



Protecting Farm Animals in Extreme Winter Weather



Large death tolls in recent years have shown just how vulnerable farm animals—in particular, outdoor-raised cattle, sheep, and goats—can be to the extreme cold, wind, and snow that accompany brutal winters in parts of the United States. The winter of 2018 claimed the lives of more than 37,000 cattle across Montana, and one blizzard in South Dakota in 2013 resulted in the death of up to 100,000 cattle.

Incidents such as these highlight just how important it is for farmers and ranchers to take necessary precautions to protect their animals from cold-weather-related injuries and illnesses prior to forecasted extreme winter weather conditions.

When subjected to extremely cold conditions, farm animals can suffer from hypothermia and frostbite, and may be vulnerable to other illness as a result of a weakened immune system. Newborns and younger animals, as well as animals with pre-existing conditions, are especially vulnerable to hypothermia because their bodies have lower energy reserves that prevent them from producing enough body heat.

The Animal Welfare Institute offers the following tips for protecting farm animals during extreme winter conditions:

- Ensure animals are in good body condition heading into the winter season so they can better handle low temperatures or other extreme winter conditions.
- Animals will need extra energy to maintain their body temperature, so plan to provide them with extra feed that is of good nutrient quality. Be prepared in case power outages or cold weather impact mechanized feeders.
- In cooler weather, younger animals in particular must burn more energy to maintain body temperature. It is important, therefore, to provide them with extra feed as the weather begins to cool, not just during extremely cold conditions.



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- Monitor water sources to ensure water is accessible, clean, and free of ice to prevent dehydration.
- When possible, provide shelter or move animals into indoor facilities that have adequate space for all animals and proper ventilation to help prevent respiratory diseases.
- Provide bedding in order to insulate the animals from snow and ice underneath their bodies; routinely change bedding to protect animals from wet conditions and help prevent hypothermia and frostbite.
- When indoor housing is not an option, ensure there are adequate barriers to protect animals from the wind, including land windbreaks, trees, overhangs, or other natural or constructed barriers.
- Continually monitor for cold-related illnesses and injuries, including inflammation and/or swelling around the ears, tail, teats, and male reproductive organs, which are signs of frostbite. Pay particular attention to vulnerable animals, including those that are younger and smaller.
- If signs of frostbite are observed, wrap the affected areas in warm towels or blankets and provide an additional heat source for the animal, keeping in mind potential fire hazards. Contact your local veterinarian for further advice on how to treat these conditions should you begin to see signs of cold-related illnesses and injuries.
- Animals should not be transported in extreme cold and windy conditions unless absolutely necessary. If transporting is necessary, avoid stopping en route, and deliver animals to their destination as quickly as possible. Use dry bedding and close bottom slats on the transport vehicle, being sure to still allow adequate ventilation.