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Flooding crisis Farmers demand action

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In their own words: Farming's view on the Somerset floods

The fight to save flooded farm businesses has drawn the industry together. **Johann Tasker** met those helping with the aid effort on the Somerset Levels.

"It's very heartening and very humbling. All of us at the end of the day reflect on everything and all of us have cried a lot, because you realise how wonderful people are." *Noami Parker, NFU group secretary, who has helped co-ordinate offers of help from across the farming community.*

"When farms started being evacuated, it was all hands to the pump. You do what you can. It's not just us, it's been a real team effort between everyone." *Robert Venner, Auctioneer, Greenslade Taylor Hunt, who provided temporary accommodation for cattle from flooded farms at Sedgemoor Livestock Centre.*

"It's shocking – the rain is one thing, but the high tides are another. They're making a bad situation worse. It's good that everyone is pulling together, but that's how it has always been." *Steve Cade, Cambridgeshire farmer, who drove more than four hours to deliver beet to Bridgwater market from Lord de Ramsey's farm at Abbots Ripton.*

"We need to keep up the momentum. Even if it stopped raining now, it would still take months for the water to disappear. We could be in this situation for a long time." *Nathan Ponsillo, farmer and operations manager at Junction 24, which is acting as a delivery and collection point for donated livestock feed, forage and bedding.*

"It has been amazing. I don't know what to say. Everyone has pulled together – farmers, ag dealers, market staff, everybody. It's just incredible." *Graham Gasper, who works at Staple Farm, Staple Fitzpaine, Taunton, Somerset.*

"It's like there's a war on and everybody is roping together. I like to think as a nation we are pretty spirited and when the chips are down, everyone mucks in." *Justin Nichols, managing director of Compass Tractors, which has supplied tractors, trailers and drivers to deliver feed and bedding.*

"The forage aid we arranged with Club Hectare spurred me to come. I never expected to be here, to be honest. But it's what you do." *Yorkshire farmer and Club Hectare co-founder Juno Dixon, who helped raise £600 and drove from his farm near Hull to assist with the aid effort.*

"We're a local business and our farmers are right in the thick of it. When you go home at night and you've a dry house and warm bed, you realise how lucky you are." *Richard Phelps, ABP UK director and managing director of Blade Farming, which helped house cattle.*

"The farming community has been amazing. We've lost absolutely everything this time. It's six foot deep in places." *Moorland farmer James Winslade, who evacuated 550 cattle and sent them to seven dry farms after floods engulfed his sheds.*

"I'm from a farming background – these people are my friends and colleagues. We have 100 acres under water, but it is nothing compared with these guys." *Relief milker Rebecca Horsington, a founder of the Flooding on the Levels Action Group, who is helping to co-ordinate donations.*

"This is my community – we wanted to do all we could to help. The whole community has been affected and the farmers put meat on my shelves." *Rob Gerard-Hurt, who manages Bridgwater's Asda, which has set up a relief fund and organised food parcels and clothes.*



TIM SCRIVENER

PULLING TOGETHER

- * Hundreds of livestock evacuated
- * Emergency forage centres set up
- * Whole industry united in fight
- * Millions already pledged in aid

By Johann Tasker

Rural communities across the country are pulling together in a massive effort to get emergency supplies of animal feed and bedding to flood-hit farmers.

The Forage Aid mission came as more areas of southern Britain were engulfed by high water. The Somerset Levels east of Taunton and Bridgwater remain worst hit, but other affected areas include parts of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Worcestershire and Surrey. Some 16 farms on the Somerset

Levels are now believed to have evacuated hundreds of livestock. Other farmers and willow growers are also looking at heavy losses. Water is being pumped off the Levels, but it will take months for the floods to subside (see p10-11).

Sedgemoor Livestock Centre at Bridgwater has turned into a depot for deliveries of forage and straw bedding, which are then being sent to individual farms. Agricultural buyers and suppliers are also helping with the aid effort.

Prime minister David Cameron has pledged £10m in aid for

flooded farmers. But many producers believe it will take much more for livestock producers and growers to recover from the effect of water lying on farmland for months (see p8).

In a mammoth undertaking, two tractors and trailers laden with livestock fodder and bedding set off on a 225-mile journey from Yorkshire to Bridgwater. After travelling for 10 hours, the convoy was due to arrive in Somerset on Thursday (13 February).

Wakefield agricultural contractor Philip Rowbottom and his neighbour Andrew Nicholson said diesel costs were being met by local farmers and Wakefield NFU. All donated fodder and bedding was sourced by members of the Barugh and District Ploughing Association.

"We deliberately wanted to take the donations by tractor and trailer to help highlight the plight of farmers so desperately in need. Hopefully our journey will help highlight the solidarity we all feel with those farmers in Somerset who are facing such tough times."

Paul Gentry, chief livestock auctioneer at Newark livestock market, has been helping to co-ordinate efforts to get feed and

bedding supplies from his area. Kind-hearted farmers who had themselves been "feeling the pinch" locally were coming forward with generous donations of fodder, he said.

Supermarket chains have also been helping. Tesco put its fleet of lorries at farmers' disposal to transport supplies. And Asda has pledged £400,000 to help flood-hit communities, with some of the money earmarked for farmers.

One partnership saw members of farmer-owned co-operative

Farmers across the country have responded to calls for help.

Camgrain donate lorry loads of wheat for processing into animal feed by the Creden Milling Company. More than 40 tonnes had been donated as *Farmers Weekly* went to press.

In Northamptonshire, Jenny Martin of Walcote Lodge Farms, Fotheringhay, said she and her husband Bill wanted to help after seeing a news report. "We realised we had some spare bales and started asking neighbouring farms and within a couple of hours we'd got promises of about 400."

Ed Ford, vice-chairman of Essex Young Farmers, helped organise loads from hay and straw gathered from farms in his locality. "We started texting local farmers and it has spread like wildfire. Something has to be done and this is an ideal opportunity to rally around."

In Herefordshire, Ally Hunter Blain, who himself has almost 60ha under water, dispatched two loads of bales to Sedgemoor with transport supplied by Frontier. Another load of straw was transported by Premier Foods from James Howe Farming, near Alford, Lincolnshire.

Help with fodder and donations

* Sedgemoor Livestock Market, off J24 of the M5, is acting as a collection point for deliveries of feed and bedding. Please call first to check what is needed and to arrange a delivery time on 01278 410 278.

Rebecca Horsington is helping to co-ordinate deliveries. Email her on rhorsington@hotmail.com

* Forage Aid founder Andrew Ward is also offering advice. Contact andrew@wcs-farming.co.uk or via Twitter @wheatdaddy

* The Addington Fund is collecting donations which it is using to help pay for the haulage of supplies to those farmers most in need. Donate online at www.addingtonfund.org.uk

* Tesco – groups of farmers who are trying to find hauliers willing to move feed or bedding can contact Tesco which is making some of its fleet available to help out (0800 072 6684).

* Well-wishers without fodder who still want to help can make donations via the Farming Community Network webpage www.justgiving.com/fcn/donate Donations should be marked 'For Somerset farmers.'

* You can also donate to RABI on its Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/rabi

* Farmers affected by flooding and unsure where to turn for help are encouraged to call the Farming Help Partnership on 0845 367 9990 (7am-11pm).

OTHER HELP AND USEFUL NUMBERS

* NFU South West for donations of bedding, forage or fodder south.west@nfu.org.uk or 01392 440 700

* Emergency Livestock Movements AHVLA licences 01392 266 373 (24 hours)

* Prince's Countryside Fund Emergency Funding www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk

* Somerset Levels Relief Fund www.justgiving.com/Somerset-Levels-Relief-Fund

* Somerset Community Foundation www.justgiving.com/Somerset-Community-Found-Flood-Appeal 01749 344 949

online fwi.co.uk

For more news from the flood-hit farms and the effort to save them, visit www.fwi.co.uk/floodingnews



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