

NEWS COLUMN

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Pay Close Attention to Livestock and Pets during Heat

As we go through July, August and early September pay extra attention to animals both large and small for signs of heat stress. Keeping cool and comfortable during hot spells is easy and common for most people in today's modern world however, most animals are not as fortunate.

With the exception of horses other animals including cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, rabbits, dogs, cats, and poultry do not perspire and cannot regulate their body temperature in that manner. Any physical activity during hot and humid conditions makes it more difficult for animals to maintain normal body temperatures. When exposed to high levels of heat and humidity animal's body temperatures reach their peak in late afternoon and early evening hours.

Two important rules apply to all animals when the mercury rises which are reducing activity and checking animals often. All classes of animals share many of the following signs of heat stress which include panting, open mouth breathing, excessive salivation, rapid breathing rate, weakness, lack of coordination and in horses profuse sweating.

To aid animals in their heat stress provide shade in locations that are more conducive to available air flow. Make certain that a clean, plentiful water supply is available to all animals and that crowding stress around water supplies is minimized. When using sprinklers to reduce heat stress make sure large water droplets are being delivered onto the animals as light spray mists often times only contribute to the humidity level. In severe cases provide fans and individual care of animals as needed.

Much of what I have discussed is common sense and easily done. Don't get complacent however as animals can easily and quickly heat stress often resulting in death of individuals or groups in extreme cases. Still days with temperatures over 90° F in combination with high humidity levels should raise concern with anyone who owns or cares for any type of pet or species of livestock.

Heat stress is one condition that occurs almost every summer. Dark hided and heavier animals are at the highest risk and should be given pens with more airflow. If pens near shelterbelts with less airflow are utilized, stock them with lighter-weight, lighter colored cattle.

Avoid working, transporting or moving livestock during hot weather. If you do move animals, do so in the early morning hours. Cattle for instance are yet getting rid of their body heat during the evening hours.

Adding supplemental water sources for livestock is also a helpful management consideration. This step often reduces overcrowding and allows animals to consume more water at a faster rate.

When monitoring animals start early in the day, well before the noon hour. By the time high temperatures are reached, it will be difficult to cool animals down adequately.