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Hooves in High Water: The Untold Impact of Floods on Punjab's Livestock

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When the monsoon turned merciless in Punjab, it was not just crops that drown, it was also the hopes tethered to the livestock sheds. The flood that submerged fields in Punjab State this year left behind more than silted land; they left behind hungry animals, broken livelihoods, and anxious farmers struggling to start again. According to Akashvani News report about 1.75 lakh acres of farmland was submerged under water affecting lakhs of lives.

An aerial view of an area partially submerged in floodwater at Ghanaur village, in Patiala district, Punjab, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025. (PTI Photo)

The Hidden Victims of Floods

When floods hit any area, most attention naturally goes to the submerged fields and people who loses their everything but livestock quietly endure their own share of suffering. Cattles, buffaloes, goats, and poultry are the silent sufferers of every flood. Stagnant water filling sheds creates the perfect conditions for painful infections like foot rot and mastitis. Contaminated drinking water sparks bouts of diarrhoea, weakening already stressed animals. Fodder that every farmer works hard to store safely turns damp and mouldy within days, becoming unsafe to feed to the livestock. For farmers who depends on livestock for a steady source of livelihood, it is not just their income but their entire livelihood security that comes at a stack.

Loss Beyond Numbers

According to Abulude & Fadiyimu (2024), floods cause not only direct animal deaths but also long-term productivity losses. Animals that survive the stress of flooding often show reduced milk yield for months due to infection, exhaustion, and feed shortage. Pregnant cattle frequently suffer miscarriages, and young calves are the most vulnerable to hypothermia and starvation. It is not just the animals but also the entire ecosystem of the area gets affected and it takes months and even years for its restoration. Lakhs of animals across the state got displaced and eventually starved to death. The entire value chain got disturbed as products like milk, meat, eggs etc coming from livestock sector became scare as compared to their demand in the market. The after effects of the flood remains unnoticed. Stagnant water imposes a life threat to the animals which even survives the flood. The stagnant water becomes a breeding home for a number of microbes and vector-borne diseases affects the remaining alive animals. For smallholder farmers, who typically rear two to three animals, losing even one means losing half their livelihood.

Fodder: The First Casualty

Fodder fields are the first to go underwater. Green fodder like maize, bajra, or berseem gets washed away or contaminated. Stored hay and silage are often ruined by moisture. In several flood-hit villages, farmers have been seen feeding banana stems or tree leaves just to keep their animals alive. The water along with the destruction brings tonnes of sand and other particulates with it

changing the soils profile which in return affects the entire production cycle as even the nutrients in the soils get altered directly affecting the crops which in return causes decline in productivity of not just the fodder crops but ultimately the livestock that depends on them. The shortage of dry fodder forces distress sales of animals at throwaway prices which leaves the farmers left behind with just misery.

Veterinary Frontlines

In the 2025 floods, Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (GADVASU), Ludhiana once again emerged as a pillar of support for livestock farmers in Tarn Taran. A dedicated team of veterinarians and intern students travelled to the affected villages to provide on-spot treatment, distribute free medicines, carry out deworming, and offer essential vaccinations to prevent disease outbreaks among stressed animals (Punjab News Express, 2025). The relief effort received a heartfelt boost when the All Feed Millers Association (AFMA), Punjab donated 75 quintals of cattle feed, easing the acute fodder shortage farmers were grappling with after the floods washed away their supplies. There is an urgent need of district-level livestock disaster plan with mapped shelter sites, feed banks, and mobile veterinary kits which is essential to reduce such losses in the future

Building Resilience

In rural Punjab, women play a major role in livestock like feeding, milking, and cleaning cattle. When floods strike, they face double the hardship: protecting animals and managing household food shortages. The emotional toll is immense; animals are seen not merely as assets but as family members. Thus, women and children should be given priority in any action plan to be formulated for flood or any natural calamity affected area. The way forward lies in preparedness. Raised cattle sheds, elevated fodder godowns, and silage pits on higher ground can prevent massive feed losses. Promotion of climate-resilient fodder varieties like sorghum and maize hybrids, along with community fodder banks, can ensure feed availability during disasters. Livestock insurance under government schemes like the National Livestock Mission should be expanded and made more accessible. Training farmers in basic first aid, disease prevention, and safe relocation methods during floods can save many animals. Incorporating expert system in the livestock management should be given of high priority , thus empowering locals with digital extension tools would indeed help communities to take timely and effective decisions. Local youth and Self-Help Groups can be trained as “Pashu Sakhis” (animal friends) to act during emergencies.

A Hope That Floats

Punjab’s livestock sector has long been the pride of its villages symbolizing hard work, prosperity, and self-reliance. But recurring floods are a stark reminder that climate change is rewriting rural realities. Protecting livestock must become a part of every flood management plan, not an afterthought. When the waters recede, fields can be replanted but the trust of a farmer who loses his animals takes much longer to rebuild. Strengthening early warning systems, ensuring fodder security, and providing veterinary support can help Punjab’s livestock farmers stand firm the next time the rivers rise. Because when hooves stay above water, so does hope.

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