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APHIS to the Rescue

Lost in the midst of the larger story of mass evacuation of the Gulf Coast region in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) sent 50 veterinarians and wildlife experts to Mississippi and Louisiana to rescue household pets, zoo animals and livestock. Along the way, they rescued some 300 stranded citizens, as well.

Working with private-sector groups, APHIS employees helped to save some 10,000 animals in the aftermath of the flooding of New Orleans, and provided veterinary services at shelters where the animals are kept until their owners are located.

APHIS performed other animal rescue operations. It delivered fresh water and bales of hay to starving cattle. It assisted in the rescue of eight dolphins that were found swimming in the flooded streets of Biloxi, Miss., after their enclosure was destroyed during the hurricane. And finally, it rescued a group of mice from Tulane University that represented years of cancer research.

USDA provided water, food and temporary housing after the storm, and was gearing up to provide the same services in Texas as Hurricane Rita bore down on the Houston area on Thursday. The agency has pre-positioned supplies of food and beverages in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin and other cities to replenish reserve food supplies exhausted by evacuees from La. and Miss.

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