

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN
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THE MOST IMPORTANT NUTRIENT FOR WINTERING LIVESTOCK

When temperatures in Kansas are on the decline, livestock producers begin focusing on delivering forage to their animals. We often focus on protein and energy sources for the winter months, ensuring proper nutrition for each class of livestock (growth, gestation, lactation, maintenance). However, winter is no time to discount the importance of water when caring for our animals. Water is the cheapest and most important nutrient to all living things.

Ensuring that your herd has adequate access to water is essential to their health. All animals require water to meet their physiological functions. Water transport compounds through the blood to regulate temperature and maintain the cellular structural integrity of the body. Livestock meet those needs by drinking water. But, battling frozen tanks and buckets can be a challenge. Utilizing tank heaters, heated buckets or automatic waterers helps to ensure that water is kept ice-free and at a temperature the animal is comfortable drinking.

It's important to consider the how much water is required by each class of animal when considering winter watering options. Several factors affect an animal's water intake including animal specie, environmental temperature, dry matter intake, body size and class of production. Mature cattle will drink 1 gallon of water for every 100 pounds of body weight. Lactating cows will drink more.

It's important to have free-flowing water available to livestock at all times. While winter's freezing temperatures are a challenge, there are tools and options to make providing this nutrient easier. Utilizing tank heaters, heated buckets or automatic waterers helps to ensure that water is kept ice-free and at a temperature the animal is comfortable drinking. When using an option that utilizes electricity, be sure to check the water with a voltmeter to ensure there is no electric current running through the water. This should be checked often for the safety of your livestock. Additional watering options include frost free waterers, solar powered devices, heaters or air stones are other options for keeping water open. Some of these options do require a monetary investment, but the investment may be worth your time and headache in the end if you don't have to break ice throughout the day.

Water quality is also important. Regardless of the device used for watering livestock, it should be cleaned regularly. Hay, saliva and dirt can get into waterers throughout the year. If a water source is being fed by a private well, test the well every other year. Water test kits are available from the Extension Office.

For more information livestock and agriculture in Cowley County, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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