



Frozen Waterers—Good for Hockey, Not for Livestock

By Ron Kuck, Dairy and Livestock Educator

No matter what your livestock of choice is animals burn more calories to keep warm during extreme cold. The facts are they can consume 30-50% more feed just to stay warm. Producers need enough hay and feed on hand during a winter cold blast and that means livestock producers need to be paying extra attention to the drinking water needs of their animals. Limited water intake depresses animal performance and well-being quicker and more drastically than any other feed stuff. Yes, water is your most important source of nutrients.

The necessity of a clean and reliable year-round source of water cannot be overemphasized. Frozen water sources and improperly functioning automatic waterers are major contributors to limiting water intake. Rookies often mistakenly believe that animals can meet water requirements by eating snow or licking ice. With daily water requirements varying from three gallons (sheep) to 14 gallons (cattle), one can see that livestock would need to spend every waking hour eating snow to meet their requirements. Ice and snow consumption also lowers body temperature and increases maintenance energy needs, so it should be discouraged.



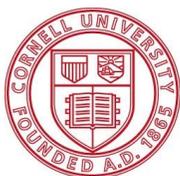
Consider Beef, Sheep and Goats. We know that dairy cows given free access to water will produce more milk than cows on a restricted drinking schedule. It is logical to suggest that other ruminants will respond in a similar manner. Keeping open water available may result in bigger weaning weights, higher average daily gain, and healthier dams and their calves, lambs and kids. Chopping ice twice per day should be looked upon as an investment, not an unhappy chore. Remember, the days when you most want to stay by the wood stove are the days it pays the most to keep your waterers free from icing over.

Although horses are not technically classified as livestock, it is important to note the most common wintertime cause of colic in horses is limiting opportunity for water consumption. Horse owners and managers need to be aware that equines are reluctant to drink ice cold water. You might want to provide warm water or tap water from the house if possible. When water intake is decreased, your horse has an increased chance that its intestines may become impacted and colic can then occur.

In the winter, chickens will expend extra calories staying warm so give them an added ration of cracked corn or scratch grains. Adequate and available water allows them to eat more grain. Also, if your hens free range in the summer and eat lots of bugs (protein), be aware that their diet changes in the winter. Make sure you're feeding them high-quality laying or broiler grain because now all of their nutrition comes from you.

Water consumption is higher when the water's temperature is 37°F or above. Tank heaters may be required to ensure that water sources do not freeze. Be sure to follow manufacturers' recommendations to prevent fires and electric shocks or electrocution of livestock. If heaters are not used, unfrozen water should be provided several times a day. Ensuring adequate water intake will encourage optimal health and performance of livestock and help prevent serious conditions such as colic, impaction, and even starvation.

It is far less stressful on both the animal and owner to just assure adequate and continuous water intake. Remember, give 5% of your time to keeping your animals well. You then won't have to give 100% of your time when they're ill.



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