

Navigating a crisis starts with preparedness

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger when important decisions have to be made quickly – often in the absence of all the facts. From the moment you become aware there is a problem, the crisis continues to unfold and may impede or even halt your normal business operations. It may also impact cooperatives, packers, processing partners and brands associated with your farm or ranch in the supply chain. Preparing in advance can save valuable time in the heat of the moment.



Three Rules in a Crisis:



Anticipate the Unexpected: Perform a Risk-Ranking Analysis

Bring your team together and brainstorm all the potential crises that could occur on your farm or ranch or in your veterinary clinic.

1. Assign a probability ranking from 1 – 10 (1 = least likely to occur to 10 = may happen tomorrow)
2. Assign an impact score from 1 – 10 (1 = little to no impact to 10 = would shut us down)
3. Multiply probability x impact to reach a final score. This will allow you to quickly identify the top three crisis scenarios for which you should be prepared.

Six key areas where a crisis can strike

1. **Natural disasters/seasonal weather events:** Knock down buildings, loss of power & water, flooding
2. **Herd health event:** Disease outbreak
3. **Animal welfare event:** Challenge protocols/practices, undercover video
4. **Environmental threats:** Manure spill, nuisance complaints
5. **Farm/employee events:** Fire, equipment accidents, fatalities, immigration
6. **Food safety/supply chain issues:** Milk contamination, E. coli, Salmonella, Listeria

While it's not a complete list, it can serve to get your wheels turning about what types of crises you need to prepare for.

Probability x Impact = Be Prepared!

Potential Crisis	Probability	Impact	Score <small>Probability X Impact</small>
Manure spill	4	5	20
Natural disaster/other event	8	7	56
Herd health event	5	8	40

Elements of a Crisis Plan

1 Core Response team appropriate to the crisis. The team assigned to handle a herd health event may be different from the team handling an on-farm accident. Identify the important people with knowledge of your operation who could help you make decisions. Your team should include a key decision maker, spokesperson and an attorney when appropriate. As the crisis unfolds, you may need to add other members to your team like state, national and industry representatives, packer/ processor and brand representatives if the crisis also impacts them.



2 Key contacts list that is current – this is easy to update when times are calm – and very difficult in the “heat of the moment.”

3 Media spokespeople who are trained to respond and a plan for when you will engage the media.

An effective spokesperson is:

- Knowledgeable about your farm, ranch or veterinary clinic
- Able to deliver the message quickly & smoothly
- Trustworthy & credible
- Empathetic & caring
- Competent & knowledgeable
- Honest & open

4 A plan to secure your property. Keeping people and animals safe during a crisis is key. Ensuring everyone’s safety, including spectators, is key. Consider in advance how you will secure access to your property and barns.

5 Plan to manage the flow of communication during the crisis to keep important stakeholders informed. If you’ve done your homework, you will have a plan to manage the crisis as it evolves. Determine in advance what the tipping point is – when you’ve gathered enough information and it is necessary to engage and communicate. The first step is to bring the core team together to assess the situation, assign responsibilities and develop strategies to manage the crisis.

6 Key messages about your farm, ranch or clinic and messages specific to the crisis. When you are dealing with a crisis, you also need messages specific to the crisis at hand.

7 Family and employees trained on the plan. Make sure they know who to contact in case of an emergency and who they should or should not discuss the matter with.

Assign responsibilities:

- Answer the phone
- Secure the property
- Communicate with employees
- Monitor the media
- Update website and social channels
- Serve as liaison to customers/suppliers
- Inform key industry leaders

Make sure everyone knows what to do!

Resources

For additional resources scan here to visit the Value Chain & Consumer Affairs web page.

