

# Dealing with the aftermath of a barn fire



**Accidents involving farm animals can be reduced through awareness and education.**

Farm fires are always devastating events and having livestock on those farms increases the challenge. According to the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, farm fires pose a special threat. Farms tend to be isolated and rarely have access to well-equipped urban fire departments or to large quantities of water. Barns are also highly flammable and can quickly burn out of control. As a result, economic losses due to fires in farming are severe and out of proportion to the number of fires that occur.

No amount of precaution will entirely rule out the chance that a fire may start, so it's important to be prepared to deal with the aftermath of a barn fire.

Decisions will vary depending on the type and numbers of animals involved, season, provincial regulations and other circumstances. The information in the next few pages is designed to help with some practical advice and options.



## Planning ahead

Having a plan already in place will help you to efficiently and effectively assess the situation. The plan can be divided into three parts: immediate, short term, longer term.

## Assessing the situation

A fire of any magnitude can be an overwhelming circumstance. Before making any decisions, call in your support network.

### Support network:

- Family members
- Neighbours
- Veterinarian
- Insurance company
- Commodity group/marketing board
- Provincial agriculture ministry



Here are a few questions to guide you through the process:

- 1 Inventory: How many live animals? How many dead animals?
- 2 If you have live animals on the farm:
  - a. Are they injured? Do they require veterinary treatment or euthanasia?
  - b. Have they been exposed to smoke? If yes, they may be suffering from smoke inhalation and should be inspected by a veterinarian ASAP. Damage caused by smoke inhalation is costly to treat and the prognosis is generally poor. These animals should be euthanized.
  - c. Do they need alternative housing? Feed? Water?
  - d. Can they be sold if alternative housing is not available?
- 3 Who do you need to contact? Insurance agent, veterinarian, hydro, feed company, deadstock collector, transporter, buyer, processing plant, creditor?

Smoke Inhalation. Consult your veterinarian to diagnose and create a plan for those animals that have experienced smoke inhalation.



## Surviving animal relocation

Unaffected animals may be moved to another barn or location.

Things to consider include bio-security, space allowances, feed and water availability, long-term prognosis of animals' health and welfare, labour requirements, market potential, and economics.

Alternative housing for large numbers of animals is limited.

Possible options include:

- Connecting or neighboring barns
- Sales or assembly yards
- Event facilities that aren't in use
- Weather permitting, gates or fencing could be set up in nearby fields, yards, or empty bunker silos.

Ensure areas are safe and secure and that animals can be easily monitored, fed and watered.



## Marketing

Unaffected animals can be sent for processing or for dispersal. This reduces the burden of caring for animals on the people who are trying to deal with the aftermath of the fire.

Seek the guidance of your insurer if considering this option.

Farmers should contact their receiver(s) immediately or contact their commodity group for assistance in arranging marketing and transport.

Animals should be sent directly to a processor. Animals that aren't at market weights may need to be shipped to a processor specializing in cull or off-sort animals.

Some buyers have experience in dealing with emergencies and can provide advice and assistance to move animals quickly.

Sales barn operators can help in emergency dispersal sales.



## Special considerations for gestating and birthing farm animals

- Have a plan in place for handling farm animals that have recently birthed, may begin to birth or are due to birth within a week. By federal law, animals likely to give birth during transport can not be transported.
- Farm animals in early gestation may be accepted by a receiver under emergency situations. Determine and arrange this with a buyer directly.
- Holding a dispersal sale for breeding stock and dairy animals may be an option.
- Extreme circumstances may dictate the need for euthanasia or aborting pregnancies.
- Veterinarian advice and assistance may be required.



## Euthanasia

Animals may need to be euthanized. When making these decisions, consider the animal's well being and its quality of life if it survives. If in doubt, consult with your veterinarian.

- 1** Assess the animals and rank them according to those that need attention. Animals in pain with severe injuries or burns should be euthanized immediately.
- 2** Smoke inhalation damage and chemical contamination are untreatable. Animals showing signs of such exposure should be euthanized. Signs of smoke inhalation damage and chemical contamination: Singed hair/feathers, burns, noisy or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath), coughing, changes in vocalization, black or grey saliva, change in skin colour or unconsciousness.
- 3** Farmers should refer to euthanasia guidelines or the farm protocol that has been developed with their veterinarian that details methods, equipment and people needed to deal with euthanizing the various sizes or types of animals on their farm.
- 4** Although poultry and pigs seldom survive barn fires, farmers should be prepared to be able to deal with euthanizing large numbers.
- 5** Have a backup plan in case euthanasia equipment is destroyed or trained staff is not available.

For more information, see the "Should this animal be loaded?" decision tree. Available under the Animal Care button at [www.FarmFoodCare.org](http://www.FarmFoodCare.org)



## Deadstock disposal

Removing dead animals from a barn is a difficult task physically and emotionally. Mass mortalities (when large numbers of animals die as a result of a barn fire) require having enough people and the proper equipment to make this job more manageable.

Even in an emergency, it is imperative that deadstock be handled responsibly and in compliance with provincial and federal regulations.

In most provinces, farmers have 48 hours to dispose of dead animals in an acceptable manner. In the case of a fire, this would be 48 hours from the time of the animal's death, or within seven days for a post mortem. If mortalities cannot be disposed of within 48 hours, they may also be kept in cold storage for up to 14 days, or frozen for 240 days. Check with provincial regulations.

If farmers in Ontario require additional time to dispose of dead farm animals, a request will need to be made under O.Reg 106/09 through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs by contacting the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300.

Disposal options may include both on-farm or off-farm locations and methods. Acceptance of the deadstock at off-site locations, such as renderers and landfills, are at the operator's discretion. It should be noted that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has special requirements for the transport and disposal of dead cattle. Please refer to its website for further information at [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca).



## Transportation of deadstock

Under Ontario regulations, farmers may transport their own deadstock to regulated off-site location, or they may use the services of a licensed collector.

The deadstock must be transported in a leak-proof container, out of public view, and the container must be able to withstand repeated cleaning and sanitizing after delivery. This is important for biosecurity purposes.



## Rendering

Acceptance will depend on number of animals, condition of animals, and whether the dead animals can be separated from debris. Fire damaged animals are not acceptable for rendering.

Farmers should have their licensed collector and insurance adjuster assess the situation.

## Landfill

Acceptance at the landfill may be limited or require special approvals. Only a few Ontario landfills accept deadstock in emergency situations, and the disposal of dead cattle can only occur at federally permitted facilities.

Farmers should pre-arrange the disposal of deadstock with the operator.

## On-farm burial or composting

Burial may be the only feasible choice in the event of a fire, where steel, concrete, or other materials mixed with the deadstock make it unfit for rendering or composting.

Provincial regulations governing burial or composting must be observed. Deadstock may be buried or composted on site, with or without debris.

Burial and composting are restricted on some soil types, and in areas subject to flooding.

Ontario requirements restrict the amount of deadstock that can be buried in one pit to 2,500 kg.

Deadstock composting sites in Ontario are limited to a footprint of no more than 600 m<sup>2</sup>, and no more than 600 m<sup>3</sup> of composting material may be present at one site. More than one site may be established, but only through a request under the Emergency Authorization section of O.Reg 106/09.

Barn fire mortalities generally compost quickly, although it is imperative that the appropriate substrate type and volumes are used in the process. Composting will require on-going management. Regularly monitor the site to ensure compliance with deadstock and environmental regulations.



# Incineration

Acceptance will depend on number of animals, condition of animals, and whether the Incineration means the burning of deadstock in a specially designed unit that ensures the burn temperatures in order to limit the air emissions.

Where incineration is permitted, installation and operation must meet regulatory standards.

Due to the high cost of construction and operation, incineration is not used to a significant degree, particularly in emergency situations.

For more information on deadstock disposal options, check with your provincial agricultural department.

In Ontario, farmers should contact the Agricultural Information Contact Centre for further information or in the event that these requirements cannot be met. OMAFRA and the Ministry of the Environment have established a process for identifying an alternative disposal method in the event of an emergency.

In Ontario, contact OMAFRA Toll Free: 1-877-424-1300 during business hours, or after hours at Ministry of the Environment's Spills Action Centre at 1-800-268-6060.

OMAFRA Fact sheets:

- Emergency Disposal of Deadstock On-farm  
[www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-023.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-023.htm)
- Deadstock Disposal Options for On-Farm  
[www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-025.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-025.htm)
- On-Farm Bin Composting of Deadstock  
[www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-031.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-031.htm)
- Burial of Deadstock  
[www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-029.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/09-029.htm)



For more information:  
[www.FarmFoodCare.org](http://www.FarmFoodCare.org)  
[www.LivestockHandling.net](http://www.LivestockHandling.net)

Farm & Food Care Ontario  
100 Stone Road West, Suite 202  
Guelph, ON N1G 5L3  
T (519) 837-1326  
E [info@farmfoodcare.org](mailto:info@farmfoodcare.org)