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Wildfire Disaster Checklist

Comprehensive Strategic Guide and Administrative Checklist for Federal and State Wildfire Disaster Recovery Programs for Nebraska Agricultural Producers

This operational checklist is designed to assist affected producers in navigating the disaster recovery landscape, detailing precise eligibility prerequisites, immutable application deadlines, exhaustive documentation requirements, and the specific sequence of immediate actions necessary to secure financial indemnification without forfeiture.

GIVEN HOW DYNAMIC THIS SITUATION IS, NOTE THAT SOME DETAILS MAY CHANGE IN THE COMING DAYS AND MONTHS.

READ ALL OF THIS BEFORE PROCEEDING

1. Immediate Triage, Livestock Stabilization, and Nutritional Management

The initial hours and days following a wildfire dictate herd survival rates and the fundamental eligibility for federal assistance.

- **Secure the Site and Mitigate Hazards:** Strictly prohibit cattle from re-entering recently burned pastures. Ensure livestock is kept away from smoldering fencelines, residual ash, undetected hot spots, and compromised hay piles.
- **Identify and Track Relocated Livestock:** Re-establish the chain of custody. Proactively communicate with first responders, county sheriffs, and adjacent landowners to locate missing cattle. Apply temporary markers (livestock chalk or paint) before moving them to centralized staging areas.
- **Conduct Sequential Veterinary Assessments:** If possible, perform repeated physical evaluations over successive weeks. Animals will need multiple physical exams over the days and weeks following the event because initial signs of suffering may be delayed.
 - Check udders, sheaths, testicles, and hooves for localized swelling, blistering, or delayed heat damage. Feet pathology may take 5+ days to become evident.
 - Assess the muzzle and eyes for soot accumulation or corneal ulcerations.

- [] Monitor for rapid, shallow breathing or coughing (indicators of smoke inhalation).
- [] Consult a veterinarian early AND ensure clear document trails verified by your veterinarian. Provide herd health records to confirm animal numbers, pregnancy status, and other health information.
- [] **Implement Safe Hydration Strategies:** For cattle deprived of water for more than 24 hours, manage hydration incrementally to prevent fatal water intoxication. Provide 3-5 gallons for mature cows/bulls, and 1-2 gallons for calves, every thirty minutes until thirst normalizes.
- [] **Adapt Nutritional Protocols:** Temporarily transition the herd to a low-protein (12-14%) and low-starch (8-12% crude fiber) commercial feed formulation for 4-5 days to stabilize the rumen microbiome and prevent acidosis.

2. DOCUMENT EVERYTHING!

To cover all your bases, operate as if the burden of proof rests entirely on you.

- [] **Capture Photographic Evidence:** Before disposing of carcasses or repairing/removing structural assets, take as many photos as possible with timestamps. Document burned livestock, destroyed feed stockpiles, and failed infrastructure.
 - Pro tip: On a piece of paper, write your name, the location, and a different number for each photo. Make sure that the paper shows up in the picture. That way, every photo will clearly show what you are documenting, along with who took it, where it was taken, and its photo number. This allows you to identify each picture by number instead of trying to describe each one.
- [] **Compile Inventory and Herd Records:** Aggregate all foundational herd records (tag numbers, specific pasture locations, branding records). Ensure beginning herd inventory is substantiated by historical birth recordings, purchase receipts, bank loan documents, or pre-disaster veterinary records.
- [] **Retain Veterinary and Rendering Documentation:** Keep all veterinary statements detailing the cause of death/euthanasia linked directly to the fire.
- [] **Adhere to Legal Carcass Disposal:** Follow Nebraska Statute §54-2946 (burial, rendering, composting, incineration, or landfilling). If using commercial rendering, retain truck receipts specifying exact kind, type, and weight of animals removed.
- [] **Notify Agencies BEFORE Remediation:** Contact the local FSA and NRCS offices promptly. Ensure any alterations to grazing rotations, pasture use, or fencing infrastructure are pre-approved before initiating physical cleanup.

3. Government Forms Etc.

Before any disaster application can be processed, the following forms must be active and accurately filed with the USDA county office:

- [] **Obtain a registered Farm Number** from the FSA (mandatory baseline identification).
- [] **Form AD-2047:** Customer Data Worksheet (Demographic profile and contact architecture).
- [] **Form CCC-902:** Farm Operating Plan (Defines operational structure and establishes "actively engaged" status).
- [] **Form CCC-901:** Member Information for Legal Entities (Required if operating under an LLC, corporate, or partnership structure).
- [] **Form CCC-941:** Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification (Certification of Compliance with the \$900,000 AGI Limitation).
- [] **Form AD-1026:** HELC and WC Certification (Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation compliance).
- [] **Form FSA-578:** Report of Acreage (Maps crop/pasture allocations for geographic loss calculations).
- [] **Form SF-3881:** ACH Vendor Enrollment Form (Direct deposit transfer setup).

4. Core FSA Disaster Indemnification Programs

Evaluate losses against the specific parameters of these core FSA programs and adhere strictly to deadlines.

- [] **Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP):** Submit the formal Notice of Loss (CCC-576) and final Application for Payment by **March 1, 2027**, for 2026 calendar year losses. Compensates for death losses exceeding normal mortality.
- [] **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP):** Submit Notice of Loss and final Application for Payment by **March 1, 2027**. Covers peripheral losses (burned purchased/harvested feed, water hauling, transporting livestock, specialized equipment rental, including grazing losses and additional feed purchased).
- [] **Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) :** Submit Form CCC-853 for grazing losses on federally managed rangeland.

- [] **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP):** Apply immediately following the fire. Obtain absolute pre-approval from the FSA before undertaking heavy debris removal, land grading, or repairing permanent perimeter/cross-fencing.
- [] **Tree Assistance Program (TAP):** For orchards, nurseries, or vineyards, file applications within **90 days** of the disaster event or from the date plant loss becomes apparent.

5. Supplemental and Commodity-Specific Relief

- [] **Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) Program:** Apply by **April 17, 2026**. Qualified producers must access and submit pre-filled applications via a secure Login.gov portal for one-time bridge payments on eligible commodities (corn, soybeans, wheat, sorghum).
- [] **Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP):** Monitor the ECAP dashboard for potential subsequent funding rounds or extensions triggered by 2026 disaster events.

6. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Interventions

- [] **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** Engage the local NRCS office immediately for technical expertise and cost-share assistance to implement soil erosion protection, emergency cover crops, invasive weed mitigation, and livestock infrastructure restoration.
- [] **Submit EQIP Applications for Batching:** Ensure the operation is assessed and ranked in the earliest possible funding cycle. Check with local offices for specific state emergency wildfire sign-up deadlines.

7. Risk Management Agency (RMA) Protocols and Crop Insurance

- [] **Initial 72-Hour Notification:** Report any discovered crop or pasture damage to your dedicated crop insurance agent within exactly 72 hours of discovery.
- [] **Written Notice of Loss:** Submit a formal, written notice of loss within **15 days** of the initial discovery.
- [] **Appraisal Prior to Destruction:** If intending to unilaterally destroy or abandon a heavily damaged crop, mandate an AIP loss adjuster to perform a physical appraisal *before* destroying the evidence.

8. Credit Facilities, Bridge Capital, and the SBA Misconception

- [] **Bypass the SBA (For Primary Producers):** Do not waste administrative effort applying for SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) if you are a primary agricultural

producer/rancher. (Only small agricultural cooperatives, nurseries, and aquaculture are eligible).

- [] **Apply for FSA Emergency Farm Loans:** Submit applications within **eight months** of the official disaster designation date to secure low-interest emergency credit (capped at \$500,000) for replacing essential property, production costs, or refinancing specific disaster-incurred debt.

9. FEMA Individual Assistance and Household Recovery

- [] **Apply for FEMA Individuals and Households Program (IHP):** If your primary farmhouse was destroyed, apply for grants covering temporary rental housing, crucial home repairs, and essential personal property replacement.
- [] **Compile FEMA Verification Documents:** Ensure you have a valid Social Security number and strict public record verification confirming citizenship status and that the damaged home was your primary residence.

10. State of Nebraska Interventions and Logistics Coordination

- [] **Utilize Carrier Waivers:** Take advantage of Governor Pillen's Executive Order 26-07, waiving standard hours of service and weight limits for commercial motor carriers providing direct agricultural disaster assistance.
- [] **Coordinate with the NDA:** Contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) hotline at **1-800-831-0550** if in acute need of donated hay, livestock feed, fencing materials, equipment, or volunteer labor.
- [] **Report of Damaged Real Property:** Property owners who have real property that has suffered significant damage on or after January 1 and before July 1 of the current assessment year may file a "Report of Damaged Real Property" to have their property reassessed by the county board of equalization as of the date of the damage. Learn more at www.revenue.nebraska.gov/PADdamaged-real-property
- [] **Apply to Private Relief Funds:** Seek assistance from private relief funds such as the Nebraska Farm Bureau Disaster Relief Fund and the Nebraska Cattlemen Disaster Relief Fund.

11. Strategic Avoidance of Common Administrative Pitfalls

Ensure your claims survive rigorous scrutiny by avoiding these frequent reasons for denial:

- [] **Do NOT Remediate Prematurely:** Do not bury livestock, burn structural debris, or bulldoze new fencelines before an FSA or NRCS agent has officially documented the damage or granted specific pre-approval.

- [] **Certify "Qualifying Disasters" Accurately:** Ensure you legally certify that specific indemnified losses were caused directly by the wildfire, this includes photographs and vet records.
- [] **Comply with Insurance Linkages:** Budget aggressively for the mandatory future insurance premiums required after accepting SDRP funds to avoid federal clawbacks.
- [] **Verify Loss Categorizations:** Work closely with agents to ensure losses are not categorically misclassified (e.g., classifying a PRF "feed loss" erroneously as a "production loss").
- [] **Address Psychological Strain:** Do not ignore the emotional burden of disaster recovery. Utilize confidential resources like the **Nebraska Rural Response Hotline (800-464-0258)** to connect with specialized professionals.