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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Preparing Your Outside Animals for Winter

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Winter is right around the corner and, it is time to think about things you can do to help your outside animals be prepared for winter. A little time and work now can save you a lot of trouble later.

If your large animals are kept outside, check your fencing to make sure posts and boards are secure, especially where snow drifts form. The animals must have the ability to get out of the wind/rain/snow. A run-in shed with the open end facing away from the winter wind is best. Make sure that mineral and salt blocks are not covered in snow.

Keep paths free of slippery mud, snow, and ice; a broken leg in a large animal can have disastrous consequences. Have a plan to provide fresh water to your outside animals and to keep it from freezing. Livestock drink less when it is cold out. You can increase the amount of water that your animals drink in cold weather by heating the water and this effect is particularly notable in goats. Use de-icers, water heaters, and insulate the water hoses both outside and inside the barn.

It is critical to address nutritional needs in the winter. Talk to your veterinarian who can help you formulate a feeding plan for your outside animals. They have training in nutrition and are familiar with your livestock's health and nutritional needs. In general, having a high quality hay available for your animal to eat at any time is the best way to keep most farm animals warm in the winter. Hay keeps horses and ruminants warm: heat is produced as the bacteria in their intestinal tract ferment it. (Grains are more efficient feeds and affect less heat loss from the gut which means less heat for the animal.) One of the important things you can do is to keep your hands on your animals in the winter. With just looking at them it is impossible to tell how they are doing. Rub your hands on horses' ribs and on top lines for small ruminants and camelids to check for prominent ribs or vertebrae that signal weight loss. While you're at it, make sure the animals' coats are free of manure and mud. It is not for cosmetic reasons: mud and manure in the fur prevent the longer, coarser winter coats from retaining heat.

Talk to your veterinarian about deworming the animals before the winter. Have him/her check your horse's teeth for hooks/points on the teeth. If not addressed, these can cause pain, dropping food, and weight loss. Make sure the animals are up to date on vaccines, too.

Don't forget your barn cats (and dogs). You'll need to have a way to provide fresh water for them, too. A place for them to sleep that is enclosed (even in the barn) will help them to retain body heat. Contrary to common belief, bigger is not better- at least when it comes to dog houses. A smaller house is better, as it helps keep the heat in. The barn may keep the wind and snow out, but it's still very cold in there for your smaller barn animals.

A little preparation can help your barn animals out this winter. For advice on keeping the animals healthy and warm this winter, talk to your veterinarian. Vets see a wide variety of housing and animal health complications in the winter and can give you advice on how to prevent trouble.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 350 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.