

How To Keep Your Farm Animals Safe During Winter

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You store back plenty of firewood and make sure the roof and windows are all secure. If you have a fireplace, you may have the chimney cleaned or the brickwork checked.

You may even buy a wood-burning stove just in case the [power goes out](#). You do all of these things to make sure that you and your family stays safe in the winter, but what about your animals? How do you keep your farm animals safe in the winter?

We're going to get to that today, so that your meat sources – and your pets – stay warm and [healthy](#) over the winter months.

Ventilation

First, you need to know that not all animals have the same needs, and sealing all the drafts in a barn or chicken coop is a bad thing, not a good thing. It's great that you want to keep out that cold air, but it's a misguided effort even in the far north. Your barn and your coops need ventilation to keep your animals healthy.

Chickens and farm animals create an amazing amount of water both through breathing and urination/defecation and if that water vapor doesn't have an escape route, your coop or barn becomes a breeding ground for bacteria and mold that's harmful to both your chickens and you. Your chickens are also more susceptible to frostbite if the coop is humid.



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Finally, ventilation keeps your coops and barn from becoming too hot. Yes, even in winter! Just like with any creature, your animals emit body heat and if you have many of them in a relatively small space with no ventilation, it can become too warm.

You do, however, need to keep them safely warm. Birds especially are prone to frostbite on their waddles and feet. In addition to keeping them safe, keeping them comfortable will also help keep your farm animals producing eggs and milk. You take care of them and they'll take care of you!

Of course, if you're getting a blizzard or are having an extreme cold snap, you can shut the coop or barn up for the night, but open it up, at least in intervals, throughout the day to let air circulate.

So, how do you find the happy medium between providing adequate ventilation to let in fresh air and let out air that contains the ammonia and other harmful waste? With coops, you should build it so that there's a small gap between the rafters and the roof, adding flaps so that you control the amount of ventilation. You can also put in screened windows so that you can crack them and have more

control over the ventilation.

Proper Shelter

We've always had cows and horses – and a barn – and people would see the horses standing outside with a layer of ice on their backs and feel badly for them. Strangely enough, that layer of ice or snow is actually keeping them warm, especially if it's relatively dry.

How? There's a gap between the ice and the skin formed by the animal's coat, and heat is trapped in that space. Now if the animal is soaking wet when the ice settles, this doesn't apply so much. Also, if you've kept your animal from growing its winter coat for show purposes, it needs a blanket in much warmer temperatures than an animal that grew a coat.

Even if you don't have a barn, you should at least have a lean-to that they can use to get out of the weather.

Ensuring Adequate Food and Water

This is critical because many animals actually need more food and water in the winter than they do in the summer. That may sound backward but it's really not if you think about it. We take in moisture in more ways than one. Believe it or not, your skin absorbs water when you shower and even from the air. So do other animals.

But in the winter, the air tends to be dryer, so there is less moisture in the air to keep us hydrated. That's one of the reasons, anyway.

You'll probably notice that your chickens drink more, as do your dogs, cats, horses, goats, cattle, and every other critter on your farm. Keep their water bowls, buckets and troughs full of fresh, clean, unfrozen water. Check it at least a couple of times throughout the day to make sure it's not frozen.

Food needs change, too. Shivering and maintaining body heat uses a lot of fuel and most of our animals don't have a large supply of fat to meet that need. Therefore, you need to feed them more. Some people switch to a higher fat and/or protein feed in the winter so that they get more nutrients for the same buck. Hays such as alfalfa offer more protein than other hays, too.

Hay often lacks the nutrients that fresh grass carries so you may need to supplement with grain and minerals to make sure that nutrition is adequate. Also, animals burn more calories in cold weather so they'll need more to eat and drink in order to stay fat and sassy through the winter months.

Clear Ice

Ice is a monster we all have to fight in the winter. Just like us, if a horse, cow, goat, or other animal falls, it can break hips, legs, and other bones. Unlike us, that's often a death sentence.

Horse's hooves, especially, ice over. They'll build balls of ice because of the way their hooves are cupped on the bottom and if they come running into the barn with those on their feet, they can easily trip.

Other places that ice accumulates is in doorways of barns and milking stalls. I'm not saying you need

to go out and shovel them path, but be aware that ice and even mud presents a danger to them, too.

Check Pastures for Debris

Do this before the first snow falls. Make sure there are no buckets, broken boards, downed fencing, or anything else that can be hidden under the snow only to be stepped on later. If you've never seen an animal tangled in fencing wire, count yourself lucky and pray you never have to. It's not pretty, so make sure there's no loose fencing wire or any kind of debris laying around your pastures.

Keep Your Animals Separate from the Neighbors

Animals get sick just like people do. So, if we don't want to get the flu, we don't go near people with the flu, right? Well we don't have that luxury with the neighbor's animals. We have no idea, unless you're talking to them and they tell you the truth, whether or not their animals are sick.

Cold weather already taxes your animals' immune systems, so don't make it worse by exposing them to potential diseases or illnesses presented by surrounding animals. If possible, keep them separate.

Winter is a tough time for animals as well people and it's our job to take care of them. If you want them to continue to give you eggs, milk, and meat, you need to keep them happy and healthy.



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If you have any other suggestions for taking care of animals in the winter, please share them in the comments section below.

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