

After an Emergency: Re-entry & Recovery Guidance for Agricultural Operations

Returning to a farm following an emergency evacuation requires careful planning to ensure the safety of people, livestock, and agricultural operations. Agricultural producers should take a cautious and informed approach when re-entering evacuation alert and evacuation order areas.

This document provides guidance on safely returning to impacted properties, assessing hazards, evaluating impacts, and prioritizing recovery activities. Re-entry can only occur when authorized by local authorities and emergency officials, and you should continue to monitor official updates and restrictions.

Recovery from a disaster may take months or even years, depending on the extent of the damage. Local authorities will continue to share information and coordinate recovery efforts to support impacted communities.

A safe and well-planned return can help reduce risks and support a more effective recovery.

Preparing to Return

Before returning to your farm, ensure you have the information, equipment, and documentation needed to safely assess impacts and begin recovery.

- Follow local and [provincial guidance on when it is safe to return](#)
- Have appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) available for cleanup activities
- Be aware of hazards associated with [operating equipment in hot, dry, or fire-affected conditions](#)
- Gather insurance and business risk management program information
- Keep detailed records, receipts, notes, photographs, and videos of all damages and recovery activities

Gather as much information about the wildfire that impacted your farm as possible. This includes dates impacted, wildfire numbers or local authority task-numbers, evacuation alert and evacuation order dates, and other relevant incident information to support insurance claims and recovery assistance applications.

Assessing Your Farm for Damage

Once evacuation orders have been rescinded or downgraded, conduct a systematic assessment of your property to identify hazards, document losses, and prioritize recovery actions.

Immediate Priorities

- Check livestock and provide food, water, shelter, and veterinary care as required
- Inspect the property for ongoing hazards, including hot spots, damaged infrastructure, unstable ground, and smouldering roots
- Assess the condition of:
 - Fences
 - Farm buildings
 - Fuel storage tanks and power distribution systems
 - Livestock facilities
 - Farm equipment storage facilities
- Identify and mark hazardous or damaged trees
- Secure the property and prevent unauthorized access
- Take steps to reduce risks from erosion, flooding, or debris flows

Assessing Homes and Farmsteads

Before occupying homes, secondary residences, or farm offices, follow [all provincial guidance on ensuring your property and home are safe for re-entry](#).

Assessing Crops and Food Safety

Wildfire smoke, ash, and fire suppression activities can affect the safety and quality of fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products. Assess crops for signs of direct fire damage, smoke exposure, ash deposition, or contact with fire retardant.

- Discard any food that has been in direct contact with fire or extreme heat
- Do not consume fruits, vegetables, or other crops from areas where fire retardant has been directly applied
- Produce exposed to smoke or ash may be safe for consumption if thoroughly washed multiple times to remove residues
- Peeling fruits and vegetables and removing the outer leaves of leafy crops can further reduce contamination risks
- Follow your on-farm food safety plan and assessment protocols when determining whether products are suitable for consumption or sale
- When in doubt, do not consume or market the product until its safety can be confirmed

Forage and Feed

- Record losses like hay or feed using inventories and written notes. Detailed records of impacts and losses will support future recovery claims, should assistance become available
- [BC Cattlemen's Access to Feed Program](#) can help identify feed for sale throughout the province
- Keep receipts for any outstanding purchases

Water Sources and Water Quality

Consider testing water quality where contamination from ash, sediment, fire retardant, or damaged infrastructure is suspected. Inspect and assess:

- Domestic water systems
- Livestock watering systems
- Irrigation infrastructure
- Wells, springs, and surface water intakes

For support on testing Livestock Water Quality the [Livestock Water Quality Testing Project](#) has test kits throughout the province and will support additional testing if needed.

Fire Retardant and Ash

If fire retardant was applied on your property, or there is heavy ash build-up:

- Clean water troughs that may have been exposed
- Consider delaying grazing until rainfall or irrigation has reduced residue levels
- Consult a veterinarian if livestock health concerns arise
- Do not consume fruits, vegetables, or other crops from areas where fire retardant has been directly applied

Restoring Communications

Reliable communications are important for contacting suppliers, customers, insurers, lenders, veterinarians, and government programs. Verify that communication systems are functional, including:

- Cell service
- Internet access
- Landline or satellite communications
- Emergency notification systems

Documenting Damage

- Contact your insurance provider as soon as possible
- Photograph and video all damage before cleanup or repairs begin
- Document salvaged items
- Collect samples where laboratory testing is required (e.g., smoke taint in grapes)

Disposing of Deadstock

Emergency events can result in livestock mortalities that require timely and appropriate disposal. Document all losses before disposal, where safe to do so, and follow provincial requirements and guidance to protect animal health, public health, and the environment. Where accepted by the local authority, disposal at an approved landfill may be the preferred option.

- **General Guidance:**
 - There is no current ministry programming to assist with emergency related deadstock removal
 - Contact your local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) if you are unable to handle disposal on your own
 - Refer to the [Ministry of Agriculture and Food's Mortality Management Webpage](#)
 - Refer to the [AgSafe Working with Dead Animals Package](#) which includes risk assessments and safe work practice guidance including PPE to use, potential hazards, and steps to stay safe while working with deadstock
- **Landfilling:**
 - The rules surrounding the landfilling of mortalities are region-specific. Acceptance of livestock mortalities varies by local government and facility
 - For more information, reach out to your regional district
- **Composting:**
 - Refer to 3.3 of the [On-Farm Composting in British Columbia Guide](#)
- **Burial:**
 - Refer to the [Large Animal Disposal Factsheet](#). It refers to the South Coast region of B.C. but the considerations are applicable across the province
- **Specified Risk materials:**
 - If deadstock contains [Specified Risk Materials](#) (SRM), then SRM must be disposed of in a SRM Certified Landfill
 - [Permits](#) are required for transportation
 - Contact your local [CFIA animal health district office](#) regarding on-site disposal
- **Biosecurity:**
 - Mitigate [biosecurity risks associated with deadstock collection and disposal](#)

Planning for Recovery

Recovery is a long-term process that often extends well beyond the initial return to the property. Developing a prioritized recovery plan can help you focus resources on the most critical needs, coordinate recovery activities, and support insurance claims, financial assistance applications, and operational decision-making.

The province has [resources available to help with general recovery](#) beyond the agricultural recovery resources included here, and the Ministry has a more detailed guide for [wildfire recovery for agriculture in BC](#) you can use to plan your farm's recovery.

Develop a Recovery Action Plan

Recovery activities often extend beyond the initial return period.

Consider:

- Identifying immediate, short-term, and long-term priorities
- Assigning responsibilities for recovery tasks
- Recording estimated costs and timelines
- Tracking completed actions
- Reviewing priorities regularly as conditions change

Evaluate Production Impacts

Consider potential effects on:

- Livestock productivity
- Crop production
- Forage availability
- Irrigation capacity
- Feed costs
- Future revenues

Replacing Fences Lost to Fire

Several programs may assist with the replacement of burned or damaged fencing.

- **Private Fencing**
 - Coverage for private fencing may be available under a personal or commercial insurance policy. Consult your insurance provider to initiate a claim if covered
- **Highway Fencing**
 - Assistance may be available through the Ministry of Transportation and Transit & BC Cattlemen's Association to repair livestock fencing damaged along highways and rights-of-way
 - For fence inquiries please contact BC Cattlemen's Fencing Program at fencebc@cattlemen.ca or call 1-866-398-2848, extension 3
- **Crown Range Fencing**
 - The Ministry of Forests may provide support for damaged Crown range fencing. Contact your [Ministry of Forests District Range Staff](#) or FrontCounter BC by calling 1-877-855-3222 for more information

Insurance and Financial Recovery

Financial assistance programs often have application deadlines. Initiate insurance claims and notify program administrators as soon as losses are identified. Insurance, business risk management programs, and disaster assistance are designed to support recovery after you have taken reasonable steps to protect your operation.

Initiating an Insurance Claim

1. Gather photographs, videos, inventories, receipts, and other records
2. Report losses to your insurance provider and any enrolled government risk management programs
3. Submit required documentation as early as possible
4. Complete a thorough damage assessment and maintain accurate records throughout recovery

Agriculture Insurance and Income Protection Programs

[Agriculture Insurance and Income Protection Programs](#) help agricultural producers manage the unpredictable financial challenges that come with food production in B.C. These programs help mitigate financial losses associated with production risks, market disruptions, natural disasters, and other eligible events.

AgriStability

- AgriStability provides assistance at the whole farm level against an income margin (eligible expenses minus eligible expenses) decline greater than 30% of their Olympic average margin for the previous five years. The program considers losses and recovery costs due to fire and drought in the calculation of assistance.
- [Producers who wish to enroll in AgriStability for the 2026 Program year have until November 30, 2026 to do so.](#)
- For 2026, BC producers can receive an interim payment of up to 75% of their estimated final benefit payment. Interim payments can help with cashflow issues
- Producers are encouraged to file a notice of loss with AgriStability as soon as possible after experiencing a loss
- Phone 1-877-343-2767 or email AgriStability@gov.bc.ca to enroll or get more information

Production Insurance (crop insurance)

- Production Insurance supports agricultural producers to manage the risk of crop losses caused by weather perils such as hail, frost, excessive rain, fire, flooding, drought, and wildlife. In B.C., Production Insurance is offered for [berries](#), [grain](#), [forage](#), [grapes](#), [tree fruit](#), [vegetables](#) and [flower bulbs](#)
- Contact your [Regional Production Insurance Office](#) or phone 1-888-332-3352 to file a notice of loss if you purchased coverage for the 2026 crop year, or to sign up for the next growing season.

AgrilInvest:

- [AgrilInvest](#) is a savings account that helps you manage small income declines and invest in projects to strengthen your farm's financial resilience.
- Producers with an AgrilInvest account can withdraw funds at any time
- For further information, please contact the AgrilInvest program at 1-866-367-8506 or visit the [AgrilInvest – After you apply page](#)

Recovery Programs

Federal and provincial recovery programs may be available to assist you with eligible recovery costs. Program availability and eligibility criteria will vary by event.

The ministry continues to monitor the effectiveness of existing financial support programs like Disaster Financial Assistance, Private Insurance, AgriStability, AgrilInvest and Production Insurance, and will communicate any additional recovery measures if they become available.

Agri-Business Recovery Planning

- Funding support for costs related to immediate and long-term business recovery planning under Stream 2 of the [Agri-Business Planning Program](#) will be open for enrollment in September 2026

Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA)

- Following eligible disasters, [Disaster Financial Assistance](#) may help restore essential uninsurable losses, including cleanup, repairs, equipment, and inventory replacement

BC Wildfire Service Fire Suppression Rehabilitation

- Property owners may be eligible for compensation for damage caused by wildfire suppression activities, such as fireguards affecting fences, irrigation systems, or other agricultural infrastructure
- Contact: WildfireLandBasedRecovery@gov.bc.ca

Range Tenure Impacts

- Contact your [Ministry of Forests District Range Staff](#) regarding range losses, seeding post-fire, and other fire related impacts

AgriRecovery

- [AgriRecovery](#) provides a framework for governments to determine if additional assistance is required to help with the extraordinary costs of recovery not covered by existing programs and private insurance. An AgriRecovery based response is not guaranteed for every disaster event, however, if a new support initiative is established, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food will provide additional information regarding eligibility and application requirements

Rebuilding and Recovering to be Wildfire Resilient

Recovery activities may include repairing, replacing, or constructing new agricultural infrastructure. When rebuilding homes, barns, shops, livestock facilities, irrigation infrastructure, or other agricultural buildings, consider incorporating [FireSmart](#) principles to reduce future wildfire risk and improve resilience.

- Review the BC Wildfire Service case study from BC Wildfire Service highlighting [characteristics of homes that survived the 2023 McDougal Creek Wildfire](#)
- Download and use the [FireSmart BC Wildfire-Resilience Best-Practice Checklist for Home Constructions, Renovation, and Landscaping](#)
- Review [FireSmart Factsheets](#) for guidance on wildfire-resilient building materials and design considerations, including roofs, gutters, eaves, vents, siding, decks, porches, and fences

Consider making a [Farm & Ranch Wildfire Preparedness Plan](#) or getting a free [Farm & Ranch FireSmart Assessment](#)

Community Recovery and Support

Recovery is not something you need to undertake alone. Community networks, industry organizations, and government partners can provide valuable support during the rebuilding process.

- Connect with local farmer institutes, commodity organizations, and agricultural associations
- Work with neighbours to locate, identify, and return displaced livestock
- Seek support from regional agricultural organizations and local governments
- Participate in industry and community recovery information sessions
- Collaborate with neighbouring farms to restore operations and critical services
- Consider rebuilding with greater resilience, including [FireSmart Farm and Ranch Wildfire Preparedness](#) principles and fire-resistant building materials where appropriate

Recovery is a long-term process. By accessing available supports, maintaining strong community connections, and incorporating resilience measures where appropriate, you can support the recovery of your farm operations and the broader communities that depend on you and your neighbours.

Caring for People During Recovery

Recovery can be physically demanding, emotionally challenging, and stressful for agricultural producers, their families, employees, and volunteers. Taking steps to support personal wellbeing and workforce safety can help maintain productivity, reduce the risk of injury or burnout, and support a more effective recovery process.

- Recognize that wildfire recovery can be emotionally and physically demanding
- Check in regularly with family members, employees, and volunteers
- Watch for signs of stress, fatigue, anxiety, or burnout
- Ensure adequate rest, hydration, and breaks during cleanup activities
- Consider counselling or peer support services if needed
- Clearly identify who is responsible for critical recovery and operational tasks

Additional mental health resources are available for producers, farm workers, and their families who may require support during recovery.

Mental Wellness Supports

Recovery can be physically demanding and emotionally challenging. Whether you are a producer, family member, employee, volunteer, neighbour, or someone supporting recovery efforts, it is important to look after your own mental wellness as well as the wellbeing of others.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, exhausted, or struggling to cope, support is available and reaching out for help is a normal and important part of the recovery process.

Additional resources:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/business-market-development/emergency-management/health-wellness-preparedness>

Crisis and Mental Health Resources

National Crisis Line (24/7)

Call or text **9-8-8** or **1-800-784-2433**

BC Mental Health Support Line

Call **310-6789** (no area code required)

AgSafe Mental Wellness Program

Free counselling services for members of B.C.'s agriculture industry.

<https://agsafebc.ca/mental-wellness/counsellors/>

Do More Ag Foundation - AgTalk

24-hour peer-to-peer support for individuals aged 16+ in Canadian agriculture.

<https://www.domore.ag/agtalk>