

# **TIPS TO PROTECT LIVESTOCK DURING EXTREME WINTER WEATHER**

Although most livestock animals are well adapted to cold weather, severe wind and cold can cause significant problems for livestock and their owners. Under extreme winter storm conditions, simple shelters alone may not be effective in protecting livestock. The following is a list of recommendations for livestock owners and caretakers to protect their animals during extreme cold:

- ✓ Having abundant and accessible feed will help animals maintain body temperature and survive cold temperatures.
- ✓ Make sure stored winter feed is of good nutrient quality for the type of livestock you are feeding.
- ✓ Rations of hay/forage/feed must be increased in order for livestock to maintain body temperature. Some cold and wet weather fronts may result in a 100 percent increase in energy requirements to help animals maintain normal body temperature and function. The nutritional needs of gestating livestock increase during cold temperatures. Failing to meet these needs may result in stunted animals, poor milk production and weak or dead fetuses.
- ✓ Animals' water consumption increases because of elevated metabolic rates necessary to maintain warmth. Don't assume livestock can meet their water needs by eating snow or licking ice. Make sure water is clean, free of ice, and in adequate supply. Make sure you have portable watering equipment or a way to maintain water for your livestock in case of extreme cold and ice.
- ✓ If possible, shelter animals indoors during extreme weather events and storms.
- ✓ Increased time spent indoors will increase the amount of soiled bedding material needing removal. Keep bedding as dry and clean as possible in order to avoid increased ammonia fumes which can irritate the respiratory lining of livestock thereby increasing susceptibility to pneumonia causing bacteria and viruses.
- ✓ Shelter animals from the wind. Trees, land windbreaks, other natural weather barriers and constructed shelters will assist in blocking winds. These protected areas should provide all animals enough space to lie down safely without being trampled or smothered. Evergreen trees such as fir, pine, and juniper are effective types of trees for windbreaks. Trees without leaves during winter are relatively ineffective windbreaks.
- ✓ Consider where snow will drift under different wind conditions and plan how to clear gates, shelter openings, barn doors, and roads when snow begins to accumulate.
- ✓ The time livestock spend in muddy pens and areas should be limited to avoid the development of foot problems and injuries incurred while moving across slippery ground. Stay alert to problem areas and resolve future problems with the use of geotextiles, gravel, tiles, gutters, sand or woodchips.
- ✓ Extremities that become wet or are normally damp are particularly subject to frostbite and freezing during sub-zero weather. Livestock may lose or have damaged ears and/or tails. Male livestock may suffer cold damage to reproductive organs, which can impair fertility or the animal's ability to breed.
- ✓ During cold, driving rains or freezing rain, animals should be monitored often. Shivering animals should be brought inside, if possible, to warm up. Be cautious; a sudden significant change in temperature can lead to respiratory problems, including pneumonia.
- ✓ Blankets can be used on individual animals. However, the animal's coat as well as the blanket material touching the animal's coat must remain dry. Change as necessary.
- ✓ Small animals such as rabbits and poultry as well as very young and old livestock may need supplemental heat and/or protection. Monitor their status often.
- ✓ Stay alert: young/smaller animals are more at risk to cold temperatures and are at greater risk of becoming buried by snow.
- ✓ Care for young animals first, since they are more vulnerable than larger animals.
- ✓ Make sure animals are in good body condition and vaccinated. Livestock that are larger and in good body condition can handle winter weather and extreme conditions better than smaller or weaker animals.

Livestock owners should check with their veterinarian, county agriculture extension agent, or the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Health at 609-671-6400 for additional information and assistance.