Animal Carcass Disposal Following Hurricane Florence

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Many farmers in the lower coastal plain of North Carolina were directly impacted by rain and floodwaters from Hurricane Florence. One of the many challenges North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) faced was how to help these farmers dispose of poultry carcasses and saturated manure in a manner that would protect public health and the environment and would quickly get the farms back into operation. NCDA&CS needed to accomplish this monumental task while simultaneously completing other critical response activities in support of the agricultural sector.

In the immediate aftermath of Florence, NCDA&CS chose to contract out the main elements of the response and recovery effort for flooded poultry houses. By doing so, their staff was able to manage other aspects of the entire agricultural recovery effort and focus efforts on the oversight of the contractors to ensure a rapid and efficient response. NCDA&CS developed and executed contracts for the three main components of recovery operations: subject matter expertise for composting, equipment operations for moving materials and compost windrow construction, and carbon materials sourcing and delivery. The Florence response framework was built on a series of interrelated steps requiring highly coordinated interaction among NCDA&CS, specialized contractors, and farms.

As demonstrated during the Hurricane Florence response, composting has the potential to be a valuable waste management tool during natural disasters. Composting can help solve the immediate needs of protecting public and the environment, provide the basis for a rapid agricultural recovery, and create a safe product for beneficial reuse in agricultural systems. The NCDA&CS response plan for Hurricane Florence, which incorporated lessons learned from disease and disaster events across the United States, is a successful model of the effort needed to execute composting on a large scale in the agricultural sector for disaster response.