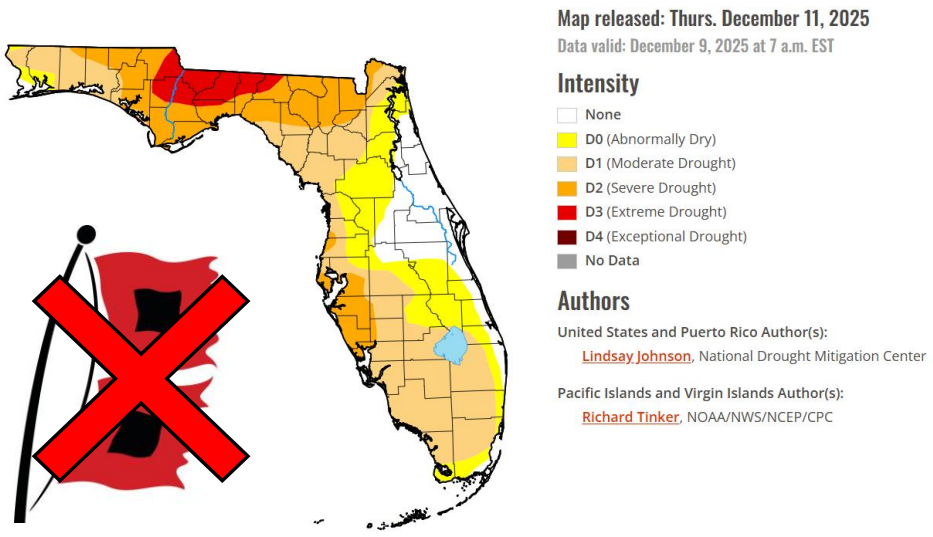
The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team



Drought levels for December.

From Lackluster Hurricane Season to Drought

The 2025 hurricane season proved to be lackluster, at best. For the first time in over a decade, no tropical systems made landfall in our state. Given the devastation we experienced from the 2024 season, many people are celebrating this unusual season. Amidst the celebration, there appears to have been an unintended consequence that has reared its head.

The dry conditions that managed to keep the state hurricane free last season has led to drought conditions that are having significant impact on our agricultural producers.

Approximately three-quarters of the state is in some level of drought conditions with parts of the Panhandle seeing the worst of it. According to the National Weather Service, some Panhandle counties are sitting at roughly 7–9-inch rainfall deficit and are now in the "Extreme" status.

This drought has proven to be especially problematic for our producers. Farmers have seen significantly smaller yields from their crops and the cattle producers are seeing dry pastures for their cattle. The drought has come at the prime time for winter hay harvesting that would be used to feed the cattle throughout the season.

Recently, however, the drought-stricken region received a little over two inches of rain over a few days period. While this has quenched some of the drought, it was not enough to completely void it. Fortunately, there are assistance programs out there for the producers.

Continued, next page.

Special Features of this Issue:

- *SART In-Person Meeting – Goodbye 2025!*
- *2026 EDEN Spring Training Set for Tampa*
- *Reviewing Plans and the new "FL COCO"*

Congratulations to The San Diego Zoo Safari Park as the celebrate the birth of two Przewalski's horse fillies, marking a significant milestone in their conservation effort aimed at bringing these rare animals back from the brink of extinction.

Shown below: Przewalski's horse at the San Diego Zoo.
Read more on Page 2.

From Lackluster Hurricane Season to Drought (continued)

Source: USDA Farm Service Agency

One such program is the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP). This program was established to help offer some financial relief to livestock producers. It doesn't just cover cattle, it also covers some of the less common livestock such as alpacas, bison, and even emus – to name just a few. If you would like more information on this program, check out the FAQ sheet here: Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP).

Back from the Brink

Congratulations to The San Diego Zoo Safari Park as the celebrate the birth of two Przewalski's horse fillies, marking a significant milestone in their conservation effort aimed at bringing these rare animals back from the brink of Extinction. The first Foal was born on September 30th and the second on October 24, the first they have produced since 2023. The Przewalski's horses are the only remaining true wild horse species sporting several differences from Domesticated horses. These stocky adults stand around 5ft tall, 8ft long, and weighing in at around 750lb with erect mohawk - like manes and dark stripes on their back legs. The Przewalski horse's Territories spanned from Europe to Asia be for going extinct in the wild due to human activity in the 1960s. Today they only exist in the forest and mountains of Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan which are considered reintroduction sites.

Unfortunately, the road to survival for this species is not without its bumps. Approximately 1900 examples of these horses descend from a pool of 14 wild caught "founders" causing them to have a very small genetic pool. Climate change is causing the grass and shrubs that make up their normal diet harder to find, and humans continue to encroach introducing new diseases brought by their domestic horses.

Here's hoping San Diego Zoo's two new additions are a sign of better things to come as the international conservation effort strive to bring this unique horse back from the brink of extinction so it can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Source material:

Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. "Przewalski's Horse." *Smithsonian Institution*, https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/przewalskis-horse. Accessed 11 Dec. 2025.

Associated Press. "Endangered Przewalski's Horses Born at San Diego Zoo Safari Park." *AP News*, 25 Oct. 2025, https://apnews.com/video/endangered-przewalski-horses-born-at-san-diego-zoo-safari-park-3fe78c4f452c4c428b83051ae6602e41. Accessed 11 Dec. 2025.

SART In-Person Meeting – Goodbye 2025!

In December, SART partners convened at the Florida Farm Bureau Federation's headquarters in Gainesville for the final in-person quarterly meeting of the year. Participants reflected with appreciation on what had been a relatively calm season for emergency management. The gathering provided an opportunity for partners to share updates on organizational initiatives undertaken throughout 2025.

Several speakers representing different areas of the partnership delivered presentations on key topics. Highlights included updates from the Florida Veterinary Corps and a training outlook from the Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FL SARC). For details on upcoming SARC training opportunities, please visit their website: Florida SARC | Disaster animal rescue.

Participants were given a demonstration of the new Animal Health Assessment tool, which will be utilized by Emergency Support Function 17 (ESF 17) teams during disaster response. The digital assessment tool will help accelerate response times while ensuring that recovery efforts are appropriately scaled to the actual needs of affected communities. The system is expected to provide responders with a more comprehensive picture of conditions on the ground, enabling smarter decision-making and more effective allocation of critical resources.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) shared both an educational overview and historical context on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). They also provided an update on ongoing initiatives to monitor the disease and limit its spread within Florida. In addition, participants received a brief presentation on the development of an Agricultural Safety Officer program. Although still in its early stages, this program is designed to close critical safety gaps by improving coordination between agricultural responders and those without agricultural backgrounds.

Reviewing Plans and the new "FL COCO"

The Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) has recently opened the Central Operations and Coordination Office (COCO) in Auburndale, marking a major advancement in the state's disaster preparedness and response capabilities. The 421,600-square-foot facility, already 91% utilized, will serve as a hub for logistics and coordination, ensuring rapid deployment of lifesaving supplies such as food, water, generators, and flood prevention resources. Equipped with utility vehicles, forklifts, and skid steers, the warehouse is designed to stage and deliver aid efficiently to communities in need.

Photo: Landing bay at the new COCO storage warehouse.

Last month, representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) ESF 17, and key FDEM personnel had the opportunity to tour the new facility. After the tour concluded, representatives were provided with an overview of the Logistics Center and the National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS).

These two entities are crucial for federal and state integration when responding to high consequence animal disease events necessitating the deployment of veterinary countermeasures. The representatives concluded their visit by reviewing, discussing, and updating how Florida's NVS plan integrates into the federal plan. During this review, the state plan was thoroughly examined to identify any gaps and ensure clarity. This plan will later be tested and reviewed through discussion-based tabletop exercises in 2026.

Photo: The new COCO storage warehouse in Auburndale.

New World Screwworm

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

New World screwworms are fly larvae (maggots) that can infest livestock and other warm-blooded animals, including people. They most often enter an animal through an open wound. They feed on the animal's living flesh and, if not treated, infestations can be fatal. While New World screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) has not been widely present in the United States since the 1960s, it is still found in most of South America and in five Caribbean countries. Cases began spreading in 2023, heading north from Panama, and have reached southern Mexico, increasing the risk of reintroduction into the United States.

Signs

Screwworms are typically found on warm-blooded animals that have a draining or enlarging wound.

Screwworm eggs are creamy and white and deposited in a shingle-like manner on or near the edges of superficial wounds. The larvae are cylindrical with one pointed end and one blunt end and have rings of dark brown spines around the body. Female screwworm flies are larger than a housefly with a dark blue to blue-green body and reddish-orange head.

Almost any type of wound can become infested with screwworm larvae, including those caused by feeding ticks, castration, dehorning, branding, shearing, barbed wire fences, and even shedding of antler velvet in deer. The navels of newborn mammals can also become infested.

Guidance for Animal Health

Carefully inspect animal wounds and hides for signs of screwworm. Owners should immediately consult their veterinarian if a case of screwworm is suspected.

Continued, next page.

New World Screwworm (continued)

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Treatment

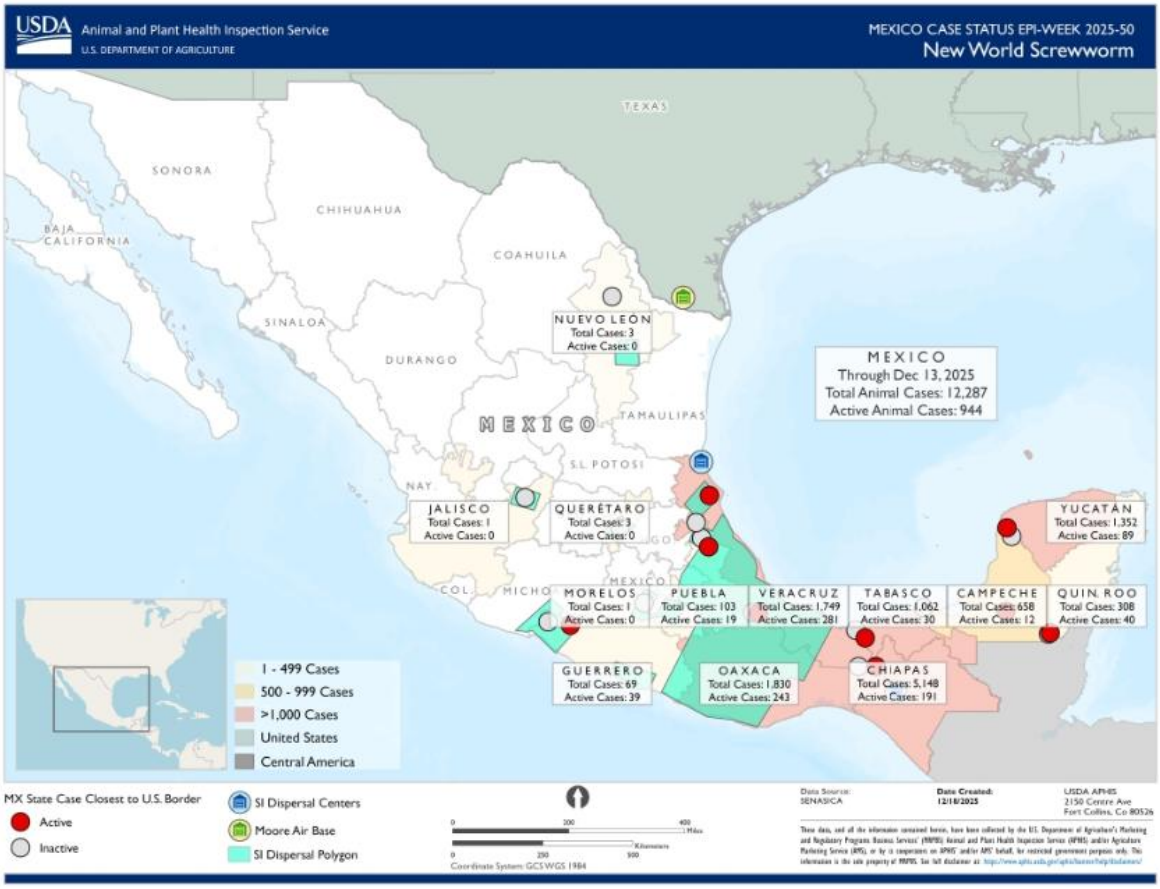
Screwworm infestation is treated by cleaning the site and topical application of a pesticide or other medication effective at killing the screwworm larvae. Treated wounds should be inspected daily until completely healed. The examining veterinarian will remove larvae from the wound with tweezers, place them in alcohol, and report to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Animal Industry (State Veterinarian's Office).

Report Suspected Cases

- **By phone during office hours:** (850) 410-0900
- **By phone after hours:** 1-800-342-5869
- **Via email:** RAD@FDACS.gov
- **Report online at:** www.FDACS.gov/RAD

Wildlife Reports

To report sick or injured wildlife, including a suspected screwworm infestation, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) or email the Wildlife Health Team at WildlifeHealthTeam@MyFWC.com.



Source: USDA APHIS (Updated 12/21/2025)

New World Screwworm Resources

- Information on the Screwworm Eradication Program (USDA APHIS)
- Commissioner Wilton Simpson, FDACS Urge Vigilance as New World Screwworm Threat Increases
- FDACS – New World Screwworm Information Page

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Training

Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FLSARC) provides Small Animal Emergency Sheltering training for Florida communities. These courses teach the unique procedures, skills, and knowledge necessary to build and operate a temporary emergency animal shelter in response to natural disasters and animal cruelty cases. These courses were created and designed by experts from many organizations including Florida SART, University of Florida Veterinary Emergency Treatment Service (VETS) Team, and leadership of FLSARC. This training is state-certified by the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

Awareness Level 1	Operations Level 2
• January 13, Suwanee County • January 16, St. Johns County • February 6, Hillsborough County • March 6, Charlotte County • April 10, Highlands County • June 12, Miami-Dade County	• TBD

To register, visit: https://flsarc.org/training-classes-events

2026 EDEN Spring Training Set for Tampa

The 2026 Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) Spring Training will take place in Tampa from February 24 to 26, 2026. Early bird registration closes January 15. This year, attendees will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of high-impact trainings and experiences, including:

- FEMA Incident Command System (ICS) trainings
- Train the Trainer sessions
- Discussions surrounding mental health and recovery resources
- A pre-training workshop and an excursion

For more information, visit: https://eden-tampa.rsvpify.com

SART Partners Meeting

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

- Monthly Virtual Meeting – January 14, at 10:00 a.m. (via Microsoft Teams)

In the News…

- Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Proposal to Protect Puppies in Florida (FLGOV.com)
- Cruise-ship stowaway owls set for US return after living it up at Spanish resort (The Guardian)
- Young goat survives rare bone infection thanks to treatment at UF Large Animal Hospital (UF VETS)

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.

Laura Bevan

Humane Society of the United States

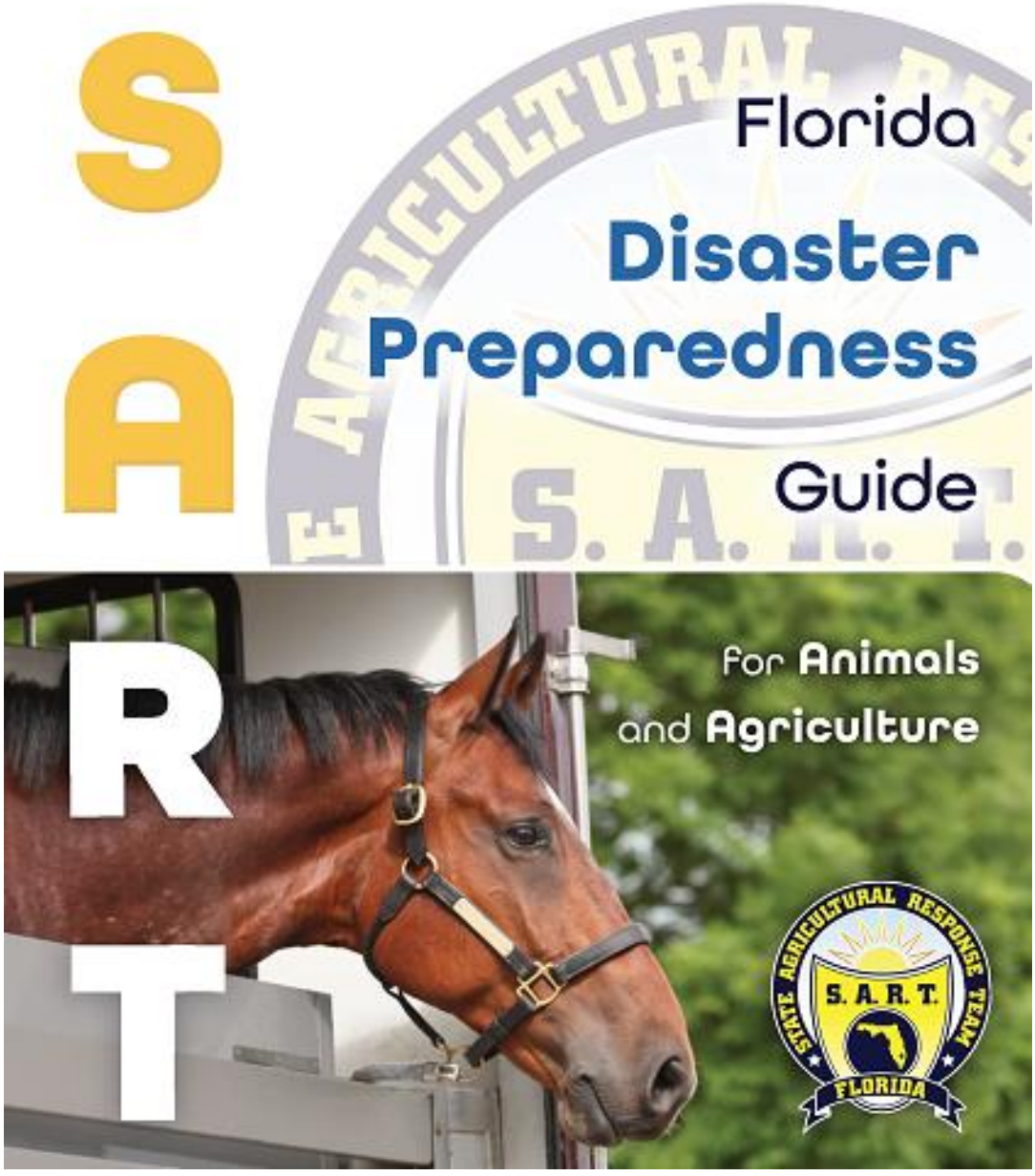
"I was blown away by the depth of the information provided in this training. It held my attention and the videos from around the state gave real life experience to the subject."

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.

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture was developed by FDACS and Florida 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!

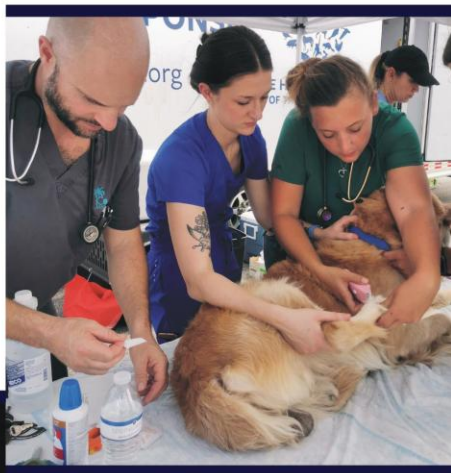
Florida veterinarians and veterinary technicians have volunteered to assist local and state emergency management officials in responding to animal emergencies. The Florida Veterinary Corps is recruiting more volunteers to help protect our state.

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

Florida SART, FDACS, and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) teamed up to create a training 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 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 January - 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.

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.

Winter Food Safety

The winter season is full of gatherings and events with friends and family. Our tips on baking safety and preparing for the big game will help you make the most of them.

Interested in other food safety topics? Visit the Division of Food Safety's Consumer Resources and Outreach website to find helpful videos, flyers, and more listed by category!

Food Storage Essentials

- Plan on enough storage space in the refrigerator and freezer. In the refrigerator, air needs to circulate to keep the temperature at 40°F or below. Keep your freezer at 0°F or below.

- Monitor your refrigerator and freezer temperatures with thermometers. Place one in your refrigerator and one in your freezer in easy-to-read locations and check the temperature regularly—at least once a week.

- Refrigerate meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and other perishables as soon as you get home from the store.

- Stick to the "two-hour rule." Remember to not allow foods needing refrigeration to sit out longer than two hours—one hour if the temperature is above 90°F. This includes leftovers, "doggie bags," and take out foods.

- Check food storage directions listed on food labels. If something hasn't been properly refrigerated, it is usually best to throw it out.

- After cooking, divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator.

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

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Dairy Cattle
https://ccmedia.fdacs.gov/content/download/115892/file/2024-HPAI-Dairy-Cattle-Announcement.pdf

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

SART Response Equipment List and Request Information
https://flsart.org/resource/equipmentrequest.jsp

FDEM Vector Control Quick Guide
https://flsart.org/pdf/Vector%20Control%20Quick%20Guide.pdf

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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