

## Key points for dealing with floods

### As the flood recedes

- Assess damage to water supply and reticulation systems. Identify troughs contaminated with silt and clean them out (silt can stop rumen function)
- Assess damage to access lanes, tracks, gateways, culverts and fences. Determine what clearing away of flood debris is required
- Damaged, wet tracks can create issues with lameness. If numbers of lame cows are increasing contact your local Healthy Hoof provider, they are trained to help with this problem
- Check for water trapped behind stop banks and for tiles that may not be operating properly. If necessary get pumps in to pump water off low lying land with no natural drainage.
- Assess damage to pastures, the depth and type of silt
  - Avoid grazing heavily silted pasture for as long as possible as silt can stop rumen function
  - Minimise the proportion of the diet comprising silted pasture when you do start feeding it
  - For pasture flattened by silt leave it to rot
- In cold weather pasture can survive
  - 10-12 days in clean water
  - 4-10 days in silted water
- Assess available non-flooded pastures and other undamaged feed reserves
- Contact local council flood relief coordinator, DairyNZ staff, Federated Farmers, MAF etc
- Talk to bank managers, insurance company
- Accept help when offered, and ask for it if you need it.

### Work out an action plan

- List what you need to do in priority order
- Consider access and culverts, water supply, reticulation and troughs, fences, clearing of debris, rejuvenation and renovation of pastures etc
- Who will do what? Allocate tasks to sufficient people with a realistic amount of time
- Identify where you need help and find out what outside help is available
- Make sure you document all damage, actions taken, people and time. Liberal use of the digital camera is very helpful, along with detailed diary notes.

### Work out a feed plan

- Assess the current feed resources available on the milking platform
- Assess winter crop paddocks and estimate yields.
- Do a supplementary feed inventory for both the milking platform and wintering block.
- Buy in feed to reduce the gap between demand and supply.
- If using a grazier for winter feeding contact them for an update on the feed situation on their farm as this may dictate decisions that have to be made on the milking platform now.
- Be realistic, how many stock can you feed successfully for the remainder of the season and during the dry period.
- Manage grazing of wet soils to minimise the risk of pasture and soil damage which will impact on subsequent growth.

- Don't be tempted to retain more cows than you can comfortably feed.
- Consider options for stock that you can't feed – which ones to send off and for how long. Competition for available feed may be high so be proactive
- Graze dry stock off?
- Dry off part or all of the herd
- Get rid of culls
- Consider OAD milking

### Plan pasture renovation

Experience with renovation after major floods shows that it is important to do it once and do it properly so take your time. Use your feed plan to help determine the key elements of your pasture restoration programme. While it is too late for major renovation now, it is important to determine how you will manage through spring with reduced effective hectares for milkers.

Some options used successfully by farmers in flood prone areas:

- Clear away rotting vegetation and other debris
- Remove gravel and shingle that is not suitable for a seedbed
- Talk to your fertiliser rep to determine the best fertiliser options for your situation. On pastures that are still green and growing extra nitrogen and sulphur may boost growth. Soil tests may be necessary.
- Lightly silted pasture with little thatch may recover given a little time, as long as the silt doesn't smell. If it does, or if there is a lot of thatch, mow it, cultivate the soil when dry enough and sow in either short term or perennial pastures with clover.
- Use nitrogen and sulphur fertilisers
- If flood sediment is 5-10 cm deep, cultivate when dry and sow in short term or perennial grasses plus clover and fertilisers
- For sediment more than 10 cm deep you will probably need to use sub-soilers to bring the buried soil to the surface, then sow in pasture and clover.

The best options vary depending on whether the flood sediment is mainly sand, gravel or silage. Follow the decision tree for flood damaged land available at:

<http://www.dairynz.co.nz/file/fileid/9098>

The following documents are available from [www.dairynz.co.nz/flood](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/flood)

[Managing stressed animals in a disaster situation](#)

[Pasture renovation after flooding](#)

[Wet weather management handout](#)

[Decision tree for flooded land document](#)