

Most cats and dogs have a warm house to sleep in, but how do farm/large animals stay warm in the winter?

Those of us with household pets know that they do not hesitate to curl up in front of the fireplace in the winter time. This would be a difficult strategy for a horse, cow, llama, etc. Most large animals live outside or in barns, thus we have to ensure their “house” is comfortable in the winter months. The animals can do their part by producing heat through metabolic processes and growing a fuzzy outside layer of hair.

Facility: Shelters and barns should prevent drafts of frigid February air but still allow for good ventilation. Various technologies can help prevent having to chip away at frozen grain or the iceberg floating in the water trough. Heated waterers and storing grains/feeds in an insulated/heated room will help ensure water and feed are available at all times. This is especially important because animals will need more energy to stay warm. Some large barns have automatic curtain systems that open and close based on the outside environment.

What you can provide:

- Blankets – You will often see horses and baby calves sporting a winter jacket.
- More/higher energy feed – They will need more energy to stay warm. The process of digestion produces body heat so it is important to always have feed access.
- More bedding – This provides a place to snuggle into.

Vacation: This is financially unrealistic for many, but some show horses spend the winter down south in Florida. Snow birds!

Exercise: Livestock still need to stretch their legs in the winter! Make sure walkways and pastures are clear of ice and too much snow.

Follow these links for more about winter livestock management:

- <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfn/w08livestock>
- <https://iowaagliteracy.wordpress.com/2015/02/02/what-do-farmers-do-in-the-winter/>
- <http://www.extension.umn.edu/agriculture/horse/care/equine-winter-care/>

By Alyssa Couse, Agricultural Outreach Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County

January 7, 2017