**Protect Animals from the Cold**

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**Extension @ Your Service**

**Even though December has been unseasonably warm, January nights have reminded us that spring weather is not yet here. It’s important to remember your pets and livestock when temperatures get to freezing and below.** You need to provide adequate shelter against the wind, thick bedding, enough feed, and non frozen water. Most animals do fine living outside during the winter months. As long as they are healthy and are provided all the proper resources, they can easily ride out a bad winter that has us humans bundling up.

Most animals don’t need to be blanketed, although waterproof/breathable blankets can help protect against driving wind and rain. However, things can lurk under a blanket that can create a problem if not detected early. A bacterial skin disease, such as rain rot, can occur if a horse with thick hair is repeatedly sweating and then drying under a blanket. Changes in body condition, such as an animal that is losing weight rapidly, can also be missed if the blanket isn’t removed frequently to check. Cold temperatures alone don’t generally make pets or livestock uncomfortable, but wind and moisture can be difficult for them to tolerate, so they must be able to get out of the elements. The best solution is a shelter that is big enough to allow all of the animals in that field or area to safely get out of the weather. One animal with a very dominant personality that won’t allow more submissive types into the barn could be a problem. Pet owners need to make changes based on the individual personalities to make sure all animals can get in the shelter.

Animals use up a lot more of their nutrients trying to keep warm in the winter than they do any other time of year. High-quality forage or hay should be the basis of any livestock winter diet, especially for animals that are turned out of the barn on a regular basis. The way animals digest, creates heat. Hay is fermented in the hindgut, and that fermentation gives off a long-lasting heat. Animals use that heat to maintain their core body temperature. We have a forage probe in our office if you would like to get your hay tested for $10 to check for quality. Older animals or those with teeth problems that cannot eat hay very well need to receive nutrients more frequently in a form that they can use, such as senior feeds.

People often like to drink a nice cup of hot tea or coffee to warm them up on cold days, but it doesn't work that way for our livestock. Hot food, such as a warm bran mash, might temporarily knock the chill off, but it won't help them to stay warm throughout the night. Grain helps animals to keep warm, but it breaks down easier and therefore keeps animals warm for a shorter time in comparison to hay and forage.

**Animals need water, not ice or snow!** They need to have enough water for the digestion process to work correctly. One of the major causes for colic in the winter for horses is impaction caused by inadequate water intake. There are a few easy solutions to that problem: heated water tubs and non-freezing automatic watering systems. For outside animals, it may be well worth the expense to run electricity to the fields for these devices to ensure a constant source of fresh water. With a few preparations before the cold weather hits us hard, you can prevent unnecessary death in your livestock herd, increase the productivity of your operation, and keep your pets safe.