

PREPARING FOR WINTER

Even though we would like to think winter is far away, every day we get closer to the temperature dropping and snow falling. As the weather gradually changes, and summer begins to come to an end, and our livestock's needs increase. Below, we will discuss the different preparations that need to be conducted to ensure that our livestock survive the winter.

LONG- RANGE PREPARATIONS

We should start preparing for winter several months before cold temperatures start. This early preparation allows us time to fix equipment, build shelter, and gather our needed feed, forage, and supplies. The amount of time and preparation depends on the location, size, and set-up of your farm. Due to the fluctuation of winter weather in Western North Carolina, we need to prepare for the worst. Preparing for the worst allows us to have plenty of feed and supplies to get our animals through the weather we undergo. Since this year has been an interesting hay year, I would suggest that you acquire a sufficient hay supply. In addition, I would suggest the list below.

- Purchase and properly store adequate amount of quality forage
- Build or repair shelter
- Purchase and/or check/repair hay ring
- Purchase and/or check/repair water trough and heater
- Prepare winter fields
- Check fence, shelter, or make shelter

SHORT RANGE PREPARATIONS

WATER: Without adequate water, livestock's digestive systems are unable to properly function. Therefore, they do not properly receive the nutrients they need from the feed and forages we give. In order to ensure that livestock receive the appropriate amount of water, we must make sure that the water source is clean, unfrozen, and plentiful. Livestock's water needs increase during winter and different stages of life. If livestock do not meet their requirements for water intake, they will decrease their feed and forage intake. This results in weight loss and therefore, loss in profit.

FEED: Feed supplementation is in high need during the winter months. The forage that is available in winter is lower in nutrition because it has gone into dormancy or has been sun-cured (Hay). To make up for the loss of nutrients during this time, we must supply the livestock with

supplemental feed and minerals. An animal's nutrition is extremely important in its growth and production. Without proper nutrition, the animal will not properly perform. Ideally, we want livestock to be at the same body condition score year-round, which requires our livestock to have access to adequate nutrients at all times. To do this, we want to supply animals with unlimited access to good quality forage and minerals.

FORAGES: Forages are important because they contain a large quantity of minerals and vitamins that livestock need. You want forage to be high quality, so that the forage contains the most nutrients. There are several factors that degrade good quality hay. Some factors include sun bleached hay, wet hay, weedy hay, and weathered hay. These factors take away the nutrients that are within the hay. When those nutrients are depleted, the hay is no longer of acceptable quality. If forage requirements are not met, your animal will not be able to properly digest the feed and other nutrients given to them.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS: The additional vitamins and minerals that are not supplied in forage need to be supplied through a free choice mineral mix. These mixes are already pre-mixed, but will need to be put in a proper container, so that livestock may have free access to the mix at all times. The free choice loose mineral mixes are best for some livestock because they allow the animals to easily consume all they need. Some blocks and tubs do not allow the livestock to receive enough minerals. Cattle and other small ruminants do well with loose minerals, while horses may do better with a block. Please be mindful of the minerals you are buying and make sure that they are approved for your livestock. Ideally, you should have the mineral mixes out year-round to meet the needs of your animal, but just be mindful that the needs of those mineral requirements do increase in winter and different stages of life. Because of this you need to keep the mineral feeders full at all times, so the animals can consume what they need. Animals are typically good judges of consuming how much mineral they need.

PROTEIN AND ENERGY: The protein and energy requirements for animals increase in the winter months due to the low temperatures and lack of green forage. With this said, we must supplement livestock with some sort of energy and protein source. This can be found in pre-mixed rations. The type and amount of feed that needs to be given is determined by the type, size, age, and stage of production the animal is in. Be sure that when supplying the feed, all animals have access. Take actions to ensure that the smaller, younger, and older animals are not cast out and away from the feed. It may be a good idea to supply an unlimited amount of feed in the form of a creep feeder for some young and growing livestock such as calves or kids. This allows the young to have all the nutrients they need, so they can grow appropriately.

PREPARATIONS FOR STORMS: It is always wise to prepare for the worst storms. We must take all speculations and possibilities into consideration when we hear there is a storm coming. It is suggested that you make sure you have a considerable amount of feed and forage ready in case the storm is larger or longer than anticipated. If possible, you should also prepare an alternate field and shelter for the livestock, in case their pasture is inaccessible. It is a good precaution to have excess medical supplies and equipment ready if your livestock happens to be injured or

delivered during a bad storm. A good rule of thumb is to think of any possible situation that may occur, and prepare for that. Also, don't hesitate to ask for help. Ask your neighbor or other personnel to aid you in their care, if a situation were to occur where you are unable to access your animals and they need attention.

For more information on preparing livestock for winter, please contact Michelle South, Extension Agent-Livestock, at 828-733-8270 or by email at michelle_south@ncsu.edu.