CDQAP Quality Assurance Update - October 2026

Preparing for a Super El Niño

Models predict most of the state is headed for at least 150% of normal rainfall. What can producers do now?

By: Dr. Michael Payne, School of Vet Med & Director CDQAP and Sonia Brown, Emergency Manager, CDFA's California Animal Response Emergency Response Support, CARES.

Historically, warmer ocean temperatures and "El Niño years" aren't great predictors of rainfall in California. In fact, the historic precipitation and catastrophic flooding California experienced in the spring of 2023 was preceded by a La Niña year.

That said, there is more heat energy being measured in the Pacific Ocean now than at any time since modern recording began in 1950. The best models available suggest most of the state is headed for rainfall of at least 150% of normal.

If there was ever a year for producers to be prepared for heavy rainstorms and flooding, the 2026 – 2027 winter season would be it.

CDQAP has partnered with CDFA's CARES and the regional water boards to create and identify the best precautions you can take now. This flooding guidance is more expansive than usual inspection and winterization recommendations.

Before the Storm – As detailed in a 2023 CDQAP article, and CDFA's new Flood-Ready Infographic, these are the most effective actions you can take prior to the storm:

- Access Your Risk – Use the Cal OES MyHazards and the FEMA Flood Mapping tools to estimate your risk of flooding. Sign up for DWR's Flood Risk Notification program.
- Inspect Nearby Levees – Use California's Levee Flood Protection Zone (LFPZ) maps to help determine your risk. Visually inspect public and private levees for damage as well as drainage pathways for obstruction. Report issues immediately, in person, to your county's Office of Emergency Management.
- Audit Farm Manure Infrastructure – Check the function of tailwater systems, berms, settling basins, storage ponds pumps, transfer pipes, pathways for clean-water runoff, and protection of well-heads from flood waters.
- Ensure Lagoon Freeboard – Confirm there is at least 2 feet for freeboard for above-ground ponds and 1 foot for in-ground ponds. Ensure there is adequate capacity for a 25-year, 24-hour storm event, which varies with the facility's location.
- Inspect Containment Walls – Extensive damage from weed-roots and rodent-holes increase the risk of catastrophic failure. Create a backup plan if seepage or boils appear during storms.

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Don't Miss the UCCE Golden State Management Conference on Nov 10

The conference will be held at the Stanislaus County Ag Center in Modesto from 11:00 am – 3:30 pm. Talks include a keynote on Dairy Trends in 2027 by Abbi Groves of CoBank, plus multiple breakouts on topics related to herd health, irrigation, N management, and manure technologies. See the conference agenda and registration information.

Fall Reminders

By: Deanne Meyer, Livestock Waste Management Specialist, UC Davis & UC ANR, dmeyer@ucdavis.edu

Daily we trade 2 to 3 minutes of daylight for darkness. Along with this is knowing harvest is nearly done, fall crops are being planted, and sampling must happen when manure is applied to land.

If your pond is being drained or excavated, remember to count and sample what is removed from ponds and land applied. These tankers and loads tend to have more nutrients than summer manure water. That translates to application rates needing to be restricted.

The 4 Rs of nutrient management are right source, right rate, right time, and right place. The nutrient content of manure in tanker trucks is usually higher than summer liquid manure applications. This makes it very important to have a light application rate to minimize over application. This manure is land applied before seeds are planted, so plant needs at the time of application are very small.

Although the Dairy General Order requires quarterly sampling when manure is applied, it's critical to sample both loads if excavated, and/or tankers if pumped. Also, work with your consultant to ensure the right soil samples are taken to ensure appropriate application rates.

Preparing for a Super El Nino - continued

- Perform Corral Maintenance – Ensure corral drainage is adequate to prevent ponding 72 hours following a storm. Preventing mud improves both animal health and milk production.
- Protect Manure & Feed Areas – Protect stored feed and manure areas from clean water run-on. Capture and contain leachate and manure-laden stormwater run-off so it remains on the property.
- Test Emergency Generators – Perform generator maintenance and test under critical load. Have adequate fuel for several days. Sign up for your utility (PGE, SCE, SDGE) to text you outage information.
- Sign Up for an Ag Pass – An Agricultural Pass acquired through your county Ag Commissioner allows commercial ranchers and employees access during emergencies like floods and fires.
- Sign Up for Emergency Notification – Producers can register with their county's Office of Emergency Management to receive alerts when an emergency develops.
- Complete a Flood Emergency Plan – See the *Additional Flooding Resources* section below. For producers in high-risk areas, the most important action is to work with trade organizations to identify a relocation site and transportation resources prior to the storms. Examples of relocation sites include empty dairies, fairgrounds, and auction facilities.

During the Storm – Continued monitoring throughout and in-between the storms.

- Monitor Property Perimeter – Check for threatened off-site discharge. This provides final confirmation that pumps and containment are working and pathways for clean-water runoff have not been obstructed with debris.
- Monitor Lagoon Walls – Inspect for seepage, boils or threatened overtopping. Under no circumstances should a lagoon be allowed to spill over, which can quickly lead to catastrophic wall failure.
- Mitigate When Possible – Some maintenance may be possible in between storms, such as unclogging and repairing gutters and berms and clearing debris. A period of dry weather, sun, and wind may create a window allowing for re-filling, re-grading, and compacting of some corral surfaces.
- Request Additional Resources – If conditions develop which require resources beyond the capabilities of the producer and their trade organization, assistance can be requested through the County's Office of Emergency Management. Emergency veterinary assistance can also be requested through the CDFA/Cal OES partnership.
- Document Losses – Receipts for disaster-related expenditures (from feed to fuel to hotel rooms) should be collected in a safe place. Cell phone video with time stamp is an easy way document.
- Report Spills – Reporting a spill quickly can minimize recovery costs and legal problems. Refer to CDQAP's Storm Water Sampling: A Quick Review Just in Case!

If Evacuation is Required – Emergency evacuations will proceed more quickly and successfully if prior to the storms, producers have worked with their trade organizations to identify relocation sites and transportation resources.

- Use a Checklist – CDQAP, in collaboration with RB-5 and CDFA, developed a dairy evacuation checklist.
- Engage Your Milk Inspector – Contact CDFA to expedite milking equipment inspection for both the host dairy and when reopening the home dairy, thus maintaining the dairy's Grade A permit.
- Notify Your Regional Board – RB-5 staff requests that they be notified of a temporary relocation so that they can provide knowledgeable and reassuring information to citizen and media inquiries.

Additional Flooding Resources – Multiple resources exist to assist producers in developing emergency flood plans, responding to, and recovering from a flood event. CDFA's California Animal Response Emergency Response Support, CARES, program has developed a Multi-Hazard Emergency Plan Guide as well as a flood infographic. CDQAP has developed a dairy flooding whitepaper and a dairy evacuation checklist. Other concise resources include CDFA's Resources for Livestock Owners and CDQAP's Flooding and Livestock Owners.