Dealing with the Cold

I have two different sets of friends on Facebook. One set loves snowy weather, the other set are farmers! Snow can make for a pretty setting when it first falls; however, snow also adds hours to an already busy farm day as snow removal is added to the list of things to do.

While most farm trucks and tractors have no issue cutting through snow, their weight and large “footprint” can turn a snowy lane into a sheet of ice in a few passes. Therefore, planning for snow removal begins long before the snow flies.

A helpful hint for pushing snow is to place the blade in front of the tracks. This doesn’t have as much to do with whether the blade is on the front or back of the tractor, but more so with the storage of the snow removal equipment itself.

My personal recommendation is to park the snowplow as close to the house as possible and position it to be scrapping snow as soon as it leaves the shed. This enables the blade to clean off untracked and unpacked snow before it can be packed into ice.

A second tip is that sometimes smaller is better. Just like a lawn mower deck, a smaller width blade can overcome more uneven surfaces than a larger blade that just hits the high spots. For years a local dealership tried to sell me on the idea that my lawn mower, equipped with a snow blade they offered for that model would do a better job than my farm tractor with a front-end loader.

A 25 HP lawn tractor outdo a 125 HP farm tractor? Yeah right… but it’s true! The smaller blade does a better job as it is lighter and easier on the pavement, it is closer to me physically so I can see what I am doing at all times, and it can be angled on the move so that it works almost like a power snow shovel… piling the snow off the pavement and out of the way.

A big reason snow must be moved is that animals need to be fed. Animal care also comes with some strategies that make their care more effective.

First off, animals eat more in cold weather. Cattle do well in temperatures down to about +5° F but even so, attention to a few details can make a world of difference. First, do what you can to give the herd a place to shelter against the wind.

This might be a barn they can access, but it can also be accomplished with some well-placed farm equipment or hay bales. Of course, “well-placed” can change as the wind shifts as well.

Just remember that as the wind blows across the top of a shelter, it will whirl back towards the side being protected. Even a barn will lose some of its protection as the wind whirls back into its far edge.

Barns can also be a problem if they are undersized or improperly bedded. Cattle aren’t going to run out into the cold for a “potty break,” so if they spend much time in the barn, it will soon need some amount of cleaning or rebedding.

A way to determine the barn’s fitness is the knee test. Can you drop to one knee without soaking your pants leg on contact? If you cannot drop to a need, bedding is needed.

Wet cattle lose more heat than cattle in the wind. Combine being both in the wind and wet and your cattle are in danger of being sick or even dying.

Finally, limit your own exposure to brutal temperatures. Loose fitting, wind-proof layers can allow you to withstand the cold for hours at a time; however, as you exert yourself, sweat can help chill you, and breathing through your mouth can burn your lungs.

Preparation is the key to dealing with the cold. I’d like to think this past week was as cold as it was going to get, but I’ve seen colder temperatures, so we will remain vigilant.

Upcoming Events

Jan 14 VQA Sale, 7 PM, Washington Co VCE Office

Jan 20 VQA Steer Take Up

Jan 22 VQA Heifer Take Up (unless it is a one day take up)

Jan 18 VT Beef Health Conference, Campus

Jan 28 VFGC Winter Conference, Wytheville

Jan 30 Smyth Washington Cattleman Annual Meeting, 4-H Center, 6:30 PM

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.