The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team

The panel speaks about state agency coordination during disasters.

Special Features of this Issue:

- *Commissioner Wilton Simpson Applauds USDA Issuing Disaster Declaration for Florida*
- *SART Response Equipment List and Request Information*
- *Florida Blueberries*

ESF 17 Speaks About SART at the Annual Volunteer Florida Convening

On March 4, Emergency Support Function (ESF) 17/Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART) representative, Colin Mullins, along with Florida Commerce/ESF 18 and Department of Children and Families/ESF 06, were given the gracious opportunity to speak on a panel about state agency coordination during disasters at the annual Volunteer Florida Convening.

For those readers who don't know, Volunteer Florida (officially recognized as the Florida Commission on Community Service) supports state and federal efforts to expand national service, promote disaster resilience, and advocate for volunteerism throughout the state of Florida. Through the Florida Division of Emergency Management, Volunteer Florida supports the State Emergency Response Team as the emergency support function partner for volunteers and donations. Beginning in 2016, Volunteer Florida began hosting an Emergency Management Convening, meant to bring together non-profit partners from around the state that support disaster response and/or recovery efforts.

The Convening has grown to almost 200 participants and hosts presentations, panel discussions, and networking opportunities for non-profit partners and members of the Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (FLVOAD).

For more information, please visit:

FL VOAD Membership:
https://voadflorida.wpengine.com/become-a-member

Volunteer Florida website:
https://www.volunteerflorida.org

Email:
info@volunteerflorida.org

Did You Know?

The UF/IFAS Blueberry Breeding Program has been central to the rapid expansion of Florida's blueberry industry, which now exceeds 7,000 commercial acres and produces roughly 20 million pounds of fruit annually.

Read more on Page 3.

SART Equipment Request

SART has strategically deployed Mobile Animal Response Equipment (MARE) trailers, Mini-MARE trailers, livestock panels, and Animal Technical Rescue Trailers (ATR) across the state for emergency response.

- **MARE Unit:** A MARE Unit (Mobile Animal Response Equipment) is a 16' enclosed cargo trailer stocked with small animal sheltering supplies such as animal crates, leashes, water and food bowls, and cleaning equipment.
- **Mini-MARE Unit:** A Mini-MARE Unit is a smaller, enclosed cargo trailer, stocked with a limited number of small animal sheltering supplies such as animal crates, leashes, water and food bowls, and cleaning equipment.
- **Livestock Panels:** Livestock panels can be used for the quick setup of a temporary pen for livestock.
- **ATR Unit:** An ATR (Animal Technical Rescue) Unit is an enclosed trailer containing equipment for both livestock and smaller animal technical rescues. Included are a portable A-frame/crane unit, rope systems, webbing, harnesses for large and small animals, and rescue glide for moving animals, a mud extrication system, and safety equipment for the responders.

If a local jurisdiction needs to request this equipment during a *non-declared event*, then the requesting county's Emergency Management Director must send a request to the state ESF 17 ECO, LeiAnna Moorhead, via email at LeiAnna.Moorhead@fdacs.gov. The request will be reviewed by the ESF 17 ECO, FDACS Bureau Chief of Animal Disease Control, and the FDACS State Veterinarian. The requestor will be contacted directly of its approval status.

Note: FDACS ESF 17 will ensure the resource request process is coordinated appropriately for declared and non-declared emergency events (Local > County EOC > State), and that the county has exhausted all available local resources prior to requesting state emergency response equipment.

For more information, visit: https://flsart.org/resource/equipmentrequest.jsp

Florida Blueberries

The UF/IFAS Blueberry Breeding Program has been central to the rapid expansion of Florida's blueberry industry, which now exceeds 7,000 commercial acres and produces roughly 20 million pounds of fruit annually. Since the 1940s, the program has focused on developing low-chill, early-ripening, high-quality cultivars capable of thriving in Florida's warm climate — conditions that fall outside the natural range of traditional northern highbush blueberries. By crossing northern cultivars with native Florida Vaccinium species, UF/IFAS created the southern highbush blueberry, a breakthrough that enabled commercial production across the state and eventually influenced blueberry cultivation worldwide.

The first southern highbush varieties — 'Sharpblue,' 'Foldable,' and 'Avonblue' — were released in the late 1970s, revitalizing an industry previously dominated by rabbiteye blueberries. Since 2005, nearly all Florida blueberry acreage has been planted with UF/IFAS-developed southern highbush cultivars, and production has expanded southward into counties such as DeSoto, Highlands, and Okeechobee.

The program continues to innovate by breeding for traits that improve grower efficiency and fruit quality. Current goals include developing cultivars suited for evergreen production systems, improving drought and pH tolerance, enhancing machine-harvest suitability, and refining fruit characteristics such as firmness, flavor, size, and color. Marker-assisted breeding is increasingly used to accelerate the selection of desirable traits.

Several UF/IFAS releases — such as 'Star,' 'Jewel,' 'Emerald,' and 'Snowchaser' — have become globally significant due to their vigor, early ripening, and high fruit quality. Looking ahead, the program aims to continue producing cultivars that support Florida growers while exploring new uses for blueberries, including ornamental varieties.

Florida State Animal Response Coalition Expands National Reach with Oklahoma Training Initiative

The Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FL SARC) has strengthened national emergency preparedness capabilities through a new partnership with Oklahoma's Small Animal Response Team (OKSmART), culminating in a week-long intensive training deployment in Oklahoma City.

The collaboration marks a significant expansion of SARC's disaster animal sheltering program, which operates in conjunction with SPCA Florida and serves as a key partner to the Florida SART. Over five days, FL SARC instructors delivered two core programs to nearly 40 participants: the Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Operations course and a comprehensive Train-the-Trainer curriculum.

The Operations Course focused on critical on-the-ground roles, including Shelter Manager, Animal Care Lead, Volunteer Coordinator, and Safety Officer. Instruction emphasized practical applications in shelter design, animal health monitoring, and biosecurity protocols essential for managing large-scale incidents.

Photo: Florida SARC delivers the Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Operations course.

Complementing the operational training, the Train-the-Trainer program equipped OKSmART leadership with the instructional framework necessary to independently deploy FL SARC's nationally recognized curriculum within Oklahoma. This initiative follows a year of virtual collaboration, during which OKSmART members built foundational knowledge before advancing to in-person, position-specific training.

"Effective disaster response starts with strong, trained teams at the state and local level," said Jeremy Hillengas, Program Manager for FL SARC. "By providing OKSmART with the training and operational framework developed in Florida, we're strengthening their ability to protect animals and support communities during emergencies."

The partnership underscores a growing trend in emergency management: investing in local capacity to ensure rapid, coordinated responses to disasters. As extreme weather events and other crises increasingly impact communities nationwide, the ability to protect pets and support displaced families has become a critical component of broader public safety strategies. Through this interstate cooperation, FL SARC continues to prioritize the sharing of best practices to enhance the readiness of animal response teams across the country.

For information on upcoming Small Animal Emergency Sheltering classes,
visit www.flsarc.org or www.flsart.org/events.

New World Screwworm

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

New World screwworms are fly larvae (maggots) that can infest livestock and other warm-blooded animals, including people. They most often enter an animal through an open wound. They feed on the animal's living flesh and, if not treated, infestations can be fatal. While New World screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) has not been widely present in the United States since the 1960s, it is still found in most of South America and in five Caribbean countries. Cases began spreading in 2023, heading north from Panama, and have reached southern Mexico, increasing the risk of reintroduction into the United States.

Signs

Screwworms are typically found on warm-blooded animals that have a draining or enlarging wound.

Screwworm eggs are creamy and white and deposited in a shingle-like manner on or near the edges of superficial wounds. The larvae are cylindrical with one pointed end and one blunt end and have rings of dark brown spines around the body. Female screwworm flies are larger than a housefly with a dark blue to blue-green body and reddish-orange head.

Almost any type of wound can become infested with screwworm larvae, including those caused by feeding ticks, castration, dehorning, branding, shearing, barbed wire fences, and even shedding of antler velvet in deer. The navels of newborn mammals can also become infested.

Guidance for Animal Health

Carefully inspect animal wounds and hides for signs of screwworm. Owners should immediately consult their veterinarian if a case of screwworm is suspected.

Continued, next page.

New World Screwworm (continued)

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Treatment

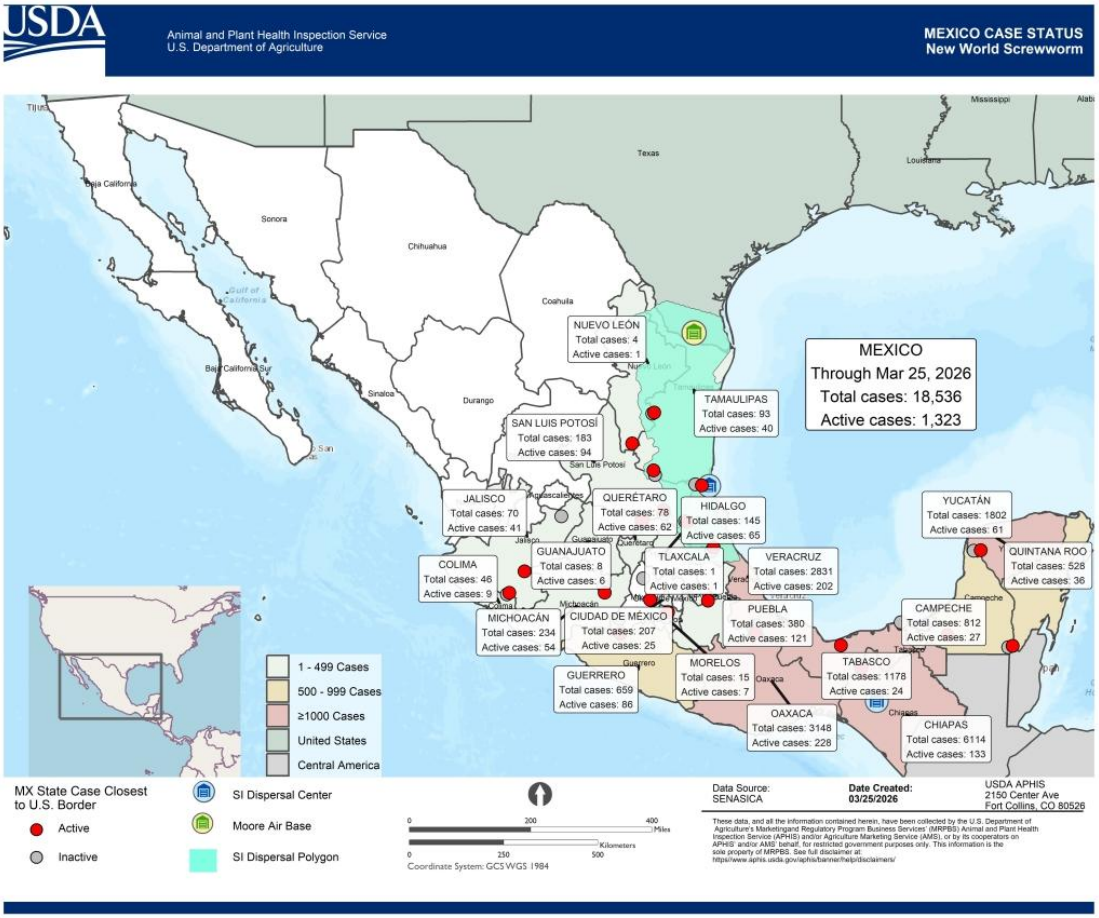
Screwworm infestation is treated by cleaning the site and topical application of a pesticide or other medication effective at killing the screwworm larvae. Treated wounds should be inspected daily until completely healed. The examining veterinarian will remove larvae from the wound with tweezers, place them in alcohol, and report to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Animal Industry (State Veterinarian's Office).

Report Suspected Cases

- **By phone during office hours:** (850) 410-0900
- **By phone after hours:** 1-800-342-5869
- **Via email:** RAD@FDACS.gov
- **Report online at:** www.FDACS.gov/RAD

Wildlife Reports

To report sick or injured wildlife, including a suspected screwworm infestation, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) or email the Wildlife Health Team at WildlifeHealthTeam@MyFWC.com.



Source: USDA APHIS (Updated 3/29/2026)

New World Screwworm Resources

- Commissioner Wilton Simpson, FDACS Urge Vigilance as New World Screwworm Threat Increases
- USDA APHIS – Information on the Screwworm Eradication Program
- FDACS – New World Screwworm Information Page
- FDA – New World Screwworm Information for Veterinarians

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Training

Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FLSARC) provides Small Animal Emergency Sheltering training for Florida communities. These courses teach the unique procedures, skills, and knowledge necessary to build and operate a temporary emergency animal shelter in response to natural disasters and animal cruelty cases. These courses were created and designed by experts from many organizations including Florida SART, University of Florida Veterinary Emergency Treatment Service (VETS) Team, and leadership of FLSARC. This training is state-certified by the Florida Division of Emergency Management under course codes FL-003-RESP and FL-018 (OpsSAS).

Awareness Level 1	Operations Level 2
• April 10, Highlands County • May 6, St. Lucie County • June 5, Seminole County • June 12, Miami-Dade County	• April 28, Hernando County • May 7, St. Lucie County • May 27, Sarasota County

To register, visit: https://flsarc.org/training-classes-events

ASAR Swiftwater Rescue & Boat Operations Training

Incidents that involve animals trapped in Flood and Swiftwater require special considerations and knowledge. This class covers both the ASAR Swiftwater Rescue skills and the ASAR Floodwater Boat Operations.
Dates: June 11th-13th and June 14th
Location: Lee County Animal Services; Fort Myers, FL
To register, visit: https://asartraining.com/event/asar-fort-myers-2026

SART Partners Meeting

The following meeting is by invitation only to primary representatives of SART partner agencies and is not open to the public:

- SART Partners Monthly Virtual Meeting – April 22, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. (MS Teams)

In the News…

- Commissioner Wilton Simpson Applauds USDA Issuing Disaster Declaration for Florida (FDACS)
- Governor Ron DeSantis Signs Florida Farm Bill (Executive Office of the Governor)
- FDA Issues Emergency Use Authorization for Topical Spray to Prevent and Treat New World Screwworm in Multiple Species, Including Cattle, Sheep, Goats, Horses, Wild and Exotic Mammals, Wild and Pet Birds (FDA)

ASAR Swiftwater Rescue & Boat Operations Training

June 11th-14th, 2026

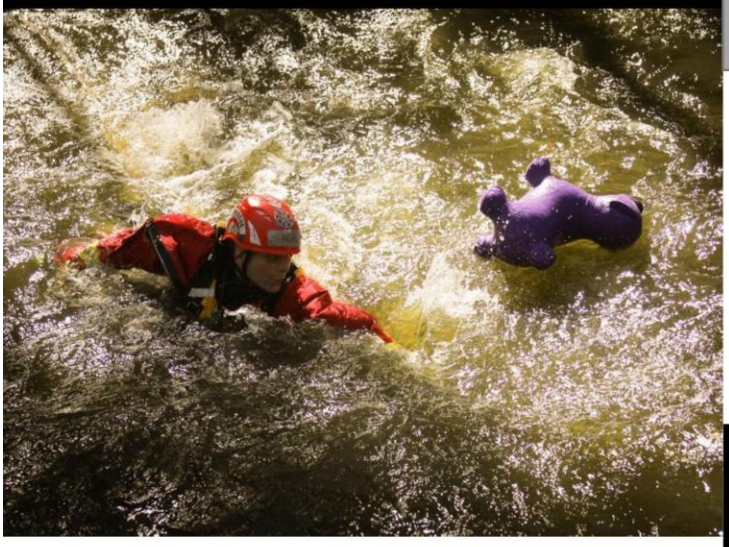
Daily start time 8am!

Lee County Animal Services
5600 Banner Dr
Fort Myers, FL 33912

For directions, questions regarding lodging, or other area accommodations, contact:
Pete Santana at
PSantana@leegov.com

To register go to: https://asartraining.com/event/asar-fort-myers-2026/ or scan the QR code.

Incidents that involve animals trapped in Flood and Swiftwater require special considerations and knowledge. This training is provided through both hands-on and classroom instruction. This class covers both the ASAR Swiftwater Rescue skills and the ASAR Floodwater Boat Operations. First responders with existing water rescue certification will receive additional certification that meets required FEMA USAR/TF animal rescue competencies. Small animal rescue techniques will be the primary focus, with additional discussion about large animal issues and hazards in floodwater. Participants need to have the ability to swim in moving water conditions.



Class Registration Fee: $650.00
Drysuit Rental (optional): $200.00
Class size limited to 30 people

Registration Deadline
June 6th, 2026

Course Topics include: Hazard Identification, Scene Management, Water Rescue Absolutes, Knots, Low Angle Rope, Mechanical Advantage, Swiftwater Operations, Floodwater Boat Operations, Self-Rescue, Team Rescue, Animal Restraint, Small Animal Rescue Field Practical and MUCH MORE!

Payment due at time of registration. Refunds: 10+ days prior to class = 100%; 5-10 days prior to class = 50%; 0-5 days prior to class = no refund.

Required PPE
Drysuit (Optional)
Water Rescue Helmet
Class V PFD with quick release strap
Water Gloves
Appropriate Footwear

www.asartraining.com

From Policy to Practice: Learn What's Ahead for Florida Agriculture in 2026

The UF/IFAS Food and Resource Economics Department is thrilled to announce it will be hosting the 11th Annual Florida Agricultural Policy Outlook Conference on Thursday, April 16, 2026 from 9:00 AM - 4:00PM at the UF/IFAS Mid-Florida Research and Education Center in Apopka, FL.

This conference will examine critical policy issues facing Florida agribusiness leaders and provide valuable economic insights that will be helpful for making informed business and policy decisions. This year's topics will include state and federal agriculture policy updates, trade, and AI in ag.

Visit our Eventbrite page for more information and both in-person and online registration. We hope you're able to join us!

Thursday, April 16, 2026, 9:00 AM
11th Annual Florida Agricultural Policy Outlook Conference

To register visit:
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/11th-annual-florida-agricultural-policy-outlook-conference-tickets-1980475738246?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl

UF/IFAS Mid-Florida Research & Education Center
For more information visit our website at:
https://fred.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/florida-agricultural-policy-outlook-conference/

SART Offers Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training – Register Now!

The Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training is the first of its kind to be offered in Florida. The training provides guidance to private, local, and state entities on how to plan for and operate a pet-friendly shelter to ensure that individuals evacuating from a disaster with their household pets are accommodated.

This training includes useful information on how to:

- Use the Incident Command System in pet-friendly shelter planning and operations;
- Plan for a pet-friendly shelter;
- Understand the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act);
- Establish partnerships for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message to the public before, during, and after an emergency, and;
- Set up, operate, and demobilize a pet-friendly shelter.

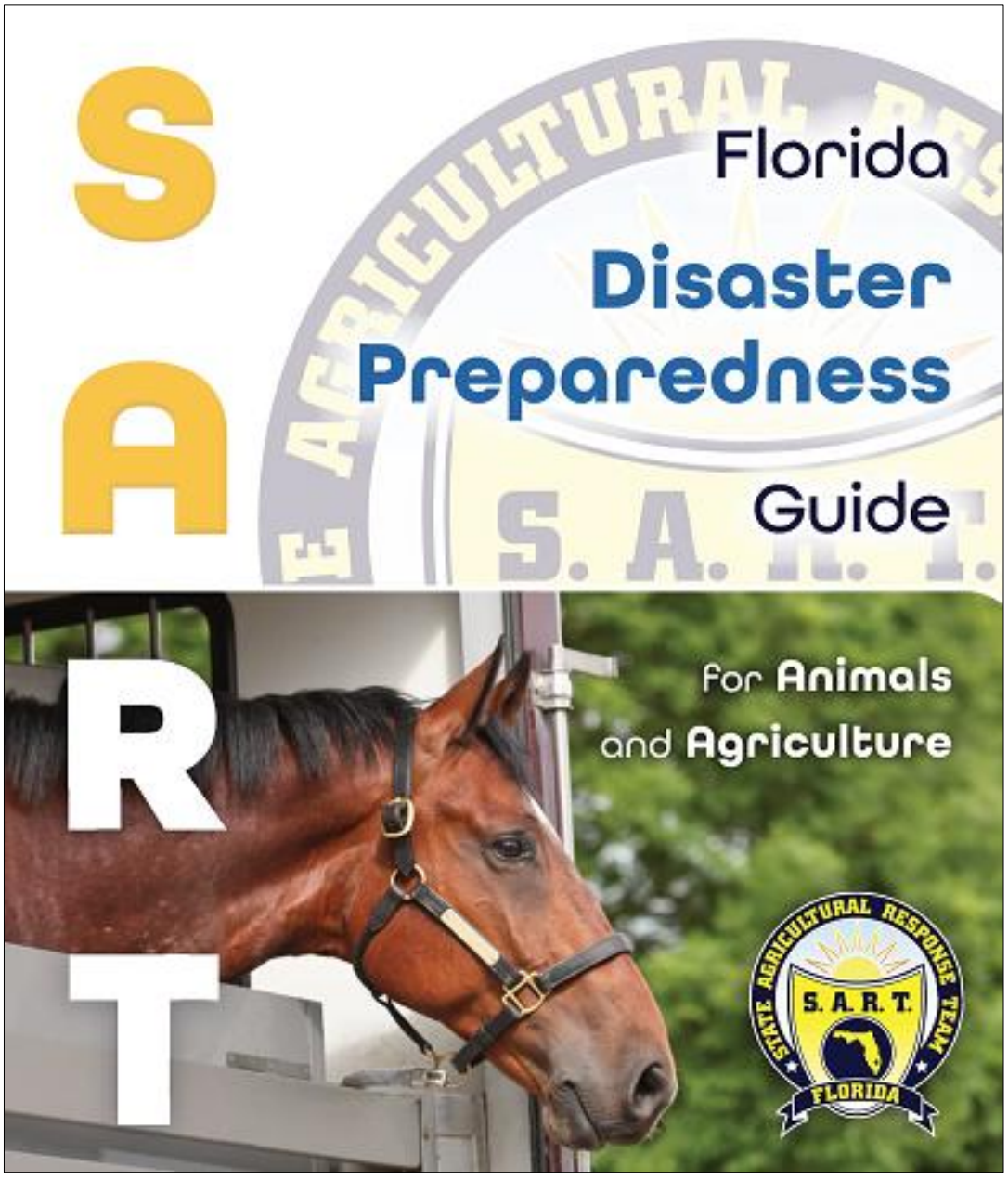
> **Laura Bevan**
> Humane Society of the United States
> "I was blown away by the depth of the information provided in this training. It held my attention and the videos from around the state gave real life experience to the subject."

The four-hour course is designed for emergency managers, county employees, veterinary and animal services, and shelter volunteers. There is no charge for this 100% online course. For more information, please visit www.FLSART.org.

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture was developed by FDACS and Florida SART. This guide explores the various animal and agricultural sectors in the state of Florida that are at risk from natural and man-made disasters, and what you can do to help prepare and protect animals and agriculture before a disaster strikes. The recommendations and resources in this guide are applicable to preparing for all hazards such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, disease introduction, hazardous material spills, and more.

This publication is available only to SART members. To access the Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture, visit the SART website at flsart.org, and navigate to the "Resources" tab. It may also be accessed directly at:
https://flsart.org/resource/DisasterPreparednessGuides/DisasterPreparednessGuides.jsp



Become a Volunteer of the Florida Veterinary Corps Today!

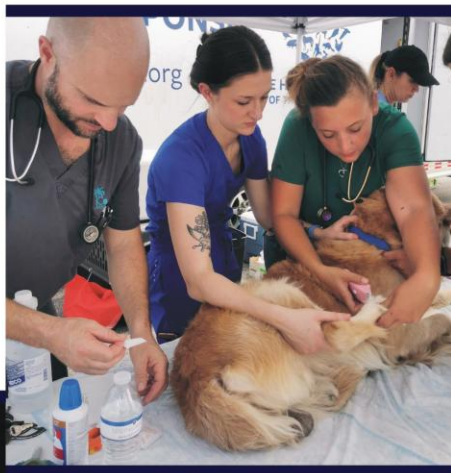
Florida veterinarians and veterinary technicians have volunteered to assist local and state emergency management officials in responding to animal emergencies. The Florida Veterinary Corps is recruiting more volunteers to help protect our state.

Become A Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Florida Veterinary Corps

Safeguarding Animal and Public Health in Florida



A cooperative effort of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team and its Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Veterinary Medical Association, and University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine.

Florida Veterinary Corps

What is the Florida Veterinary Corps?

- The Florida Veterinary Corps (The Corps) is a component of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART), established within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and a cooperative effort with the Florida Veterinary Medical Association and the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine.
- The Corps has been established to enlist veterinarians and veterinary technicians who are willing to volunteer their services in responding to animal emergencies in the state of Florida.
- During activation, Corps volunteers will work within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team.
- Corps volunteers will be kept informed as to the status of emergencies and the need for volunteers depending upon the specific emergency.
- Volunteers may serve in veterinary infrastructure assessment teams, triage or emergency animal treatment teams, and animal disease surveillance or control teams under an Incident Command System structure.

Obligation of Corps Volunteers

- Corps volunteers will serve only when activated within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team and adhere to all state regulations and rules.
- Complete the following four Incident Command System trainings to apply for The Corps. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides the independent study courses online, free of charge. The training is required for credentialing of emergency responders by the Department of Homeland Security. The courses are critical to train a professional volunteer Corps capable of responding as part of the state Emergency Support Function 17 and State Emergency Response Team.
  - IS-100.C: Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS)
  - IS-200.C: Basic ICS for Initial Response
  - IS-700.B: An Introduction to the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
  - IS-800.D: National Response Framework, An Introduction
- Corps volunteers will only be activated in response to specific emergency situations and may decline service at any time.

Rationale

- Protecting animal agriculture and household pets in Florida begins locally and requires cooperation, participation, and partnership.
- Federal or other outside assistance to deal with an animal disease emergency may not be available for hours or days.
- Animal agriculture in Florida is highly vulnerable to severe disruption and financial loss through natural disasters and exotic or zoonotic diseases.
- Counties and state agencies must be prepared to respond to animal disasters through planning and identification of human and material resources.
- Natural disasters are unpredictable and cannot be prevented.
- Florida has a high risk for introduction of a foreign animal disease.

Become a Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Be Sure to Check Out the FDACS and UF IFAS Partnership Video

Florida SART, FDACS, and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) teamed up to create a training video on their disaster response partnership.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

UF IFAS UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Published in December 2022 on YouTube, the video features interviews with LeiAnna Moorhead (FDACS Emergency Programs Manager), Dr. Saqib Mukhtar (UF/IFAS Associate Dean for Extension, Agriculture, and Natural Resources), and Dr. Angie Lindsey [Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)].

EDEN is funded by the USDA and is a collaborative multi-state effort by cooperative extension services across the country to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters.

Dr. Lindsey highlighted the important connection that agricultural extension agents have throughout the State of Florida. "We learn so much from our Extension agents and the work that they're already doing throughout the state and the work that they do within their own communities for disaster preparedness, recovery, and response," said Dr. Lindsey.

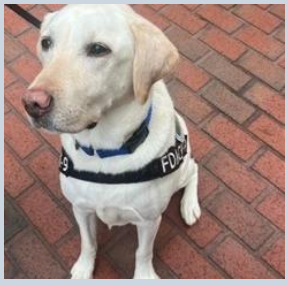
To view the video for yourself, and to like or comment, please visit:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI1Xsjd-FCw

UF/IFAS Florida Gardening Calendars

The Gardening Calendar publications on the UF/IFAS Solutions for Your Life website gives Florida gardeners a monthly guide for what to plant and do in their gardens and includes links to useful gardening websites, all based on University of Florida research and expertise. Three different editions of the calendar provide specific tips for each of Florida's climate zones—North, Central, and South.

What to Plant in April - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

Counties, Is Your Contact Information up to date on the SART Website?



Please review your county emergency contact information at: https://flsart.org/resource/countyinformation.jsp.

If you need to make changes to your county contact information, please send a request to LeiAnna Moorhead at LeiAnna.Moorhead@FDACS.gov. During an emergency, ESF 17 and SART provides necessary food and water to affected areas to help protect animals, agriculture, and pets.

Food Safety and Food Defense Report

A special section dedicated to feed and food emergency planning and response.

FDACS Division of Food Safety is responsible for assuring the public of a safe, wholesome, and properly represented food supply through permitting and inspection of food establishments, inspection of food products, and performance of specialized laboratory analysis on a variety of food products sold or produced in the state. The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the farm gate, through processing and distribution, to the retail point of purchase.

Spring Food Safety

Get springtime off to a fresh start with our cleaning tips.

SART Resources and Links

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – USDA APHIS Flock Defender
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/outbreak-illness/outbreak-illness

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Dairy Cattle
https://ccmedia.fdacs.gov/content/download/115892/file/2024-HPAI-Dairy-Cattle-Announcement.pdf

Large Animal Incident Response Plan Template
https://flsart.org/resource/TLAER

Pet Sheltering Resources
https://flsart.org/resource/petshelter

Ask IFAS: Disaster Preparedness and Recovery
https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/disaster_preparedness_and_recovery

SART Response Equipment List and Request Information
https://flsart.org/resource/equipmentrequest.jsp

FDEM Vector Control Quick Guide
https://flsart.org/pdf/Vector%20Control%20Quick%20Guide.pdf

Please log in and update your membership information online at:

www.FLSART.org

About the *SART Sentinel*

The *SART Sentinel* is an email newsletter prepared monthly by the members of the **Florida State Agricultural Response Team** on the Florida SART website at www.FLSART.org.

If you have a story or photo that you would like to have considered for publication in the *SART Sentinel*, please contact the editors.

Editing Services: The Turner Network, LLC under contract with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry.
E-mail: flsart@turnernetwork.com

Associate Editor: LeiAnna Moorhead, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry.
E-mail: LeiAnna.Moorhead@FDACS.gov