

Ask A Vet: Ready For Winter?

Sunday, November 2, 2014

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I was talking to my neighbors at the feed store about winterizing my home for the winter by checking weather stripping for windows, checking the furnace and closing up the pool with a cover when one gentleman made the comment to not forget to winterize the barn for the livestock. It struck me that I had not given that much thought. What would you as a veterinarian recommend?

-Not Ready for Winter

Dear Not Ready,

I am also not ready for winter either and certainly none like last winter. By planning ahead you can make the barn a very comfortable environment for your animals whether you have just a couple of goats or a barn full of feeders. The first mistake most make is to close up the barn air tight. You do want to eliminate any drafts coming in through windows or doors but it is extremely important to maintain adequate ventilation so that you cut down on respiratory problems. You do want to maintain clean bedding and water in the barn. The advice I give most clients is to think of you in that barn 24/7 eating and sleeping there. If there is an offensive odor or wet sleeping areas, then you can bet it will be a problem for your animals. Remember to have warm water in those bowls/troughs by either water tank heaters or physically carrying it to them. Fresh water is essential to good health, Use proper electrical heaters with proper extension cords and check daily. Playful calves or horses love to get these out of the tanks. Shorts in the cords can shock the animals and then they will not drink from that tank. You can caulk around windows or use weather stripping around doors to tack rooms/feed rooms (favorite places for cats to bed down). You will want to be sure to service any heaters or pumps and get a lot of heating tape around pipes that are vulnerable to freezing. Check fences for holes now. This is much easier to take care of now before blowing snow finds the holes you did not.

If you have animals like horses that may need blankets, now is the time to make sure to inspect them, check for holes or broken hooks and replace as needed. Animals need more calories in winter to stay warm. Be sure to have feed stock piled for a minimum two weeks in case you can't get feed for a couple of days. Don't forget the dog/cat food and kitty litter too. You will want to also stock up on bedding and believe it or not a first aid kit/ cabinet. If the weather is bad and the vet can't get to your farm like last winter for me even with 4-wheel drive, you will want to have those drugs or bandage supplies and cell phone to handle that emergency. Have a generator for emergency power outages from frozen lines. Thinking about things now will save a lot of anxiety later.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz