

North Carolina Agriculture/Emergency Management Deployment to Puerto Rico

By Dr. Jimmy Tickel & Mark Howell, NCDA&CS

Puerto Rico suffered incredible damage due to Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Although the continental United States have also experienced catastrophic damages from tropical systems; Florida with Irma and Texas with Harvey, the islands of PR and USVI suffered impact from two category 5 storms. Winds of over 200 mph brought down buildings, sheared the tops of forests, and crushed the power infrastructures of the islands. As a reference, with regards to the wind damage, NC has not experienced as catastrophic an event as even one of the two hurricanes that the island experienced, in our lifetimes.



In an effort to assist, NC was asked to deploy an ESF 11 (Emergency Support Function- Agriculture and Natural Resources dealing with animals, Ag, and natural history facilities) short team by FEMA/Puerto Rico Emergency Management through the EMAC system (Emergency

Management Assistance Compact). Our team consisted of **Mark Howell** (30 yr. NCDA & CS Emergency Programs Specialist with great ICS planning and operations background), **Hendrix Valenzula** (Emergency Management Planner and interpreter extraordinaire), **Eric Wiseman** (an Emergency Management Area Coordinator who would make Radar on the old Mash Series look like a novice when logistics were needed), and **Dr. Jimmy Tickel** (NCDA & CS Veterinarian and lead for the team with operational, governmental, and national response expertise).

Going in, all knew the area was heavily impacted making for austere living conditions, and that response to recovery would be incredibly difficult and long. The greatest challenge in response on Puerto Rico was/has been the logistical nightmare of attempting to “fix” a heavily impacted ISLAND with 3.6 million people by bringing in all that was needed on either planes or by ship/barge. The logistics portion of the response has been nothing short of monumental, not only on the human side, but animal as well.

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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & CONSUMER SERVICES

Emergency Programs Division

Steve Troxler, Commissioner of Agriculture



To manage the response, FEMA and PREMA (Puerto Rico Emergency Management Agency) established a huge federal/state JFO (Joint Forces Operations Center) in the San Juan Convention Center. That is where our NC ESF 11 Short Team was based. Challenges to responding on behalf of ESF 11 included: complete loss of the commercial production of poultry (loss of 3.6 million birds) including total destruction of ¾ of poultry houses and damage to the rest, damage to every dairy farm on the island (280 farms), complete destruction of the coffee, plantain, and banana crops, and loss of pasture and fence damage. Storm debris completely hampered initial operations, and even weeks after the storm there was not only very little of the island clean, but areas where access and assessment had not even been able to take place for humans much less animals. Power and communications were lacking for well over 90% of the island when our team arrived and continued to be so the duration of our two-week deployment. Communications are commonly recognized as a challenge in any event or exercise, and in Puerto Rico, it proved to be an exponential.

An immediate hurdle for our team going in to Puerto Rico was to establish our mission/team in the JFO which had made a place for all the national response plan ESF's except 11. Patiently, our team established the ESF 11 desk in the atrium area outside the JFO due to space constraints (ballroom hosting over 1000 people from all walks of FEMA, military, law enforcement, Public Health, and every federal agency you can name). We began our work by interfacing with our usual response partners in the JFO on matters such as Ag response, mortality management, public health concerns etc. Upon completing a general assessment and understanding the time frame of our deployment along with the short time period (2 week EMAC deployment) we would be on island, we chose a number of areas to, as Eric would say, "make something happen!" These areas included assisting the poultry operation in its attempt to save 400,000 birds as well as assist its community in storing fuel and providing potable water, advising PR officials on mortality management, proposing/crafting/advising on a grant to rescue the dairy industry, a donations voucher based program for all other livestock and horses, and crafting a zoonotic mitigation strategy for public health.

There were a number of successes for the team including spearheading a successful, rather unprecedented USDA grant for the dairy industry for \$12 million focused on providing fuel (all 280 farms were using generators at a cost of 3x electricity), feed, veterinary support, and a cache of generators to serve as replacements for those that fail at farms. The other areas included support to the poultry operations in its community efforts (received prioritized fuel), as well as working to advance the response needed to address the zoonotic outbreak potential (rabies/leptospirosis). Perhaps one of the teams most significant successes was to work with Puerto Rico's Secretary of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture's personnel to provide just in time training to assist them in taking up the efforts we had started in the JFO and continue the role of ESF 11 representation.

VRC COORDINATOR	UPCOMING EVENTS:	REQUIREMENTS FOR VRC DEPLOYMENT
<p>Mandy Tolson, DVM Southeastern Region Emergency Programs Veterinarian (252) 813-0989 Mandy.Tolson@ncagr.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please see our website for future training and activities. • Check out our sheltering webinars posted on the website! • www.ncagr.gov/oe/sheltering/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICS 100, 200, and 700 • Biosecurity/PPE Training • Knowledge of NC Emergency Management • Knowledge of Emergency Support Functions • Attendance at VRC Meetings • Sign a Code of Conduct
<p>COMPLETE YOUR VRC REGISTRATION AT WWW.SERVNC.ORG</p>		



Public Health Corner

EXOTIC TICK SPECIES IDENTIFIED ON HUNTERDON COUNTY FARM

(TRENTON) – New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher today announced the United States Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa has confirmed the finding of an exotic East Asian tick, also known as the longhorned tick or bush tick, on a farm in Hunterdon County on Nov. 9. Initial identification was made by the Monmouth County Tick-borne Diseases Lab, located at Rutgers University and the Hunterdon County Division of Health. This tick is not known to be present in the U.S., although there are records of at least a dozen previous collections of this species in the country on animals and materials presented for entry at U.S. ports.

The *Haemaphysalis longicornis* tick species is dark brown in color and grows to the size of a pea when fully engorged. Both larval and nymphal stages are very small and difficult to observe with the naked eye. Adult ticks are seen mainly during early summer, larvae from late summer to early winter, and nymphs mainly in the spring.

This tick is a serious pest to livestock (including cattle, horses, farmed deer, sheep, and goats), particularly in New Zealand, as well as wildlife, pets, and humans. Farmers should monitor their livestock for the presence of this tick and decreased growth rates or signs of anemia in the animals. With respect to livestock, the tick is known to transmit a disease called Theileriosis to cattle, which results in severe anemia and possibly death. There are no human health or food safety risks associated with Theileria. This tick also has the potential to spread other bacterial and viral diseases to humans and other animals.

The animals and the property where the tick was found have been treated to eliminate the tick. To determine if the tick has spread to nearby wildlife, ongoing surveillance is being conducted by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in cooperation with Wildlife Services from the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study at the University of Georgia.

The potential impact of this tick on tickborne illness in New Jersey residents is not yet known. In other parts of the world, the bush tick has been associated with several tickborne diseases, some of which are found in New Jersey, such as spotted fever rickettsioses. The Department of Agriculture is investigating if the ticks found locally are carrying any potential pathogens that may impact human or animal health.



North Carolina Emergency Management Region 4 & 5 Capabilities

By Dr. Bruce Akers, NCDA&CS

North Carolina Emergency Management Regions 4 and 5 (12 counties) recently conducted refresher training with many of these tools and displayed them for all attendees to become familiar with. This was hosted by the City of Fayetteville's EM & Fire Services at the Fayetteville Regional Airport on Nov. 29, 2017, but the training was conducted from Nov. 28-30. Staff members (Drs. Tolson & Akers) from NCDA&CS Emergency Programs Division participated too as they are support partners to the counties of these two regions. This time also included the combined quarterly meeting of these regions' counties.



Included are photos of many of the pieces of equipment trained with and viewed. This Capabilities Exercise (CAPEX) lasted all day and included western shelters erected by fire service men & women, displays and training with radio/communications equipment from multiple counties, a CAMET from Cumberland County's partnership with AKC and Decontamination Unit from NCDA&CS developed in preparation for an animal industry disease event. The whole purpose of this day's activities was to share the knowledge of all the tools spread across the agencies available to all the state's partner agencies. As preparedness monies have gotten more stretched over the past few years, it is apparent that all agencies can't have all the "tools" likely needed to respond to the variety of events our state faces.

This spread of capabilities emphasizes the urgency that we all be familiar with the others' capabilities to better prepare to respond with the right tools earlier to protect our state's citizens economy and industries. I'd like to encourage all of you to engage with your local Emergency Service Agencies and become familiar with their capabilities and potential needs that you may better volunteer and plug in and in doing so develop new skills yourself.





Public Health Corner

Some tick species may become less active in the winter; however, it is important to take steps to prevent tick bites whenever you are in areas where ticks may be found. Protect yourself, your family and your pets from tick bites by:

- Knowing where ticks are: ticks can live in or near wooded or grassy areas or on animals directly.
- Using repellent on skin: use EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone. Always follow product instructions.
- Treating clothing, boots and camping gear with permethrin.
- Covering up by wearing long sleeves and pants when spending time outdoors and consider tucking pants into socks to prevent ticks from getting under clothes.
- Showering as soon as possible after coming indoors to remove unattached ticks.
- Inspecting your body for ticks and removing ticks immediately.
- Treating your pets with veterinarian-approved products to kill or repel ticks. Products are available for domestic animals like dogs and cats, as well as for animals like sheep, goats and cattle.

State and federal animal health and wildlife officials are working to address these findings. Response efforts will include surveillance of the property and wildlife within the region. If necessary, tick treatments will be conducted to reduce the risks of spread. The primary goal is to eradicate the tick before it spreads to new areas.

Questions about livestock can be directed to your local veterinarian or the State Veterinarian at (609) 671-6400 during regular business hours.

This tick is a known pest in deer and has a wide host range, thus can infect a range of wildlife species. If the tick is detected in wildlife, then it should be immediately reported to the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Wildlife Management at (609) 984-6295 or the Office of Fish and Wildlife Health and Forensics at (908) 637-4173 ext. 120.

For questions about tickborne illness in humans, contact your local health department (<http://localhealth.nj.gov>) or the New Jersey Department of Health during normal business hours at 609-826-5964

Note: Tick photo is courtesy of Jim Occi, Rutgers University

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