loan Program (FDACS)

USDA: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Detections in Livestock

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and State veterinary and public health officials are investigating an illness among dairy cows. Beginning in March, USDA confirmed the detection Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) amongst some domestic dairy herds.

HPAI is a disease that is highly contagious and often deadly in poultry, caused by highly pathogenic avian influenza A (H5) and A (H7) viruses; it is also known as bird or avian flu. HPAI viruses can be transmitted by wild birds to domestic poultry and other bird and animal species. Although bird flu viruses do not normally infect humans, sporadic human infections have occurred. It is important to note that "highly pathogenic" refers to severe impact in birds, not necessarily in humans.



Source: USDA APHIS

This is a developing story. The USDA has opened a webpage and federal order with forthcoming guidance pertaining to the situation. Please visit https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/livestock for the latest details.

Further, FDA states confidence that pasteurization does effectively inactivate HPAI in milk. However, "the FDA continues to advise strongly against the consumption of raw milk and recommends that industry does not manufacture or sell raw milk or raw milk products." For more information, please visit https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/updates-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai.

In Florida, Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson issued Emergency Rule 5CER24-4. The Emergency Rule imposes specific restrictions on the importation of cattle into Florida to prevent the spread of HPAI. There have been no detections of HPAI in any livestock in Florida. For more information, please visit https://www.fdacs.gov/News-Events/Press-Releases/2024-Press-Releases/Commissioner-Wilton-Simpson-Issues-Emergency-Rule-to-Further-Protect-Florida-Livestock-from-Highly-Pathogenic-Avian-Influenza. View the FDACS Emerging Disease in Dairy Cattle announcement at: https://ccmedia.fdacs.gov/content/download/115892/file/2024-HPAI-Dairy-Cattle-Announcement.pdf

Did You Know? SART Offers Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training

The Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training is the first of its kind to be offered in Florida. The Training guidance to private, local, and state entities on how to plan for and operate a pet-friendly shelter to ensure that individuals evacuating from a disaster with their household pets are accommodated.

This training includes useful information on how to:

- Use the Incident Command System in pet-friendly shelter planning and operations;
- Plan for a pet-friendly shelter;
- Understand the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act);
- Establish partnerships for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message to the public before, during, and after an emergency, and;
- Set up, operate, and demobilize a pet-friendly shelter.

Paula Carroll

Jefferson County, Florida

"I feel that with this training we will succeed... I am much more equipped."

The four-hour course is designed for emergency managers, county employees, veterinary and animal services, and shelter volunteers. There is no charge for this 100% online course. For more information, please visit www.FLSART.org.

Chronic Wasting Disease Detected in Florida

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has confirmed that a road-killed 4.5 year-old female white-tailed deer in Holmes County sampled during routine surveillance activities has tested positive for chronic wasting disease (CWD). It is the first known case of CWD in Florida. CWD is a contagious disease of the brain and central nervous system that is always fatal to deer. FWC and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) have implemented response and management actions to protect against the possible spread of CWD.

On September 8, 2023, the FWC issued a new executive order outlining regulations designed to increase sampling and slow the spread of CWD in Florida deer. Existing regulations pertaining to the establishment of the zone, baiting and feeding restrictions, prohibition of rehabilitating or releasing injured or orphaned deer and export of high-risk parts remain in effect. If you are a permitted captive Cervidae premises and have any questions regarding CWD, please reach out to the FDACS Division of Animal Industry, at (850) 410-0900. Visit the FWC CWD website for more information, updates, and resources.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

African Swine Fever Update

In 2021, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the detection of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Dominican Republic. ASF is a deadly pig disease that spreads rapidly and affects domestic and wild swine. While not a threat to human health, the virus could devastate America's swine, pork industry, and food supply. Whatever pigs mean to you—your livelihood or a pet—we're all in it together. Protect our swine and keep the disease out of the United States. Please report any sick swine with clinical signs consistent with ASF to the State Veterinarian's Office through the e-mail address RAD@FDACS.gov, or by calling (850) 410-0900 (during office hours) or 1-800-342-5869 (after hours). You can also file a report online.

Clinical signs of ASF in swine can include reddening of the skin, listlessness, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, conjunctivitis, lack of an escape response, trembling, complete loss of hind leg functioning, and high death loss.

It is important to note that Classical Swine Fever has been present in Haiti and the Dominican Republic for many years and, therefore, the U.S. does not receive pork products or live swine imports from either country. The highest risk of ASF introduction into the U.S. is from pork products brought in by international travelers via sea or air. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection has increased inspections of products and personal items brought into the U.S from affected countries. More information regarding ASF can be found on the USDA website.

Click here for the FDACS Announcement on ASF.

Commissioner Wilton Simpson Launches Loan Program for Florida Farmers Impacted by Winter Storm

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

On January 28th, Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson announced that Florida farmers, ranchers, and growers impacted by the recent winter storm can now apply for interest-free loans through the Agriculture and Aquaculture Producers Natural Disaster Recovery Loan Program. Eligible agriculture and aquaculture producers can use loans to restore, repair, or replace essential physical property — including fences, equipment, greenhouses, and other buildings — and remove debris. Commissioner Wilton Simpson will advocate for additional funding for the program during the upcoming legislative session.

"Delivering immediate support to agricultural producers impacted by the recent winter storm, like our nursery growers in North Florida who were hit especially hard, is a critical first step to get them back on their feet," **said Commissioner Wilton Simpson.** "The Natural Disaster Recovery Loan Program provides a start with immediate financial relief, ensuring that Florida's farmers and ranchers begin to rebuild their buildings and infrastructure."

The winter storm, which brought successive hard freezes and the heaviest snowfall in the state's history, primarily impacted growers and producers in North Florida. Impacted producers are encouraged to take photos of any property damage sustained from the winter storm and to save all receipts for recovery efforts and supplies. Specific details on the application process are available on the program's webpage.

Agriculture and Aquaculture Producers Natural Disaster Recovery Loan Program

- Interest-free loans up to $500,000 for eligible agriculture and aquaculture producers that have experienced damage or destruction from the winter storm.
- Loans may be used to restore, repair, or replace essential physical property, including fences, equipment, greenhouses, and other buildings, or to remove vegetative debris.
- Interested producers can learn more or apply here.

Producers who were previously awarded funds for damages sustained from recent hurricanes may be eligible to apply for damage sustained from this disaster. An applicant may not receive more than one loan per storm, more than two loans per year, or more than five loans in any three years.

During a special legislative session in November of 2023, the Florida Legislature passed House Bill 1-C, which provided $75 million to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for a revolving loan fund to support impacted agriculture and aquaculture producers recover from natural disasters.
For more information about Commissioner Simpson and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, visit FDACS.gov.

Food Safety and Food Defense Report

A special section dedicated to feed and food emergency planning and response.

FDACS Division of Food Safety is responsible for assuring the public of a safe, wholesome, and properly represented food supply through permitting and inspection of food establishments, inspection of food products, and performance of specialized laboratory analysis on a variety of food products sold or produced in the state. The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the farm gate, through processing and distribution, to the retail point of purchase.

Food Safety for the Big Game

This upcoming month, people are getting excited for the big game. Friends are ready to share fan favorites like chicken wings, nachos and more. Follow these important tips to keep you and your fellow fans safe from foodborne illness:

- Always wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash, rinse and sanitize any cutting boards, dishes, and utensils that have come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood before using with any other foods.
- Keep all raw food, like chicken and eggs, separate from ready -to -eat foods.
- Cook all food to a safe internal temperature.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Make sure leftovers are promptly and properly refrigerated.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

For more information on food safety, visit the Division of Food Safety's Consumer Resources and Outreach website.

SART Resources and Links

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – USDA APHIS Flock Defender
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/outbreak-illness/outbreak-illness

Large Animal Incident Response Plan Template
https://flsart.org/resource/TLAER

Pet Sheltering Resources
https://flsart.org/resource/petshelter

Ask IFAS: Disaster Preparedness and Recovery
https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/disaster_preparedness_and_recovery

FDEM Vector Control Quick Guide
https://flsart.org/pdf/Vector Control Quick Guide.pdf

Dairy Farm Emergency Information Sheet
https://flsart.org/resource/Dairy

Please log in and update your membership information online at:

www.FLSART.org

About the *SART Sentinel*

The *SART Sentinel* is an email newsletter prepared monthly by the members of the **Florida State Agricultural Response Team** on the Florida SART website at www.FLSART.org.

If you have a story or photo that you would like to have considered for publication in the *SART Sentinel*, please contact the editors.

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