

## Cold Snow Creates Imagery While Challenging People and Cows

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The challenges cow/calf producers face never cease to amaze me. The wind and temperature extremes--just the sheer forces of nature--are enough to set most of us back.

The other day, walking across a yard covered with cold snow, I even questioned my own sanity. Was it the cold? Was it the snow? Or, was it my age? Those who know what cold snow is can at least be moderately sympathetic.

There are several types of snow. The first and most fashionable is the snowflake. Many a poem has been written about the snowflake, speaking eloquently about its beauty, its shape and the mild weather required to gently layer the land, one by one, with snowflakes. Snowflakes would actually be a first cousin to Jack Frost, who forms beautiful ice crystals on cold mornings.

Another form of snow is just snow, those white particles flying through the air, creating visibility problems, and maybe even a blizzard if the winds get strong enough. Once deposited, snow creates drifts, mounds of piled water, ideally suited for sleds and kids.

Snow comes in many forms and shapes with many degrees of intensity. But cold snow is a different story. On these cold mornings, when clutching a cold pipe with bare hands feels as though you've grabbed molten steel, everything soon goes numb.

Walking to check the cows, calves, horses and other living things, you hear a very distinctive sound: the crunching of cold snow underfoot. The snow is so cold the weight of a person or cow simply causes a slow moan. It's so cold, no amount of weight could press it into a ball and a stream of water simply turns to ice with the crystals scampering across a surface that was blown smooth as glass by the piercing breeze.

Twenty degrees below 0 is a starter, but minus 25, minus 30, minus 35, minus 40 produce much better cold snow. With each temperature dip the walk gets more awkward, the lungs more demanding, the moan crisper. The stillness of the air is deafening. Sun dogs make the

sun three strong in the southern sky.

Finally, the gate is reached, and there's not a sound to be heard. A group of cows stand huddled together. Their ears and eyelashes are laden with frost. Every hair is coated white. Their eyes slowly check the intruder. Movement is optional, hibernation preferred.

The cows are okay, at least the ones with some fat. The thin cow, come spring thaw, will lose her ears. The rancher knows her by name, not by number because her years are long, her calves strong. The bulls are much the same, however reproductive days may cease because essential body parts become frostbitten.

The rancher, numb with cold, prepares to offer feed, chip open the water and return home. The return home echoes with the same sounds of cold snow moaning under foot.

At home, the entryway is laden with parkas, too many gloves to count, foot gear, scarves and stocking caps, many in triplicate. In the kitchen, the cheeks start to lose their bright red color, the coffee cup welcomes the hands and fresh white socks speed circulation to the toes. A smile and a friendly chat bring back the comforts of home.

The chair is soft and comfortable. The magazine talks about places far from here. The sun dogs go with the setting sun. The evening is filled with thoughts of cold snow, frost-covered cattle and other images of life amidst the beauty and challenges of nature. Those thoughts slowly dissolve into dreams of summer breezes and tropical locations. Dad's asleep in the chair--again.

May you find all your ear tags.

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