

South Dakota Rancher[®]

Management tips for South Dakota livestock and grassland managers

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Keeping Calves Healthy Following the Blizzard

Last week's blizzard wreaked havoc over significant sections of central and eastern South Dakota. Twelve to 18 inches of snow with high winds is not a good combination for previously unstressed calves waiting to be shipped or put on winter feed rations.

Several areas of central South Dakota and north central Nebraska have reported problems with sick and dying calves in the aftermath of the storm. Problems with pneumonia and other respiratory infections in calves have become prevalent in some herds as nighttime temperatures have remained well below zero across the state.



Photo: Simone Holt, SDSU

To protect calves from the onset of respiratory problems, it is advisable to keep livestock dry and out of the wind as best as possible. Although many herds remain out on winter range and pasture with little protection from the wind, moving livestock

into protected areas as soon as possible may reduce potential problems.

Colder temperatures also raise nutrient requirements of both cows and calves. Extra, high quality feed may be necessary to help livestock maintain their core body temperatures and keep the immune system functioning properly.

Calves that are showing signs of respiratory problems should be treated with CTC crumbles at a rate of 4 g/hd/day for 4 days. If further treatment is necessary, 2 g/hd/day for an additional 2 to 4 days may increase efficacy. Continually feeding antibiotic to calves to prevent respiratory problems is discouraged as resistance can become a problem.

Another problem likely to arise following the winter storm stress is bloody scours as a result of coccidiosis. Bovatec[®] and Deccox[®] are examples of feed additives that are effective against the pathogenic bovine coccidia. Deccox[®] however, also can be used as treatment to reduce the effects of an acute outbreak. The clinically-affected animals should be treated with sulfa drugs, and then the coexistent cattle should receive Deccox[®] to prevent further cycling of the oocysts. Contact your veterinarian for additional treatment recommendations.

Another concern producers may be experiencing is water availability for livestock as a result of freezing temperatures, no electric service, or both. After a short adjustment period, cows will consume adequate amounts of snow to meet water requirements. Eating snow is a learned behavior rather than instinct, therefore an adjustment period is needed for the cows to learn how to eat snow.

Generally, it takes 3 days for cows to adapt to eating snow.

Cattle do well when snow is their only water source, **as long as there is adequate snow present, and it is not hard or crusted over.** It is important to monitor cow and snow condition on a daily or second day basis. A lack of water reduces feed intake, and cows can lose condition fairly rapidly when water is deficient. Studies in Canada have shown some cows have gone 50 to 60 days with snow as the sole water source without any adverse effects.

However, if erratic weather continues, and if snow hardens and crusts over due to drifting, rain, or thaw/freezing with the warmer temperatures expected this weekend, animals will need to be provided with an alternative source of water. Substituting snow for water is not a cure-all, but it can buy us some time until the power is turned back on.

Note: Dick Pruitt, SDSU Professor of Cow-calf Management and Russ Daly, SDSU Extension Veterinarian contributed to this article. Portions of this article were adapted from an article prepared by Nanita Blomquist, Ag-Info Centre, Alberta Agriculture Food & Rural Development.

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