

# Meet your Livestock Specialist

## Winter Feeding



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# 5 Tips For Winter Feeding Livestock

- During winter feeding, all livestock require increased nutrients.
- Animals need additional calories to stay warm, above and beyond normal requirements for body maintenance and growth.
- If they graze and snow covers their pasture—or grass is nearly gone—winter feeding is necessary.



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# 1. Forage First

- Forage must be high quality with adequate protein, vitamins and minerals. Otherwise, you must also provide a supplement.
- Ruminants (cattle, sheep and goats) create “energy” from digestion of forage (complex carbohydrates). But they also need adequate protein to feed the rumen microbes that help digest the forage.
- If forage (winter pasture or the hay you feed) is low in protein, provide the needed protein with pellets or some high-quality alfalfa hay.
- When winter feeding livestock, forage is better than grain for ruminants because digestion of roughage in the rumen involves fermentation (facilitated by rumen microbes), producing heat in the process. This “heat of digestion” helps the animal stay warm in cold weather.



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# 2. Increase Forage During Cold Spells

- In cold weather, livestock animals require more forage to maintain body heat. Appetite increases. Feed them as much forage as they will clean up.
- [Cows](#) can do well on low quality roughages such as straw or mature grass hay (and consume more in cold weather) as long as they have adequate protein to go with it. But [sheep](#) won't eat coarse, mature hay.
- If you feed twice a day, feed the biggest portion in the evening so animals have adequate food through the long night when temperatures are coldest. They need feed in the rumen all night to keep producing body heat.
- During cold weather, put out extra straw for bedding and eating or big straw bales in feeders. Oat or barley straw is more palatable and is utilized better than wheat straw.



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# 3. Avoid Waste & Prevent Illness

- When winter feeding, provide hay on grass or snow—not on mud or bare ground—and choose a new, clean place every day. Livestock won't eat muddy hay or hay that has been stepped or pooped on.
- When using feeders, move them to new locations regularly. This avoids the animals standing in mud and manure around a feeder and wasting the forage they pull out.
- Many diseases—especially in young animals—are spread via feces (consuming pathogens from manure), so keep feed clean.
- Spreading it out on clean areas will keep animals healthier. Feeding in a confined area creates more risk for health issues, but you can reduce the risk somewhat if you use feed bunks and feeders to keep hay clean.



# 4. Free Access

- It's best to allow livestock animals continual access to forage in winter.
- They can consume what they need and not have to rely on you bringing it to them. This saves money and time.
- If you have stockpiled pasture (forage left ungrazed, to grow tall before winter), livestock can utilize it during an open winter and with less waste if you strip graze the pasture with portable electric fencing.



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## 4. Free Access – Cont.

- Other ways to provide free access include:
  - **Windrow Grazing:** leaving hay in windrows to eat in winter, which is also most efficiently done with strip grazing and portable fences
  - **Bale Grazing:** leaving big bales in the field or setting them in the feeding area to allow livestock to eat free choice after you remove strings or net wrap
- The most efficient bale grazing involves portable fencing. Make the animals clean up the bales they're using before you give them access to new ones.
- For a small herd, you can set out enough bales for winter in the fall and have to use the tractor only once.



# 5. Remember the Water

- Make sure water sources don't freeze in winter. Livestock need adequate amounts of clean water or plenty of snow.
- Sheep grazing winter pastures can manage eating snow, but cattle usually need water, especially when eating hay. Without adequate water, livestock won't eat enough and will lose weight.

# Questions?

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