Tornado Hits Charmany !!!

At about 8:30 pm on June 23 a tornado went through the near west side of Madison and the Charmany Instructional Facility suffered a direct hit. The tornado was classified as an F1 with estimated wind speeds averaging 80-90mph. At the time the tornado hit, the herd was outside grazing in the large grass pasture adjacent to Rosa Road. While some of the cows were feeding, the tornando blew their hay-wagon 500 feet north of its normal position and separated it from its front wheels. Several of the cows ended up with minor lacerations and hematomas likely due to flying debris or from falling down during the tornado. Immediately after the tornado, Dustin Lochner, a pre-vet student, went out to the pasture amidst all the chaos and was somehow able to round up all the cows and bring them into the barn himself. Kerry Hagen and her mother happened to see the tornado forming when they were driving on the west side of Madison and made it inside Charmany just as the tornado hit. Dr. Goodger was on his way and arrived shortly after it had passed through.

There were many live power wires knocked down and consequently no electricity in the facility. The Madison Police Department and Fire Department were both on site restricting access to the grounds. With the sirens blaring and no electricity, it took 2 hours for Dr. Goodger, Dr. Momont and all available help to get the cows into their stalls. They did their best to look over all the cows with flashlights, and determined that all the injuries were minor. The concern was that power would not be restored in time for the morning milking, but luckily it was restored at 1:00 am and not a single milking was missed. Once the power was restored a more thorough exam of all the cows was conducted (SEE BELOW).

Damage to Charmany and all its associated buildings was significant. The roof of the Charmany Instructional Facility was shifted 1.5 feet. The haybarn on the west side of the facility was completely destroyed and the hay, cottonseed and bedding stored within it were deemed unusable because of contamination with nails and other debris. The outside exercise yard was decimated with overturned feedbunks, damaged fences and the shade tarp and wooden poles were ripped out and thrown into the horse yard on
the other side of the barn. The roof over the large animal surgery area collapsed and the old pole barn had extensive damage with the roof almost completely removed. Additionally, the debris from the haybarn was found all over the property and many of the trees were blown down. Thankfully no one was injured and none of the cows were severely hurt.

How About the Cows?

Taking into account the damage to the haybarn and the amount of debris that was flying around, we are extremely lucky that none of the cows were seriously hurt. However, there were some injuries and the overall herd production dropped drastically and still has not recovered.

- Udder hematomas from either flying debris or running resulted in hemorrhagic milk in six cows that required treatment: Char, Diane, Brian, Bitsy, Griffey and Tina

- Jessica had general soreness and trauma relating to a fall and difficulty getting up that occurred during the panic as the cows were coming into the barn with the sirens blaring and no electricity.

- Olive had a nose bleed from the right nostril that has cleared up

- Amanda had a laceration on the inside of her mouth that has cleared and the laceration to her right-rear teat is healing well

- The handful of cows with minor cuts and bruises, including Sadie, Tootsie and Morgan, are healing well.

- Susan may lose the medial claw of her left-rear foot, but this is unrelated to the tornado

Production took a dramatic 15lb/cow/day drop at the very next milking; this converts to about $120 lost per day. Production has regained about 50% (7lb/cow/day), but is still below expected levels. Bulk tank somatic cell counts were quite high for about 10 days following the tornado and reached 300,000cells/ml even though cows with grossly abnormal milk and high CMTs were not milked into the bulk tank.
Tootsie’s Tale – We Thought We Lost Her!

Dr. Goodger and Chris were in the cow barn sometime after 10pm still without lights or electricity. A police officer came to the back door to give them an update on the status of the building inspection and see how they were doing. Chris mentioned that all of the milk cows were accounted for but they had some dry cows in the turkey barn that needed to be accounted for—Tootsie being one of them.

It was dark outside, and with live power lines down the officer had to escort Chris down the driveway over to the edge of the cowyard. Using flashlights they could see a several eyes reflecting (and blinking) from inside the turkey barn, so they knew most of the dry cows were at least okay for the time being. Then as they swung the light around they saw a big white cow lying on her side with her head laid out near the hay feeder. Neither her head nor her feet moved while they watched her and they could not see her breathing from the road. After losing a heifer Cecil the week before, Chris told the officer "darn, looks like we've lost another one." Chris didn’t know how he was going to break the news to Dr. Goodger.

Soon after, Chris and Dr. Goodger went back over to the dry cow lot to do a more thorough check on the cows. It was at this time that they realized the down cow was Tootsie. Dr. Goodger walked right up to her at the hay feeder, as he got next to her she suddenly lifted up her head, rolled off her side, then got up and looked at them as if to ask "what's all the fuss about?"

Losing Tootsie would have been extremely tough, she is the oldest cow in the herd at 11 ½ years old and will be starting her 10th lactation when she freshens at the end of August. In the AgSource DHI Dane County Newsletter from July 2004, Tootsie received recognition on the official lifetime production list. There are only 6 cows on DHI in the county that have given more milk than her. Her lifetime production is 212,118 pounds of milk. This translates to almost 25,000 gallons or 5 semi-tankers of milk in her lifetime.

Make Do and Re-build

A lot has already been done, but the work is ongoing. Immediate attention was necessary to make the cow yard usable so the herd could be let out and fed the following morning. Since then the posts and shade were also replaced. Destruction of the hay barn not only resulted in loss of stored materials such as hay, cottonseed and bedding, but it also created a situation where there is no covered storage space for replacement materials. New hay was
ordered and is temporarily being stored in the turkey barn and covered outside. A gravity box has been rented for replacement cottonseed and bagged shavings were purchased. The corn silage bag was heavily damaged causing the silage to be unsalvageable, so UW’s Arlington Farms trucked in and bagged new silage. The pasture was unusable for a time because of debris and had to be cleaned-up. Cows are now back on pasture in the evenings. Workers are now required to sign-in and sign-out and after hours access is via a lock-box.

Special Thank Yous:

The herd would like to extend many thanks to the people who volunteered their time and energies following the tornado.

- Dustin Lochner, Kerry Hagen and her mother for all their help the night of the tornado and since.
- Dr. Harry Momont and his daughter’s boyfriend who showed up at Charmany following the tornado to help get cows in the stalls
- Chris Eisele for help the night of the tornado and since
- Claudia Hirsch – she should replace Paul Bremer!
- Tom Bennett
- The entire Charmany milking crew who have unselfishly picked-up extra shifts and taken on responsibility for the cows. For about 10 days following the tornado an extra person was required for 2.5 hours at each milking to treat and monitor cows injured by the tornado. Also an extra person was needed for 12 hours daily to assist both milking shift students in daily chores. It is tough to milk in a timely manner when there are 7-9 cows being milked into a bucket. They have done a superb job of keeping the herd milked, treated, fed and bedded.