



## Oregon State University Extension Service Marion County

### Keeping Livestock and Pastures Healthy Over the Winter

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Winter brings a chill and additional requirements for maintaining farm animal health. While most livestock can adapt to winter temperatures, animals that are sick, old, or young are more vulnerable to the cold. During this time animals need quality feed, access to clean water, and protection from rain and wind.

With lower temperatures, livestock will need to consume more feed to keep warm. By feeding quality forage like grass hay or alfalfa, the fermentation process of breaking down fiber will

produce body heat. If the hay isn't good quality, you will need to feed more to meet their needs. Water that is fresh and warm enough is also essential. Animals should have free access to water that is above 40°F. If the water isn't warm enough, intakes will decline. To keep the water fresh, use an automatic waterer or replenish fresh water multiple times a day.

As for shelter, it can be anything from an insulated barn to a simple three-sided structure. Any design you use should have enough room for your livestock to lie down without being trampled. Having bedding material also provides added protection and insulation for the animal. Use clean, dry bedding or rubber mats to insulate their body from the ground.

| Recommended square feet per animal by species: |                |
|--|----------------|
| Cows: 30                                       | Sheep: 8       |
| Calves: 15                                     | Ewe w/lamb: 12 |
| Horses: 100-150                                | Llama: 25-30   |
| Goats: 10                                      |                |

Pastures are also sensitive during winter. Grazing animals need to be kept off saturated pastures.

Livestock will tear up the soft grass by compacting the soil and creating more mud. Over time this leads to less forage for the grazing season and more weeds. By keeping livestock off wet pastures you reduce damage to the roots and increase production.

To prevent a muddy, damaged pasture, create a “sacrifice area”.



This is a smaller area where you can keep livestock to protect your pastures. The sacrifice area should be in a convenient place on higher ground that is level or slopes away from the barn. The ground must be well-drained, which can be achieved by installing footing material. Footing material might include or be a combination of gravel, sand, hog fuel, or filter fabric. It is recommended to put down twice as much footing material as you have mud in the winter. So, if the mud in your pen is 3 inches deep, put down at least 6 inches of material. There are pros and cons to each type of material, so be sure to research what would be best for your farm.

In a sacrifice area, manure will build up fast and needs to be removed. Standing in manure and mud can lead to foot problems and poor animal health. Furthermore, rainfall can carry bacteria and nutrients to surface water and groundwater. Store manure on high ground and cover it with a shelter or tarp. Composting manure will reduce pathogens and parasites while providing you with a rich nutrient source. Spread the compost on your pasture as fertilizer or use it in your garden!

Looking for other wet weather tips? Install gutters and downspouts on farm buildings to collect water or divert it away from the pen. Rainfall can add up fast on roofs and create thousands of gallons of extra water. Also, grass buffer strips planted downslope can filter nutrients and reduce runoff.

Winter isn't the best time to create a new sacrifice area, but it is the perfect time to make a plan! Observe how water moves across your landscape, take note of heavy-use areas, and measure mud depth. Research your options and find the best footing material combination for your situation. Your animals will be healthier, pastures more productive, and the environment safer for everyone!

For more information on mud and manure management contact the Marion County Extension Office at 503-588-5301 or Oregon Department of Agriculture.