

# Look for the Helpers

*Cattlemen came together to help when flooding hit Louisiana in August 2016.*

Story & photos by  
**BECKY MILLS**, field editor

When the late Fred Rogers, star of the children's program, *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, was a child himself, he was frightened by reports of disasters in the newspaper. His mom always told him to look for the helpers.

After up to 30 inches (in.) of rain fell in South Louisiana on Aug. 11 and 12, 2016, causing 13 deaths and \$15 billion worth of damage, cattle people didn't have to look far for helpers. There was Jason White; his wife, Amanda; and their son, Jacob, who rounded up cattle in chest-deep water for five days, using their horses and truck and trailer. There was Whip Brown, who boarded 350 head of cattle for two months until his friends and customers could get their fences repaired and forages growing again.

Jason White recalls, "The water started coming up on a Sunday evening. We were helping people sandbag and get their stuff up.

Cows hadn't crossed our minds yet. We didn't think the water was going to get that high."

At his Darrow operation, he and his family were blessed. They only got 8 in. of rain and their 120-cow Braford-Brangus-Angus herd was safe. However, on Monday, he got a call saying there were cows underwater in the small community of Saint Amant. Jason; his brother, Jared; and B.J. Duplessis, Amanda's first cousin, loaded their horses in stock trailers and headed that way.

Dubbed the Cajun Cowboys by the press, they used ingenuity and their horses to get the drowning cattle into stock trailers.

"There was a mobile home backed against a concrete driveway," says Jason. "We used it for a wing." In another place, they used panels against the side of a shop to get cattle into trailers.

"There [were] 3 inches of water in the bottom of the stock trailer," he recalls.

"It was surprisingly easy to get the cattle up," adds Jason. "As soon as the cows saw other cows out of the water, they wanted out."

While Jacob, then 8 years old, rode with his daddy, Amanda was on a mission of her own. While she can hold her own on a horse, she happened on people from Texas who had come with an airboat to help with the rescues. Frustrated by red

tape, they were heading home when Amanda saw them at a gas station in Saint Amant.

"Amanda got in the boat with them and was able to help a lot because she knows the area," says Jason.

Amanda downplays their sacrifices. "All who could help did," she says. "The churches cooked three meals a day for us."

Says Jason, "We had to turn down food."

While other family members kept Jason's and Amanda's then 3-year-old, Addison, they worked from sunup until dark.

"We left two trucks and trailers at a store off the main highway, and when we came back there were people waiting on us. There were lots of herds of 25 to 30 cows," Jason says. They worked until Friday, when the water started to go down.

When they got a trailer full of cattle, they headed north to Whip Brown's operation near Kentwood.

There Brown, who manages stockers and replacement heifers, tagged the cattle with different-colored tags according to their owners, and turned them out in groups.

"They probably belonged to 12 or 13 different people," says Brown. The cattle stayed free of charge, eating Brown's grass and hay.

"The Lord was looking after somebody," he says. "It hit at a time when I didn't have a lot of cattle on hand, and I had a lot grass I was going to roll."

Brown just shrugs, "I didn't want to roll it anyway, and them fellas [were] in trouble. A lot of them wanted to sell their cattle, but they weren't salable. They had been standing in water, and they were stressed."

The only money Brown requested was for White and the others who rounded up the cattle and hauled them to his place. His frustration still shows when he says he wasn't able to get what he wanted for the helpers.

"They'd work all night trucking them in, and these boys had their trucks in the water," he says.

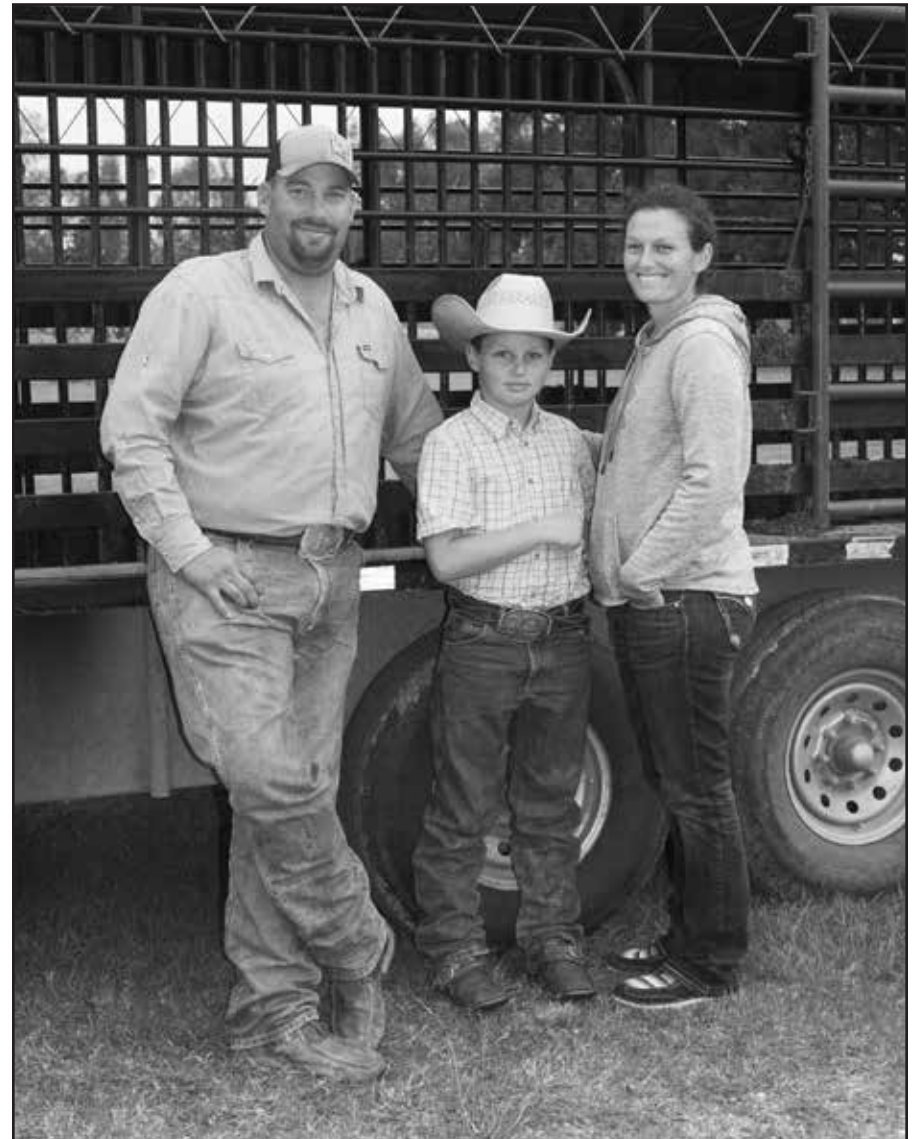
## Extended need

While most of the producers were able to come get their cattle after a couple of months so Brown could get his winter grazing planted, Marty Louviere still didn't have his pastures and fences ready.

**"The Lord was looking after somebody," he says.**

**"It hit at a time when I didn't have a lot of cattle on hand, and I had a lot grass I was going to roll."**

— Whip Brown



Jason, Jacob and Amanda White worked in the floodwater to help get other producers' cattle to safety when a flood hit Louisiana in 2016.



Prairieville, La., cattelman Whip Brown opened up his farm to cattle displaced by the flood of August 2016.



Amelia and Russell Kent's cattle were caught in the flooding in Louisiana.

(Continued on page 84)

**Look for the Helpers** *(continued from page 83)*

He had bought 15 registered Angus from Kentwood Angus breeder Chris Roussel, and is best friends with Roussel's manager, Geno Martin. Roussel and Martin stepped in, worked the cattle, and gave them a home for the three or four weeks it took for Louviere to get his own ranch ready.

When the flooding was at its worst,

**“The water was up to our necks.**

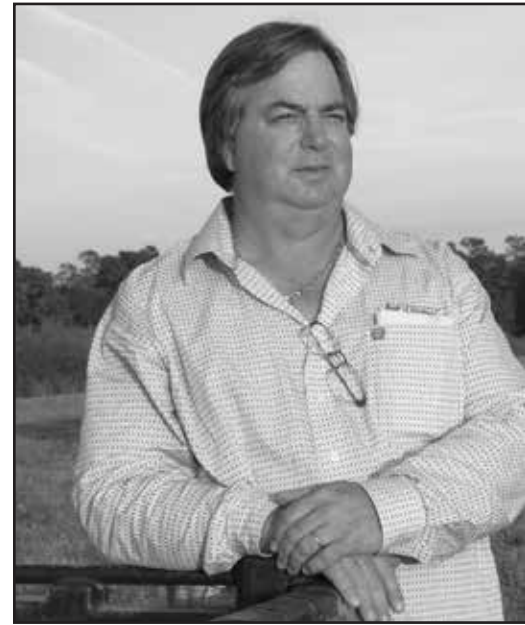
**I don't know how they lived.**

**It was horrible.”**

**— Shane Stephens**

Roussel also took a truckload of supplies to the Lamar Dixon facility in Gonzales, where people, horses and pets were sheltered. There he saw Vacherie Angus breeder Patti Hymel volunteering on the people side.

Compared to the help others gave, Roussel says, “Our story is small.” He



Geno Martin helped work his friend's cattle after they were hit by flooding.



Clinton, La., rancher Amelia Kent and her husband, Russell, were affected by the flooding in August of 2016. They still donated 150 round bales of hay the following year when other ranchers were hit by Hurricane Harvey.

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Angus breeder Chris Roussel opened up his ranch to another breeder whose cattle were displaced because of the flooding in August of 2016.



still shakes his head when he thinks about the flooding, and the help needed and given.

“In our little circle, there was such a magnitude of devastation,” he recalls.

Shane Stephens, in Saint Amant, got more than a taste of the devastation. In his case, there wasn't time to wait for help. He

ended up losing two cows, one bull and three calves from his small Angus-Brangus herd. Two were from broken legs and one was from bloat. He still doesn't know why he didn't lose more.

“The water was up to our necks. I don't know how they lived. It was horrible,” Stephens recalls.

**Value changes**

While he was able to get part of his cattle to higher ground, at the time he was mostly focused on saving his family.

“It caught us totally off guard when the water started coming over the highway,” Stephens says, recalling the day. “We never

*(Continued on page 86)*



Saint Amant, La., producer Shane Stephens lost part of his herd in the flood of August 2016. He still donated hay to ranchers hit by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.



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**Look for the Helpers** (continued from page 85)

dreamed it would come up that high.”  
 His dad was out of town, but he used a boat to rescue his mom and her dogs. He took them and a generator to his sister’s house.  
 Stephens ended up with 4 feet (ft.) of water in his house, and his parents had 5 ft. of water in theirs.

**“We opened the back door and water was past the bottom step. We were dumbfounded.”**  
 — Amelia Kent

“Things you thought were valuable to you can be taken away in a blink of an eye,” he says.

**Delayed shipment**  
 When the rains first started that Thursday, Amelia Kent and her husband, Russell, had no idea how close they would



Amelia and Russell Kent’s Bo helps keep an eye on their cattle operation.

come to disaster. Their main concern was shipping day, scheduled for Saturday the 13th. Three semis were on the way from Eastern Colorado to pick up the calf crop from their 350-cow Brangus-Braford-Angus crosses. Rancher friends were lined up to help gather the cattle, and they planned to reciprocate when it was their friends’ turn.

“Everybody has a day to ship,” Amelia comments. By Friday morning, they had already received 10 in. of rain, and the road to the scales was underwater. They rerouted the trucks.

Still, at that point, the Clinton producer says, it was just a heavy rain. “Friday night we were so bored from being inside we were playing with the dogs and their tennis balls,” she says. Then came the call from Bruce Harp, who lived 3 miles away.

“He said, ‘Y’all need to get out,’” Amelia recalls. The Comite River, a mile from their house, had overflowed the banks.

“We opened the back door and water was past the bottom step. We were dumbfounded,” she says.

Russell started moving their trucks to the paved road, just yards away. Thankfully their John Deere 7230 tractor was in the yard and Amelia used it to get their three dogs and cats, as well as herself, to the road. Harp came and took the tractor back to the house to get Russell. Their four horses were in danger, but their stock trailer was already underwater.

They went to get a neighbor’s stock trailer while more friends got their horses out of the pasture, which was chest deep in water. Russell, Amelia, their dogs, cats and horses all went to Danny Wilson’s, another one of their cowboy friends. They knew half of their cattle were out of the flood zone, but had no way of knowing the fate of the rest of them, or their neighbor’s cattle.

(Continued on page 88)

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**Look for the Helpers** (continued from page 86)

The Kents did know all 350 acres of their home place were underwater. Saturday morning they used a boat to find both herds were safe. They got word that their neighbor's cattle were also safe.

Sunday morning they had to hike in to see Wilson's cattle. They took their rifles, not knowing what they would find,

especially since his cattle were in the pasture adjacent to where the river broke through the bank.

"When we got there and they were OK, we cried," says Amelia.

As quickly as the water rose, it went down, 15 hours to be exact. When the Kents were able to take a complete

inventory, they found they did lose two cows, one to bloat and another to a lightning strike. The floors in their house were buckled, the calves lost 15-20 pounds (lb.) of pay weight to flood-related shrink, but they still considered themselves blessed.

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### Changing roles

After the flood, those who were on the receiving end of help turned into helpers. Amelia had actually started to pay it forward before the flood hit. In the spring of 2016, north and central Louisiana flooded. Ironically, Amelia, who is on the Louisiana Farm Bureau Livestock Advisory Committee, helped coordinate hay and trucking donations to ranchers in those areas.

### Be prepared

Although natural disasters can strike without warning, Louisiana extension veterinarian Christine Navarre says there are steps cattle producers can take to be prepared.

#### ● Think health.

"Follow our guidelines on herd health practices to make sure your cattle are healthy. They can handle stress better if they aren't thin or diseased," she says.

"Whether they are relocated on purpose or get out because fences are down, they can be exposed to other cattle."

#### ● Recordkeeping is a must.

"Make sure you have good records, and they are stored in an alternative location you can access from another place," Navarre continues. "Also, make sure they are identified. Ear tags can be cut out. Think about branding."

#### ● Have a plan.

"Figure out what the most likely disaster is in your area, whether it is a hurricane, flood, blizzard or wildfire. Figure out which cattle need to be moved, where, who is going to move them, and how they are going to be transported," she adds.



**Above:** Thankfully, the cattle at 12 Star Ranch were not affected by the flooding in August of 2016.

Thankfully, the Kents had enough hay in the barn they didn't need donations themselves when the August flood hit, but once again, Amelia helped coordinate and stage hay movement to those who did need it. Then, when Hurricane Harvey trounced in August 2017, the Kents sent 150 round bales of

hay to flooded southwest Louisiana.

Shane Stephens also found a way to give back after Hurricane Harvey. Despite barely being back in his flood-damaged home, Stephens and other ranchers took 400 square bales of hay, 30 round bales, and pallets of feed, water and horse supplies to Texas.

"I knew what it felt like," he says. Whip Brown says he still doesn't think he did anything special.

"I don't begrudge them anything," he says. "I just wanted to help people."

After spending days in the floodwater moving cattle to safety, Jason White simply says, "If I was in that situation, I

hope somebody would help me." It is a safe bet the helpers would come.



**Editor's Note:** Becky Mills is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Cuthbert, Ga.

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"Secure chemicals and anything toxic in a safe location so cattle can't get to them."

● **Plan for after the fact.**

If your cattle are hit by a disaster, Navarre says to try to keep their stress to a minimum. Then, make sure they have hay.

"Some people want to dump feed in front of them, but if they've been empty for awhile, that can cause digestive problems." She says if you don't have access to hay, try to find high-fiber range cubes.

"Fresh water is critical," she emphasizes.

● **Also, keep an eye on them.**

"When cattle are stressed, relocated and commingled, the two big concerns are respiratory disease and abortions, no matter what the disaster," she notes.

Other diseases and conditions are more situational, Navarre says. "With flooding, skin infections are a problem." With flooding or tornadoes and hurricanes, pastures can be filled with material of all kinds. She recommends walking through them if possible and picking up the debris as best you can to prevent hardware disease.

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