Antifreeze: Be Sure to Check Your Own

Although it happens a bit less than it used to, every spring I will have some young person contact me looking for work on a farm. It’s understandable; May is a fine time to be outside.

In comparison, I cannot recall a single time someone asked that same question in December. This is also understandable. As the days get shorter and colder, being outside isn’t nearly as much fun. Gloomy days are best because the clouds hold in heat; however, since nothing is growing, rain and snow turn pastures to mud, especially around gates, paths, and feed bunks.

A colleague who was struggling with a rebellious son asked me to take him out the farm one weekend and work him to help him see his future. “No way,” was my reply. “A trained monkey can survive two days of misery,” I shared. “Give him to me for two years. Let him see the hottest days, and the coldest… the driest days and the wettest. Then he might see the light.”

Farming requires a good bit of toughness and resilience, but all those challenges can be more bearable if you are wardrobe wise. Below are just a few hints from an old dairyman who survived 100+ degree days and also got the cows fed on a cold February 5th when it was -28° F.

1. Layers are important but air space is your friend. A lot of folks make the mistake of layering themselves with every item in the closet, especially wearing extra socks. If those extra socks make your shoes or boots tight, you are actually making yourself more likely to be cold. Tight footwear can restrict blood flow and make it easier for cold and wet conditions to penetrate to your feet. One pair of good socks along with proper footwear is best for staying warm.
2. Cover your noggin’! Mother knows best. You lose more heat through your head than anywhere else. Pull off a toboggan after forking silage for the better part of an hour. The steam off your face and head will make you look like smokestack.
3. Avoid hoods. There are times when a good hooded sweatshirt or jacket feels good but when I am working I avoid them, not because of the cold but for safety sake. Hoods can limit your peripheral vision. If I am wearing a hood and turn my head, all I see is the inside of the hood. I have to take the hood down to merge onto the road or cross the street. Hoods on tractors also tend to catch air and put the cold right down your back.
4. Outer coats may need to be “tall” even when you wear a regular. Why? Again, if you are wearing layers, the distance between the top of your shoulders and your waist increases as the fabric piles up. “Tall” sizes may be a bit floppy, but they will keep your mid-section covered, especially when seated, such as when driving a tractor.
5. All outwear needs zippered pockets. Nothing is worse than getting back the house only to put back on all that cold-armor so you can retrace your steps to find a wallet, phone or other personal item. This is one of the reasons I wear bibs and buy vests and jackets with chest pockets. Not only do these pockets keep items secured, the zipper seals out pieces of hay, silage, or sawdust that You will ultimately be covered with if you are around those conditions.
6. Quality shines. Well-made clothing costs more because it holds up and does its job. Quality can come in two forms… heaviness and lightweight technology. I never wear long-johns. Give me heavy sweats under coveralls or cold gear underlayers with bibs/pants and I am good to go.

The best measure for cold gear effectiveness is your ability to go about your day with as little disruption as possible. Surviving in the cold isn’t a fashion show. Don’t worry about how you look. The only thing more dumb than being out in the cold with warm clothing left hanging in the house, is worrying about what someone else thinks because you dressed to function in comfort!

Upcoming Events

Dec 16 Smyth Washington Cattleman Meeting, 6:30 PM at 4-H Center

Jan 7, 2025 VQA Sale

Jan 13 VQA Steer Take Up

Jan 15 VQA Heifer Take Up

Jan 18 VT Beef Health Conference, Campus

Jan 28 VFGC Winter Conference, Wytheville

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodation to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at 276-706-8339 /TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.