Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

In this episode, I interview Brandi Janssen, Director of Iowa Center for Agricultural Safety and Health. Today we are talking about winter weather emergency preparedness on the farm. I'm Olivia Hanlon, ISU Extension small farm specialist, and welcome to the show. Brandi, welcome to the show. Thanks for being on.

Thank you for having me.

All right, Brandi to get started here. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do in your role with ICash?

Sure, so I'm actually based at the University of Iowa. I'm faculty in the College of Public Health. And I come from a farm background. I know people forget, or don't often think of the University of Iowa as being a space where we do work in agriculture. But we do have a little bit and it's in our College of Public Health. And it's focused on occupational safety and health and agriculture.
And that's where ICash comes in. ICash a state funded center, were written into Iowa code. And we have funding from the state budget to do work on prevention and education programming related to Agricultural Safety and Health. Although We're based at the University of Iowa, we work with colleagues at Iowa State, as well as the Department of Ag and the Department of Public Health to get our work done. So we had to try to bring people from across the state with various types of expertise, people who know a lot about agriculture, but also public health folks with a lot of experience in injury and illness prevention, to kind of think broadly about how we can really serve Iowa farms and keep people safe and healthy.

Olivia Hanlon  01:56

All right, Brandi, we're excited to have you even though you're a Hawkeye. So you told us a little bit about ICash. And kind of what you guys do there. But do you want to dive a little more into what all you guys have going on? And what kind of things you guys sponsor?

02:11

Sure. Because we we take a broad view of farming. And we know that there are a lot of potential hazards on farms big and small. Sometimes people presume that we focus on the large scale commodity farmers, but all farms have hazards. So we try to think across all of those different types of agricultural production. And we also recognize that we try to, you know, reach the whole state as much as we can. We're a pretty small staff. But that's where even though we're Hawkeyes, we do work really closely with our Cyclone friends, particularly in the extension offices who helped us distribute a lot of materials. So one thing that is kind of an ongoing project is our seasonal campaigns and four times a year, we send out prevention, you know, resources, educational materials, to all of the ISU Extension offices, and also to all of the Farm Service Agency offices across the state. So that means that we reach every county four times a year with some materials about injury or illness prevention or farm safety or something, you know, everything from policies about hiring young workers, that was one we did a few years ago. Sun protection, you know, all varieties of things that come up, you know, we're attentive to what's going on in farming. If we see a pop of injuries, for example, like green bin entrapments, those tend to come up in the fall, we try to focus our attention on those sorts of things. But we really rely on our partners at ISU and at the FSA to get those materials out. We also host an annual conference, the Midwest, rural Agricultural Safety and Health Conference, usually in November. And there we bring together a lot of public health folks, new research in injury and illness prevention on farms. We've focused a lot in the last few years on mental health and wellness among farmers. And we're also thinking more and more about the relationships between overall farm health and soil health and human health. Lots of reasons for that the pandemic included, but also just our better understanding of, of how all of these systems kind of inform each other.

Olivia Hanlon  04:09

Yeah, for sure you guys have a lot going on Brandi, and I actually ran into you at the PFI conference. And that is where I found your handout on winter weather emergency preparedness, which is what we're talking about today, even though it hasn't felt like winter,
necessarily in the past couple of weeks. But when we are talking about winter weather, what kinds of weather events are we typically preparing for around this time of year?

04:36
Yeah, great question. You feel like you should be able to prepare, but it's becoming less and less predictable. So could be anything I guess. Certainly extreme cold. We haven't really had our friend the polar vortex in Iowa so much this year, but in past years, those extreme bitter cold snaps are one thing that we're thinking about and hoping that farmers are preparing for, but also just the kind of surprise precipitation so here in eastern Iowa. Well, we got a pretty good snowstorm last week, it's about gone now, since it's 50 degrees today, but it came on pretty fast. And the roads were pretty bad. And so thinking about, you know, prepping for what you need, so that you're prepared if you're homebound for a couple days, or if your power goes out because of precipitation. And I think the duration was a summer event back a couple years ago. But high winds are something that we're thinking about also in the winter. And when you couple those with extreme cold or freezing, slushy, snowy precipitation, there are a lot of things to take into account in getting your farm prepared.

Olivia Hanlon 05:34
All right. Speaking of that, what kinds of things do we need to do in order to prepare our farms or acreages for these kinds of weather events?

05:42
Yeah, so I think, you know, you should take kind of a whole farm approach, you know, think about your household, but also your perimeters and your buildings. You know, you referenced the winter storm preparedness guide that we put out. And that has a lot of details. But actually, one of the first things I suggest is early in the fall that you're checking your electrical systems to make sure that everything's in good shape, because we also know that winter is a really the most common time for outbuilding fires. So you know, you're running heaters more often, you might have lighting on because of the shorter days. And those things can cause electrical fire. That's a little different from the winter storm preparedness, but it's another consideration in the winter. But for storms, you know, it's thinking about, well, what am I going to need for a few days if I can't get out. And that could be everything from your own household items. If you don't have a generator, or if you do have a generator is it fueled up and ready to go? If not, is your well pump gonna run in the case of a power outage, for example, we're thinking about water a lot in the winter, often because of livestock. But if your well pump is out that can even further complicate things in the case of a power outage. And then remember that you know, getting assistance if you need it, it can be more challenging because of the cold temperatures. And because of the poor road conditions on like in a summer or spring scenario that you may have less access to services if you need them. So stocking up on things, your household items, but also your livestock feed, bedding, all those kinds of things. Those are some of the basic things to kind of make sure that you're prepared. Good flashlights again, might have less daylight might be have to be out late after dark, those kinds of things.
Olivia Hanlon 07:15
All right, Brandi, you mentioned livestock. Aside from some extra feed and hay there are there any other steps that need to be done ahead of an incoming weather system.

07:24
Depending on what your structures are, you know, a lot of our livestock are tucked inside most of the year anyway, but not everything. I'm thinking like this time of year I'm thinking about on small farms, folks who are lambing and kidding. And sometimes in really cold temperatures. And some livestock breeds are pretty hardy and can kind of do their thing year round outdoors. But others you might want to make sure that you have a windbreak. That can be something pretty simple, even you know, a small open sided shed or even a wagon or something that's sort of shored up with some hay or straw bales to provide some protection from the wind. In the case of a storm that might be important. If you've got new baby critters coming then you know, safe indoor space, again, making sure you have extra bedding on hand if you can't get out to get more if you were to run out, and that you have enough light and heat, you know for new babies. But again, you've already done your diligence and checked your electrical systems in the fall. So you know, they'll be nice and safe, as well as warm. Water, of course is an issue in the winter, not only because it wants to freeze up on you, I always tried to test our I often forget to do this, I have to confess but test our water tank heaters before I need them and everything freezes up and it doesn't work or my electrical cord doesn't work. Because otherwise you're out there breaking up ice, which is not only a hassle, but can put you at a higher risk for frostbite or hypothermia if you get your gloves wet or your sleeves wet. So thinking about you know, feed, water, shelter? And do you have what you need for an extra few days if you can't get out? And is everything going to stay functional in the case of a big winter storm.

Olivia Hanlon 08:54
Alright, so once we've done some of our preparing, and our weather is actually hitting, what kinds of things do we need to keep in mind to help us mitigate risks to ourselves our operations and our livestock?

09:05
Yeah, well, I think, you know, particularly if you have livestock, your inclination is to want to go out and check on them pretty regularly. Make sure everybody's safe, which is a good idea. But make sure that everybody knows that you're going out to do it to you know, good communication with your family members about where you need to be if you've got trees down, and maybe you want to check fence lines if you've got issues there, but make sure that somebody knows that you're going to be out and about especially if the temperatures are really low. Or you might be in a position where you got to move some brush or move some downed trees that you know and use some equipment that could put you at risk as well. Sometimes we recommend that whoever's sort of holding down the fort on home base, check in with their farmer every few hours just to give them a call on the cell phone or send a text just to have them have some communication going on throughout the day when you're working out in rough conditions. Because of course you're as I said, you're gonna want to get out there and
make sure that everybody's all of your animals are safe and your fence lines are sound and your buildings are secure. And that's really important. But make sure people are checking in on you. Of course, you know, dressing for the weather, and making sure that you're well layered. It's not very glamorous, but one of the most common ways for someone to hurt themselves on their farm is to fall down. And with ice and snow and this change in weather, that certainly increases that risk. So making sure that your footwear is in good order. And if you use gat tracks or some sort of, you know, crampons or something to help you not slip on the ice, those can be really helpful too, to keep you on your feet while you're out there.

Olivia Hanlon 10:30
For sure. All right, Brandi, after we've made it through and the storm, the weather is gone. What kinds of things should we be checking in on that maybe we might not think of right away.

Brandi Janssen 10:41
Yeah, so you know, basic cleanup, again, things like fence lines and trees that might be down in someplace that you don't often use, but could cause a problem. If they're blocking a fence or come down in an inconvenient spot. It's worth doing a perimeter check. You know, after a storm as soon as you can get out there. A storm can also kind of help you identify spots in your outbuildings maybe that aren't sound. So you know, you go out and say, Oh, well, we've got a lot of snow coming in the hayloft, there might be time to repair the barn roof in that spot so that my hay stays dry, things like that the storm can maybe help you sort of see spaces that might need some additional maintenance. And I think, you know, you come out of a kind of recognizing where the wind is going to flow and where the snow is going to drift and where you're going to have to put your energy into clean up and maybe improving some outbuildings and things like that the snowstorm can let you know where some of those gaps might be.

Olivia Hanlon 11:31
Definitely some of that cleanup that you mentioned may involve some machinery, is there anything we should do to prepare that equipment beforehand? I know we've got some stubborn equipment that doesn't always like the cold. So is there anything that we can do to kind of prep that?

11:46
Yeah, for sure. Yep. You know, knowing your equipment and which pieces are not going to like to start in the cold weather. And if you keep things plugged in, if you get diesel equipment that can be plugged in or something I have a couple of battery chargers, you know that you can sort of attach to your some of your equipment to keep it running. I guess the other thing I'll say is that you know, in the case of a power outage, or where you need extra heat that also invites using different types of equipment. And one area where you should be really cautious is if you're running any type of extra heating equipment inside a building, especially if there's a carbon monoxide risk that could reduce air quality, or if it increases a fire risk. Those are things and of course, you need heat in our part of the world and at this time of year. But be very
careful about what kinds of indoor heating sources you're using. Make sure there's good ventilation if there's any risk of carbon monoxide off gassing, and make sure all your cords and electrical systems are in good repair that's an important one. Overall, on farms, anytime your equipment are high risk of injury things, tractor rollovers and equipment incidents are high causes of non fatal and fatal injuries. So being extra attentive when the ground might be slippery, or when the snow covers up something you know, a log or a barrier that you might drive over and then cause an overturn of your equipment. Those are all things that winter can hide some of those hazards. So being really careful when you're out and about operating machinery is really important.

Olivia Hanlon  13:14
All right, so if our listeners are looking for more information on kind of winter weather preparedness, or in general firm safety, where can they find that or who should they get in contact with Brandi?

13:25
All of our resources are available on the ICash website. And that's WWW dot idash cash.org. And as I said, we're affiliated with the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa. So a Google search will probably bring us up as well. But all of the materials that we send out throughout the year to our extension, and farm service agency partners are available for free for people to use. So you're welcome to download, print and use your own resources. The winter weather handout is a good one. The other one is winter fire prevention. You can also send me an email and if we have materials in stock, we're happy to send them out we do usually try to keep some extras on hand for things like the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference or if an office wants to hand them out for other activities. So if you're looking for something like that, please don't hesitate to reach out and we'll try to put you in touch or send you what you need.

Olivia Hanlon  14:17
Great. Is there anything that we didn't get covered that you want to add today, Brandi or any final words for us?

Brandi Janssen  14:22
I don't think so I appreciate that you cover this issue. It's really important. We know that rates of injury and illness are really high on farms and we'd like to see that come down. So we're always really grateful when folks are willing to talk about it and share good information.

Olivia Hanlon  14:35
All right, well, thank you so much for being on Brandi. It was great to have you and hopefully we'll have you back in the future.
Great, thank you.

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