TRANSCRIPT

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EPISODE NAME: Post-Irene: Essential Information for Farmers

Good afternoon and thanks for joining as I'm Judy Simpson. We all know the enormous impact of tropical storm Irene on Vermont's farming community and in particular their animals and crops. There have been stories of amazing resolve and the efforts put forth by farmers to recover and rebuild while still trying to keep their farm or what's left of it going. If there had been many avenues of support including volunteer labor monetary donations and more. There has also been many state agencies teaming up behind the scenes providing expertise advice and resource for farmers. Today we are joined by two representatives of two of those agencies to share some information on processes and procedures that have been happening. Dr. Betsy green UVM extension professor and equine specialist is with us along with Dr. Kristin Haas the Vermont State veterinarian from the agency of agriculture. Welcome to both of you. I first know that you want to start out by thanking farmers.

Dr. Haas.: We do collectively our agencies and organizations have witnessed a lot of good deeds that farmers and farm families have down in their own communities all the while trying to keep their own businesses going. They have been model citizens and we want to recognize that and acknowledge it.

Judy.: Excellent. We have seen many of the stories of rebuilding. I understand there are a lot of behind the scenes things that had to take place before anything could be done. What types of hoops did they have to jump through Betsy?

Betsy.: The first thing they had to do was documents all the damage that they had. They had to work with farm services agency and if they haven't they still need to. To document this for both themselves for possible insurance grant applications and things like that as well as to document the damage overall to Vermont. Other things they need to do working with veterinarians working with the consultants bankers all these people to try to build rebuild what they had but also try to plan for the future in uncertain times.

Judy.: When you say documentation what exactly do you mean? Pictures forms?

Betsy.: Lots of forms because farm services agency has acted as the place where all the information on damages are going. That is the starting point and then there a lot of other things that they have to do for their own insurance. Forms pictures documentation of what they had with damages they had what types of things they know of that we're going through their property as Irene was washing things through.

Judy.: It's interesting to do that because I talk to one farmer he said first you start by looking at what's their but once you go through the process you realize the snowball effect of everything else that's been affected.
Betsy.: Right and then there's all kinds of guidelines that are Federal State for animal care farm safety and food safety too. They have to look at the things that they have to follow.

Judy.: So Christiane what types of recommendations with these farmers or anyone else with livestock get in this crisis situation and who comes up with this advice.

Dr. Haas.: The development of the recommendations that have been put out to the public specifically the farm families has been a cooperative effort. They've been put out by the agency of agriculture they've been put out by UVM extension they've been put out by other state and local organizations. Vermont's livestock care center advisory council came up with a concise list of recommendations for livestock owners that have been since reiterated buy all of those organizations in those would include things such as reviewing your vaccination and heart health for recalls with your large animal or herd health veterinarian in case those recommendations have changed in the wake of Irene. It would include things like reviewing your business plan looking at the economics of how you are set up and what anticipated risks there might be. For instance feed shortage. If there are anticipated feed shortages then look at ways to try to mitigate those issues. Potentially culling nonproductive animals while beef prices are strong would be one way and there are certainly others. Certainly talk to your FSA office if you haven't done so already. Make use of your other advisers and consultants feed wraps and financial consultants. The feed reps to look at trying to implement best management practices for storage and harvest of feed crops which have been heavily impacted by Irene.

Judy.: I know one big question was can we feed this corn that's been in the water to our livestock?

Dr. Haas.: The agency of agriculture and UVM extension have released information to farmers as well as other state quoters veterinarians cooperatives dairy cooperative personnel that outlined some of those recommendations and for those that didn't receive it they can contact either ever offices to get that but I guess the recommendation is that we hope and think that many of the effects can be mitigated two best management practices and proper techniques that are implemented on farms.

Judy.: For those that don't know talk a little bit about feeding cows because it's not just simply giving them silage. It’s a very exact science and if one element is lacking in the feed then you have to make it up somewhere else.

Dr. Haas.: That is true and cows are although very friendly and seem like simple to animals they're very complicated and requires specific nutritional combinations in order to maximize productivity. It isn't just a matter of feeding one type of feedstuff which in this instance works well. In my work to people's advantage because if there were flooded crops that go into making for instance corn silage. If that affected corn silage can be mixed with other feedstuffs in a total mixed fresh and then perhaps some of the contaminated pieces can be diluted and minimize the effect of them.

Judy.: This is just mind-boggling as far as all the things a farmer has to think about. What are some of the other types of assistance that are available to help even with the mental and psychological distress that many of these farmers have to be feeling?

Dr. Haas.: A very successful program in Vermont is the farm first program. It is a program that allows for anonymous and confidential counseling both to farmers and farm families. Historically the program has been available just a dairy farmers but in the wake of Irene it's been extended and opened up to include any type of farm situation. That would be one resource that people should take advantage of if need be.

Judy.: What about financial help?

Betsy.: As you seen there's been very successful fund raising throughout the state and beyond for people that have been affected but farms in particular there's a few things that Vermont farm
disaster relief program that is run through the agency of Ag. That's actually a short term grant type of program. In fact the first applications word due September 19 and the next are September 30. That's quick turnaround to help people bridge the support from what they can get long-term. What they need to make it to that point so that's something that people. But of course you have to have your FSA form in and this and that. I actually applied for a little U.S decline disaster relief that provides some bridging funds for food like hay and grain for horse owners by horse owners and that's something that I'm working with the agency of egg to identify people that need just a little bit to help them get to the next step where they can get their full return or get back in business.

Judy.: Talk a little bit about the us equine disaster relief fund and some of the things that are available for folks.

Betsy.: On that particular one is something that was put together and has helped places like Texas. It's newer than Katrina but it probably came about because of things like that. When horse owners business or just personal horse owners didn't have anything to get them to the next stage they just might need a little bit of fencing or grain or hay or whatever. This one it's not a time but it's something that every little bit helps so we're working with the agency and are actually working with guys from guys farming and yard because they're acting as the venue so if we identify the people they will provide it and get the return support from the U.S. disaster that equine disaster relief fund.

Judy.: The important issue is to find out about it and apply.

Betsy.: Or identify the people that needs that and getting them to contact us the right people because everybody wants to help but if you don't put your name in the hat for it these are things that we need we can't help.

Judy.: Let's talk about some of the other issues that the farmers are facing when it comes to their fields. What are some of the examples of contaminants of concern from the flooded fields?

Dr. Haas.: They can be numerous but there are some that are being focused on more heavily than others specifically heavy metals mycotoxins pathogenic bacteria PCBs and pesticides. Or potential contaminants that could have affected the fields. Of that list we’re focusing specifically on two of them. Heavy metals and micro toxins the reason for that is that we feel others can be mitigated through other avenues but going forward with farmers harvesting their feed crops an alternately wanting to feed that out to their livestock the heavy metals and the mycotoxins are a primary concern so we’re working now on developing a risk based testing protocol to help advise farmers on how to create total mixed ration or how to handle the feed that may have been affected. For now we're saying if you have to harvest feed that's been affected then to segregate it so that it can be handled perhaps differently and then materials that were not affected.

Betsy.: And UVM extension is actually doing that heavy metals testing right now for soil so that is something that is great

Judy.: Talk a little bit about organic farmers because they had to go through a number of hoops to qualify as an organic farm and this may be could've affected their fields.

Dr. Haas.: The point of reference for the organic farmers specifically with regard to what koran is they have to maintain in order to maintain the certification would be through NOFA. Certainly there have been impacts on organic farmers that are above and beyond with regard to maintaining that certification. My understanding is that there might be some exemptions were concessions that can be made in the wake of a disaster like this but NOFA would be the point of contact in order to find those out.

Judy.: How are you getting information about all these different avenues out?
Betsy.: From social media face book logs publications press releases letters directly to the farmer. Actually we took our typical pasture management manure management workshop and changed it to after I renew tips and strategies for dealing with flooded crops pastures and hay fields. So that is something that happened and provides information and they'll be some more stuff on that available for those that weren't attending. Then the publication on the screen right now is updated cooperative publication on managing flood damage crops and forages that has a lot of excellent information including the contact information. Then our resources that has inner the place for finding has all is WWW. UVM.edu/extension. Then you see a big Reds bar that says Irene information. It has multitudes of fact sheets contact information forms the whole 9 yards from all of the agencies.

Judy.: In addition to information and key technical assistance there have been other ways that your organization has been reaching and supporting a diversity of a farms.

Betsy.: Yes in fact a lot of the extension crew from my end of things. Heather Darby Sid Bosworth and a lot of the agronomists have been working overtime on site on the ground but also organizing work parties to help clear debris from the fields but chasing after the FSA people because two weekends ago we actually went by and they were taking pictures then we were following and pulling all the things out of the cornfields these pictures you see now are from last weekend. Even just picking up rocks from pastures at a facility in Rochester. We were also cleaning tires out of the fields in the woods between the river in the fields just trying to help get their life back to normal to the best of their ability. So many people not just us but everybody has been helping and that makes a huge difference in helping people get back to normal farming.

Judy.: Even to get the equipment into the fields to harvest what might be left of a crop you need to get all the debris out.

Betsy.: Yes absolutely.

Judy.: You mentioned that farmers from other parts of the state have been helping out?

Betsy.: Two weekends ago there were farmers from four different counties that brought their equipment down to the Rochester to help those farmers with the big stuff. We were pulling home of the other stuff out of the field. They were taking trees and snowmobiles and tents, you name it out of those feelings it was amazing.

Judy.: Before we run out of time Betsy maybe you can remind our viewers again the extension web site and information?

Betsy.: Yes the resource is www.UVM.edu/ext and you'll see the big red bar that says Irene resources. Click on that and there's a multitude of resources for anybody.

Judy.: Kristin what you think is the most important thing for farmers have to do or think about during this time?

Dr. Haas.: First taking care of themselves and their family's secondly looking at their farm operation from a business standpoint and making what may be some tough decisions but utilizing the expertise of others around them that they have available to them. Above all else if they haven't already done so then please contact their FSA Office home because as that seem mentioned as the conduit for many other potential state and Federal Financial relief programs.

Judy.: And Betsy from where you stand what would you say?
Betsy.: Definitely just working with all the experts to make sure that we're doing the best for our animals and the food sources for humans and otherwise and also moving forward to try and make the best and get back to normalcy.

Judy.: Thank you both for joining me today. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we'll see you again next time on across the fence.

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