

Florida SART Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, September 2, 2009 – 10:00 a.m. – Noon
Florida Farm Bureau, 700 SW 34th St., Gainesville, FL 32608

Attendance

Tim Manning, USDA/FSA

Joan Dusky, UF/IFAS Extension

Michael Turner, FDACS

Rick Sapp, SART Sentinel

Susan Smith, FAKC

David Perry, FDACS

Suzan Loerzel, USDA/APHIS

Jim Spratt, FNGLA

Frankie Hall, FFBF

Gary Newton, FDACS

Jim Handley, FL Cattlemen's Assn.

Jiannong Xin, UF/IFAS

Amanda Hodges, UF/IFAS SPDN

Bill Armstrong, FACA

Laura Bevan, HSUS

1. Tim Manning called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.
2. **Video Conferencing** Joe Kight discussed the former Advisory Board Meeting which was held as a video conference in multiple locations: Gainesville and Tallahassee, plus hook-ups with Hamilton, Madison and Osceola Counties. As a way to stay in touch in times when travel money was tight, this seemed to be an acceptable option when used on an occasional basis.
3. **Hurricane Ike** David Perry reported on the activities of the three Florida SART teams that assisted Texas after the landfall of Hurricane Ike in 2008. He presented a slide show of devastation that focused on the storm's affects on area livestock.
 - a. The groups were fully self-contained with their own generators, trailers, food and water. They camped in the parking lot of a PetSmart store.
 - b. They worked in the coastal zone between Galveston and Port Arthur, roughly 100 miles along the Gulf of Mexico and up to 25 miles inland. Exceptionally flat, the area was almost entirely submerged by the hurricane's storm surge, which was as much as 15 feet and came ashore at about high tide.
 - c. Texas estimated it lost in the neighborhood of 25,000-30,000 beef cattle as a result of Ike. Many head of stranded and injured cattle had to be euthanized.
 - d. The Florida teams were assigned to locate and count large animals that had been killed or were marooned following the storm. His group was directed not to render aid and he did not know how they handled the carcass disposal issue.

- e. “We’ve seen damage from storms in Florida,” Perry said, “but I’ve never seen as much damage as we saw in Texas. In my opinion, what I saw was worse than what we found in Mississippi after Katrina.”

In the general discussion, Jim Handley commented that the Florida and Texas situations were quite different. First, the Texas coastal topography lacked any barriers to flooding and secondly, relatively few Florida cattle are located within 25 miles of either the east or west coast.

- 4. **Carcass Disposal** Joe Kight reported that Florida’s recent catastrophic planning event in South Florida pre-supposed a 10% loss of cattle in the affected area. Planners estimated that locating and removing thousands of livestock carcasses for disposal at an Avon Park facility would have cost as much as \$53 million!

Bill Armstrong noted that following a storm, rescue and recovery services tend to get calls from citizens about dead animals. A more formal definition and presentation of public responsibilities would be helpful.

Kight said that other than removing carcasses from a public right-of-way, the occasional dead animal disintegrates naturally and is neither a health hazard nor an emergency. This position is supported by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Once they are dead, livestock are classified as “debris” and the Florida DOT has the responsibility for debris removal.

The focus should be on helping those animals that can be rescued: “Help the live ones and work with the dead ones later.” Of course, there is a difference between a dead animal here and there versus a high concentration of bodies.

Suzan Loerzel said a state working committee which included Greg Christy, FDACS/DAI and representatives from other government, veterinary and industry groups, continued to study the impacts of a catastrophic event on Florida’s animal industry. There are numerous issues in carcass disposal, especially if a significant number of animals is involved, not the least of which are health and safety.

Handley mentioned that the landfills in Okeechobee refused to accept large animal carcasses.

Kight reviewed the options: burning carcasses not an option, burying very difficult (unless an animal dies from a communicable disease) and composting has not been fully explored.

Armstrong asked about air assets to spot animals in trouble or concentrations of livestock carcasses following a disaster: Kight mentioned that the Division of Forestry had aircraft, Manning suggested Florida National Guard and Armstrong suggested that media might have helicopters available.

A draft guideline dated July 1, 2009 was handed out: “Florida Animal Producer guidance for Routine Disposal of Animal Carcasses.”

- 5. **SART Standard Operations Guide** Michael Turner passed around copies of the new SART SOG. The document discusses such relevant issues as Purpose, Mission and Team Development (staffing, qualifications, training and equipment). An SOG is required for funding through the FDLE. A brief discussion of funding followed.

- a. Joe Kight noted that his team had visited every Florida county except one to discuss the SART concept and integration of responders for agricultural and animal response. As a minimum, he said, we recommend that a working group in each county meet twice a year to discuss needs and possibilities. The state, he emphasized, is present to encourage and complement local preparation and response.
 - b. FEMA now requires increased accountability to go with reimbursements and funding. “We have to be able to tell FEMA who has been trained and in what subject.”
6. **Animal Sheltering** Joe Kight led the discussion and handed out a Draft Sheet “Emergency Animal Sheltering Policy” which he had worked on with Laura Bevan. Many legal and financial questions are involved in sheltering animals following an emergency. In brief, the policy statement suggested a “what is reasonable” approach:
- a. Small animals will be sheltered 30 days.
 - b. Livestock and horses will be held for at least 15 days.
- This issue can become contentious and litigious, Kight noted, and he solicited comments. It was important for local jurisdictions to have a policy and the draft presented for review and discussion was a step in that direction. Essentially, FEMA will reimburse for holding animals until the last public shelter is closed following a declared emergency.
7. **Partner Reports**
- a. Bill Armstrong reports that Animal Control offices statewide are facing serious cuts in funding and, as a result, in personnel and service options. This is happening at the same time that the number of animals needing help is climbing. Noted that his shelter in Hillsborough County collected upwards of 30,000 animals a year and the primary Miami shelter collected as many as 40,000.
 - b. Jim Spratt, representing the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Assn., said he was worried about a complacent approach to storm preparation since it has been four or five years since hurricanes swept across the state.
 - c. Jiannong Xin and Michael Turner discussed the SART web site at www.flsart.org. They are working to give it an up-to-date appearance and increase the availability of information.
8. **Next Advisory Board Meeting** The next SART Advisory Board meeting is tentatively scheduled for 10:00 a.m. December 2nd at the Farm Bureau building in Gainesville. Updates will be noted on the SART web site at www.flsart.org. The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Rick Sapp – 9-03-09