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Wilson County Agricultural Article from Ruth Correll, Agricultural Extension Agent

Cold, Wet, Snowy, Muddy, Windy Conditions Increases Care for Livestock

Who could possibly conceive that Middle Tennessee weather could be so impacted by a weather pattern in Siberia…the opposite side of the globe the last time I checked? But the meteorologists say our current weather pattern, started in Siberia, is coming across the Arctic and is being channeled down to us. Wow! Right now we all need additional warmth, nutrition and shelter to stay healthy and warm. So does our livestock.

The following information is directed toward cattle producers, but also applies to horses, sheep and goats. Cold weather and mud can be very stressful on livestock. Livestock need good quality forage (hay), free choice. Hay provides them with the ability to stay warm. They need water, free choice. Make sure they have access to water that is not frozen. They need shelter or a place to get out of a cold rain, sleet, snow and/or wind if they choose.

Cold Weather Can Be Stressful On Cattle

Cold weather can have a drastic impact on the performance of cows and calves. Understanding how cattle deal with cold will help us understand how to bring cattle through without losing performance or wasting resources.

The lower critical temperature is the point where cattle begin to experience cold stress. In an ideal environment, that temperature is 32°F. But, other factors such as wind and rain make a higher air temperature seem colder to cattle. A 10 mile per hour wind can create cold stress even when the air temperature is 40°F and the cattle have a dry winter hair coat.

The most logical way to combat cold stress is to provide shelter from wind and precipitation. Building new wind breaks and shelters is likely cost-prohibitive. Planning pasture rotation so that cattle are in areas with shelter during winter months is often a better idea. If cattle are not able to avoid cold stress by seeking shelter, their metabolic rate will increase because the heat from normal body function is not adequate to maintain their core body temperature.

When cattle are cold stressed, they need to eat more just to stay warm. Energy intake requirements can increase up to 20%. That can translate into 3.5 to 4 extra pounds of hay intake or 2 to 2.5 extra pounds of supplement. Feed your best hay during periods of cold weather stress. If the hay is less than good quality, they may need a protein supplement to be able to utilize the lower quality hay.

It is also very important to keep water available because decreased water intake can reduce feed intake. Be sure to break ice in waterers and on ponds so cattle have access at all times.
pating the increased nutritional need from prolonged cold stress can provide some flexibility. It is a good
idea to maintain cows in a body condition score 5 and heifers in a body condition score 6 so that they
have energy reserves to draw from if nutrition is lacking.

Mud also has an effect on nutrient requirements of cattle. The relationship to how much more
feed is required is less clear but some have estimated an increase in maintenance requirements of up to
30%. So, rotating feeding areas or improving rations for cattle that constantly have to deal with mud can
improve performance.

For herds that calve late into the winter months, it will be important to keep an eye on calve
born in extremely cold weather. Especially when it is wet and muddy (the ground has not frozen yet). If
calves are dropped in mud or water, they can experience fatal cold stress very quickly. Even if calves are
not lost to cold stress, it can negatively affect their immune system. Make sure that they have colostrum
in the first 12 hours after calving. Again, make sure that younger cattle have some type of shelter from
driving wind.

Agricultural Market Summary
Cattle Market Trends
Cold weather limited cattle market activity in Tennessee during the past week. Despite the frozen tun-
дра that prevails throughout much of the major cattle producing areas, stocker demand for the most
part was very good this week. Feeder steers $1.00 to $10.00 higher, $171.00-$410.00. Feeder heifers
$5.00 to $8.00 higher, $146.00-$325.00. Slaughter cows $3.00 to $4.00 higher, $70.00-$127.00. Slaugh-
ter bulls $3.00 to $5.00 higher, $114.00-$137.00.

Grain Market Trends
Cold weather limited grain market activity in Tennessee during the past week. Nationally, corn, soy-
beans and wheat were down for the week. Corn – Cash price, $3.78-$4.16. Soybeans – Cash price,
$9.59-$10.19. Wheat – Cash price, $4.63-$5.44

For additional information on these and other topics, contact the UT Extension Office, 925 East Baddour
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