

Dairy Cattle Demand Added Feed and Water in Cold Weather

J.W. Schroeder, Dairy Specialist

Feed and water are the fuel that will help keep dairy cattle healthy and productive through cold weather, notes a dairy specialist at North Dakota State University.

During cold weather, dairy cattle increase their consumption of feed by increasing the rate at which feed moves through the digestive system, explains J.W. Schroeder of the NDSU Extension Service. Although the digestive system isn't as efficient at this accelerated rate, it is able to obtain more nutrients for production and energy to maintain body heat.

"If at all possible, do not cut back on the amount of feed given to cows during cold weather," Schroeder says. "Growing heifers, dry cows and lactating cows all need their full rations to handle the stress of cold weather."

Schroeder says baby calves will benefit from higher-fat milk replacers which contain more energy. A 20 percent fat replacer is recommended during extremely cold weather. Whole milk has 25 percent fat or more when expressed on a dry basis, he notes.

Equally important is a plentiful supply of clean water. Schroeder notes that as animals consume more feed, they need more water. A lack of water may depress feed intake and compound weather-related stress. He advises replacing frozen water at least once a day.

"Baby calves that have not been weaned also need access to water," Schroeder says. "And because their water is usually in buckets, it is the first to freeze."