

February, 2011

For additional information:

*Contact your local County
Extension Office*

Cold Weather Livestock Stewardship

Rick Machen, PhD.

Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, Uvalde

Unusually Cold Temperatures Blast Across Texas

February 2, 2011— Stockmen in Texas are not accustomed to sub-zero wind chills and neither are their livestock. A fifty degree temperature change in less than 24 hours is difficult to prepare for.

A dry fall and early winter across much of Texas has reduced both forage quantity and quality and in some cases has exhausted surface water resources. As a result, stockmen need to go the extra mile while caring for livestock.

Primary consideration should be given to the livestock at greatest risk—the old, newborns and those in thin condition. With their winter haircoat and shelter from the north wind, most livestock can fare well. However, a wet haircoat provides little insulation against the cold. Animals in thin flesh

and newborns have minimal fat [insulation] under their skin and are especially vulnerable. Move livestock to easily accessible pastures that contain shelter from the wind (and precipitation if possible).

Adequate water intake is essential for survival during these times. Break and remove ice from troughs, allowing refilling with relatively warm water. If warranted, call livestock to fresh water with feed or hay.

If forage is in short supply or covered with snow/ice, provide enough hay for cattle, sheep and goats to eat their fill at least once a day. Forage digestion will generate heat, so if possible, feed livestock in the late afternoon to take advantage of this 'internal heat' during the colder nighttime temperatures.

Colic is a winter health concern for horse owners. Grazing horses are less susceptible than those kept in stalls. Feed extra long stem hay. Where feasible, possible, feed twice daily.

Adult horses will drink 10+ gallons of water daily. Maintaining water intake is a critical component of colic avoidance and essential for proper digestive function. Exercise is also beneficial, whether it's a romp around the outside paddock or a 30 minute walk inside the barn.



Special points of interest:

- Old, young and thin animals are at greatest risk of hypothermia.
- A wet haircoat provides little insulation against the cold.
- Cold temperatures reduce water consumption
- Frigid drinking water reduces water consumption.
- Restricted water consumption results in reduced feed intake.
- If forage availability is limited, provide hay for cattle, sheep, goats and horses.
- Maintain water sources for wildlife use.

Don't Forget the Wildlife

Winter blizzards bring more than bone chilling temperatures. For livestock and wildlife stewards, the cold ushers in additional chores.

Like their domestic counterparts, songbirds, game birds, deer and other wildlife need food and water daily. A dry fall

and winter has reduced the quantity and quality of food/forage available for wildlife and dried up some water sources..

So while you're out there tending to livestock, keep the ice broken and put out a little extra feed for the wild critters...

