

## **Weekly Ag Report**

David Lile, Cooperative Extension

December 26, 2012

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays everyone. This is David Lile with the Ag Report.

Well, the cold winter weather has arrived for sure and most folks know that when the weather gets cold an animal's energy requirement increases and this applies to all types of livestock as well as companion animals that are kept outside.

But let's think about some of the specific factors involved... the first thing that comes to mind in addition to temperature is wind. The combination of cold and wind or wind chill factor can really increase the cold stress in livestock. Another factor that compounds cold stress is when conditions are also wet and muddy. So dry bedding or well-drained ground and shelter from the wind can make a big difference.

Also, not all animals can adapt to cold weather equally... for example thin cows in poorer body condition are generally more affected than cows in good condition, and similarly young animals may be more affected than mature ones.

Providing extra feed during cold weather is very common. Roughages like hay provide more heat for cattle and horses during digestion than do grains like oats and barley. Many ranches simply increase the amount of hay fed during cold weather. And that usually works fine, but that hay does need to be of good quality and be highly digestible. There is a limit to the amount of low quality roughage that cattle can digest, so just giving them more of the same of something like rice straw or corn stalks won't help. To meet increased energy requirements lower quality feeds need to be blended with something better such as grain supplement, high quality alfalfa, or a combination of the two.

Some other tips to consider ...if you feed only once per day, consider making it the afternoon rather than morning. Heat produced from digestion usually peaks about 6 hours after feeding so by feeding in the late afternoon that peak period will coincide with the coldest night time temperatures. Also when we get closer to calving time, remember that cows fed late in the afternoon tend to have fewer calves at night than those fed in the morning. That said, we don't want make any sudden changes to feeding schedule.

Also we don't want to skimp on water supply which is just as important during cold weather as during hot. If water intake is limited there is no way animals are going to be able to consume extra feed. Think of it this way - how much shredded wheat cereal could you eat without milk or at least something to drink! Keeping water available can be challenging during really cold weather but is absolutely essential for the well-being of livestock. That's all our time for this week, but as always if you have any ag-related questions, don't hesitate to give us a call at UC Cooperative extension office at 251-8133.