

Do you have a water contingency plan?

In 2016, many areas of the province saw very warm and dry conditions, and many wells were still dry leading into the winter. In other years, like the start to the 2017 growing season, the province experienced periods of excessive rain, leading to saturated soils and flooding. Both situations create many challenges for livestock and poultry farmers.

No one can control the weather, but we can plan for it. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) encourages you to plan for future weather – conserving water and using it efficiently can help during low water conditions, and having effective drainage systems in place can help with saturated soil and runoff.

Things to consider for low water conditions:

- Plan ahead: Know how much water your animals need and try to predict how long it would take for your water sources to run dry. Have a contingency plan ready that you can carry out in case your water sources have maxed out. Use the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's [Emergency Plan](#) low water worksheet to help you with the contingency plan.
- Include a list of alternative water sources in your contingency plan. This can include water haulers and well drillers. Keep in mind that these sources may be unavailable at the height of low water conditions, so you'll need to plan ahead.
- Think about installing water-metering equipment to get accurate measurements of water use.
- Apply for a Permit to Take Water through the [Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change](#) (special rules and circumstances apply).
- [Monitor heat stress](#) in your livestock and poultry and have management solutions on-hand when heat stress runs high, but water levels run low.
- Look at your feed inventory now. If stocks are low for this time of year, consider looking for additional or alternative feed for fall and winter. It's not too early!

Things to consider for excessive water conditions:

- Look at your feed supply, as excessive rain can affect planting and harvesting times.
- Make sure you have enough straw or other bedding materials.
- Examine your property, your buildings and hard surfaces (like loading areas and parking lots) for flood risk areas. Install eavestroughs to redirect water away from your buildings and create a drainage plan. Plan the steps you'll need to take to move livestock, feed and equipment in the event of a flood.
- Create [a plan to manage barnyard/feedlot runoff](#). Determine if you have enough liquid manure storage capacity to store extra material from wet barnyards, and have a plan ready if you don't (such as using a neighbour's storage). Also consider what you'll do to avoid manure storage overflow from rain and flood water.
- Have a plan ready in the event that [manure spreading is delayed](#) due to rain and your storages are full.
- Think about your electricity generators – are they adequate for your farm's needs in case of a power outage?
- Pre-plan alternate routes to avoid travelling on flooded roads, considering services both into and out of the farm (such as milk trucks and feed trucks).

OMAFRA is working with other provincial ministries, conservation authorities and other partners to develop ways to help you manage water. There are existing resources that can help you, too:

- Environmental Farm Plan Infosheet #13: [Water Efficiency](#)
- OMAFRA's [drainage resources](#)
- [Water Management](#) Best Management Practices book

- The Low Water Conditions worksheet in Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's [Environmental Farm Plan Emergency Plan](#)
- The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change's [Managing your water well in times of water shortage](#) web page

Ontario has [business risk management programs](#) in place to help you when factors beyond your control affect your operation. Contact [Agricorp](#) for more information about these programs.

Visit OMAFRA's [Adverse Weather](#), [Low Water](#), [Irrigation](#) and [Drainage](#) web pages for resources to help you prepare for various weather conditions.

Do you have questions about contingency planning? Contact OMAFRA's Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 or ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca.

ontario.ca/omafra