WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN
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TIPS TO HELP LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS WEATHER THE STORM

Warmer than normal temperatures in January may have lured us into a false sense of security when caring for livestock this winter. This week, seems Mother Nature agrees with Punxsutawney Phil we need more winter. Cold temperatures are already upon us with a forecast of even colder temps with negative windchills coming up. Livestock producers don't have the luxury of taking a "snow day". Their job is to weather the storm, making sure livestock are taken care of.

Cattle are designed to withstand all sorts of temperature and weather changes if they are given proper nutrition, body insulation and windbreaks. As temperatures and weather conditions decline and cows are subjected to cold stress, their nutritional needs change. Cold stress increases maintenance energy requirements, but does not affect protein, mineral or vitamin requirements. Cattle use energy to maintain their body temperature at a threshold that's called Lower Critical Temperature (LCT). LCT is affected by weather conditions as well as animal factors, like body condition score (BCS) and hair coat. Cattle with a lighter hair coat, that are subjected to wet or windy conditions will have a higher LCT, meaning they experience cold stress at a higher ambient temperature. If there's been enough time for cattle to develop a sufficient winter coat, the LCT for an animal in dry conditions is estimated to range from 18-20 degrees Fahrenheit.

What can producers do to care for their cows in the cold?

First, maintain feed intake by managing water intake. When livestock drink less water, dry matter intake (grazing) decreases. In winter, livestock need more energy to maintain body temperature as well as other additional functions (gestation, lactation). When they consume less forage, they fail to meet their energy needs and begin to lose body condition.

Protection from the wind is obvious as windchill worsens the stress of winter conditions, especially when moisture is involved. Animals with no access to shelter from wind require a 30% increase in feed per day compared to animals with access to shelter. By providing wind protection, producers can decrease the amount of energy needed from feed.

Completely changing feed rations isn't advised, but a ration may be tweaked to help meet the needs of livestock. Exposure to cold stress results in an increased energy requirement, not an increased protein requirement. A producer may increase the amount of the ration that is currently being fed to meet energy needs during periods of cold stress. The general rule of thumb is to increase energy density of the ration by 1% for each degree Fahrenheit below the LCT. Be careful to ensure that you are not just supplementing and oversupplying protein and while continuing to limit energy. Offering a higher quality hay and/or a small amount of grain or

by-products in addition to the current protein supplementation may be all that's needed. Focus on digestibility and energy levels. Circumstances, forage and supplements will vary.

Cold weather is stressful for cattlemen and cattle. Planning ahead and evaluating management can go a long way to reducing risk during this time.

For more information about Extension programming, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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