

3.4 Million Chickens, 5,500 Hogs Killed in Florence's Flooding

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The North Carolina Department of Agriculture said Wednesday that the historic [flooding](#) from [Florence](#) has killed about 3.4 million chickens and turkeys and 5,500 hogs.

“This was an unprecedented storm with flooding expected to exceed that from any other storms in recent memory. We know agricultural losses will be significant because the flooding has affected the top six agricultural counties in our state,” said agriculture commissioner Steve Troxler in a [press release](#).

The footprint of flooding from this storm covers much of the same area hit by flooding from [Hurricane Matthew](#) in 2016, which only worsens the burden on these farmers.

When Matthew hit the state, it flooded more than 140 hog and poultry barns, more than a dozen open hog waste pits and thousands of acres of manure-saturated fields, the [Environmental Working Group](#) and [Waterkeeper Alliance](#) reported.

Poultry is the number one agricultural industry in North Carolina, with a statewide economic impact of \$36.6 billion a year, according to the [North Carolina Poultry Federation](#).

Sanderson Farms, the third largest poultry producer in the country, issued a [statement](#) on Monday that 1.7 million of its broiler chickens “were destroyed as a result of flooding.” Sixty of its 880 broiler houses in North Carolina flooded and another six broiler houses experienced damage. Four breeder houses out of a total of 92 in the state flooded.



Additionally, Sanderson said about 30 Lumberton-area farms, housing approximately 211,000 chickens in each, have been isolated by flood waters. More chickens could die if the company is unable to reach those farms with feed trucks.

“Losses of live inventory could escalate if the company does not regain access to those farms,” the statement read.

The state is also the nation’s second leading producer of hogs, with more than 2,100 farms that raise about 9 million hogs each year, according to the [North Carolina Pork Council](#).

The 5,500 hog deaths from Hurricane Florence have already exceeded the 2,800 killed during Hurricane Matthew, the industry trade group wrote in a [statement](#) Tuesday.

“Our farmers took extraordinary measures in advance of this storm, including moving thousands of animals out of harm’s way as the hurricane approached,” the statement read. “We do not expect the losses to increase significantly, though floodwaters continue to rise in some locations and circumstances may change.”

Animal rights group [PETA](#) called the animal deaths a “tragedy.”

“These millions of deaths were preventable, but as long as a market exists for animal flesh, some people will turn a profit at the expense of animals,” a spokesperson told EcoWatch in an email. “PETA urges everyone to take personal responsibility, not shrug this tragedy off, and actually help stop future suffering by going vegan so that animals are no longer forced to endure the many types of cruelty inherent in the meat industry.”

The [Humane Society of the United States](#) (HSUS) was similarly “heartbroken” over the deaths.

“HSUS is heartbroken by the reports of the catastrophic numbers of farmed

animal deaths resulting from the flooding related to Hurricane Florence,” the organization told EcoWatch via email, adding that the animals “needlessly lost their lives.”

“Having an emergency plan, regardless of the numbers of animals at your home, facility, or farm, is the responsibility of the humane steward caring for their welfare,” HSUS added. “If the sheer number of animals makes evacuation extremely difficult or impossible, then a hard look needs to be taken at the number of animals being cared for and the opportunity for them to be considered in an emergency plan. The cost of not doing so, as we can see here, has a devastating impact on the community, the environment and the animals, and are further examples of why we need to reduce the reliance on these massive factory farms.”

Meanwhile, as of Tuesday, at least 77 pig waste lagoons have either breached or are at risk of breaching, the [New York Times](#) reported, citing data from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

North Carolina’s hog and other concentrated animal feeding operations, or [CAFOs](#), produce almost [10 billion gallons](#) of fecal waste a year, according to the Environmental Working Group and Waterkeeper Alliance. Flooded CAFOs could release a [potent mix of pollutants](#) that can potentially harm human health and the environment.

Waterkeeper Alliance has conducted overflights at some of the industrial sites and agricultural operations impacted by Florence and is investigating the possible hazards left in the storm’s wake.

“We’ve been working to address environmental hazards caused by industrial waste mismanagement in North Carolina for over two decades,” said Will Hendrick, Waterkeeper Alliance staff attorney and manager of the Pure Farms, Pure Waters campaign in a statement received by EcoWatch. “As defenders of the state’s rivers, lakes and streams, we’re committed to documenting conditions and alerting the public to threats to public health and environmental quality stemming from Hurricane Florence.”

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Featured image: A North Carolina concentrated animal feeding operation, or CAFO, on Sept.18, 2018, Larry Baldwin / Crystal Coast Waterkeeper.

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