

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Reminds farmers to keep safety first, report losses following winter storms

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

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MADISON - Winter storms have brought large amounts of snow, extreme cold and high winds over the past week, resulting in reports of barn collapses, shed damage and livestock losses. Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Brad Pfaff encourages farmers to keep safety a top priority and report losses as soon as possible.

"This winter has dealt Wisconsin farmers a difficult hand," said Pfaff. "Personal safety is always our top priority. Farmers, families, employees, friends and all who are trying to assist should take necessary precautions when trying to remove snow or work with compromised structures."

Farmers are reminded to report property damage promptly to their insurers. Photographs are helpful to document the claims. Farmers should also record livestock losses.

"As this situation unfolds, I continue to communicate with the USDA Farm Service Agency," added Pfaff. "Farmers should report all damage and losses to their local county FSA office. There may be assistance available for farmers, and these reports are critical to making the determination whether to seek a disaster designation from the USDA Secretary."

FSA has safety net programs, including the Livestock Indemnity Program and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program, which may be helpful for farmers who lost livestock due to an adverse weather-related event. A disaster designation in their county would make farmers eligible for low-interest loans if they cannot access private financing. Contacts for county FSA offices are available [online](#).

"In times like this, I am encouraged by the stories I see on social media and hear from out in the barnyards about neighbors helping neighbors to assist with clean-up and even house animals," concluded Pfaff. "These are the times that make me even more proud to be part of Wisconsin agriculture and showcase what makes our rural communities special." Property owners should also be on the lookout for "storm chasers" - fly-by-night contractors that travel to storm-damaged neighborhoods in search of quick cash. These traveling work crews may perform substandard work or no repair work at all, and they typically depart soon after being paid. This leaves the consumer with little recourse when problems arise. Be wary of any contractor who knocks at your door. Hire a local contractor based on referrals (ask friends, family or coworkers) and get a written contract with a start and completion date and warranty information. Ask for lien waivers when you make a payment. And before you sign a contract, contact DATCP's Bureau of Consumer Protection (800-422-7128) to see if we have received complaints about the business.

These winter storms add an additional hardship on Wisconsin farmers and their families. The Wisconsin Farm Center is available to assist farmers with mediation, financial analysis and emotional stress. Contact the Wisconsin Farm Center at 800-942-2474.