

It seems winter has arrived in the North Country; how do livestock do in the cold?

It is a natural reaction to assume that animals are feeling just as cold as people in the frigid winter temperatures. In reality, the cooler air actually is ideal for livestock, especially ruminants. Cows, deer, goats, sheep, llamas, and alpacas are examples of ruminants you may encounter in Jefferson County. A ruminant is an animal that has multiple compartments to the stomach and regurgitates, or spits up, it's cud from the rumen to be re-chewed for further digestion. Due to this digestive process, ruminants produce extra body heat. These animals prefer temperatures below 65 °F, and even the 20-40 ° range. So if you see cattle standing outside in the snow, don't worry, they are actually enjoying themselves.

Horses handle the cold differently than ruminants. Since their bodies do not produce as much heat, they have other natural defenses to the chill of winter. Primarily, horses will grow a winter coat all over their bodies...even their ears get fluffier! They will also require more hay to fuel the heightened energy requirements for keeping warm. Horse owners will also put blankets on their horses as extra insulation and to keep their coats dry. They are made of the same materials as your parka!

More concern should actually be how livestock feel during the humid summer months. In order to minimize heat stress, many farms have THI, or Temperature Humidity Index, sensors in the barns to ensure that as soon as levels reach above 65°F, cooling measures will be activated. These include large fans and even sprinklers to help cool the livestock via evaporative cooling. Ensuring that plenty of fresh drinking water and shade is provided is crucial in every season.

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