

NEWS COLUMN

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Cold Weather Stresses Livestock

Wintertime means cold temperatures and nothing is probably stressed more than livestock. This is especially true with gestating females. Extreme cold conditions over extended periods of time can cause problems in cows, ewes and sows.

It takes more feed to keep up with maintenance requirements in all classes of livestock during cold weather, however, extra attention is needed for pregnant females because as the saying goes, "they're eating for two," and with some cows, ewes and all sows they're eating for two to twelve or more.

If gestating females are not supplemented with extra amounts of energy during cold weather, weight loss, health problems and even abortion due to cold stress can occur.

Some tips to help relieve stress due to cold weather in your livestock this winter:

1. Keep them out of the wind. Make sure there is adequate protection for them from all directions.
2. Bedding is important. It reduces cold stress and has been proven in research trials to up profits by increasing gains and bettering feed efficiency. Bedding is also crucial in helping maintain healthy animals, especially true with hogs that are produced outside. Bedding is very important for boars, bulls and rams as frozen testicles can lead to infertility problems.
3. Supplemental grain. When temperatures drop below 15°F and consistently stay there, consider supplementing more energy. With cows and ewes this may mean shelled corn, rolled corn, ground ear corn or oats. Corn is higher in energy than most grains. Start out and increase slowly over time. Example: If you start a cow out at 2 lbs. on an as-fed basis per head per day of rolled corn, you may consider upping her 1/2 lb. every other day until you get to five to seven pounds. Ewes would be similar but in much smaller amounts. Start out at 1/2 lb. and increase by 1/4 lb. every second or third day until up to 2-2.5 lbs. Sows and gilts-one to two pounds more per head per day in cold weather.
4. Young stock. Ewe lambs, heifers and first litter gilts are still growing. This plus the requirements of carrying a fetus or litter to full term requires more feed. You may wish to separate these animals and feed away from the rest of the herd.
5. Females that are poorly conditioned should be given special attention. If they are thin, they are likely candidates for aborting or producing small, weak offspring and poor production the following cycle. Thin producing females need high quality feed and more of it.
6. Feed Quality. Quantity is important but quality is as vital. Stay away from moldy feedstuff. This is directly related to high incidence of abortion. Moldy type feeds are more easily and safely marketed through finishing livestock. Especially finishing cattle and hogs when blended at no more than 35% of the ration.
7. Forages. Good alfalfa hay is an excellent source of heat increment for sheep or cattle. In cold weather snaps, it helps to maintain body heat, especially in situations where adequate wind protection or supplemental feed is not available. Rank, stemmy forage is more easily fed and efficiently utilized if it is ground up. This also makes it available to then be implemented in a mixed ration.
8. Water. Though livestock consume less during cold weather, quality water that is consistently available is very important. Get in the habit of checking the water source on a regular basis. Automatic water systems are usually the first thing to freeze up in sub-zero conditions.
9. Pets. Pets should not be overlooked. They also need adequate nutrition, fresh water and protection. Insulated dog houses facing east or southeast are best. As long as pets are not subjected to the cold ground and drafts they are usually okay. Bedding such as straw or carpet will always make dogs and cats more comfortable in extreme outdoor winter conditions.