

News column for use week of February 12, 2024  
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### **Winter Weather Creating Challenges for Beef Producers**

Cold January temperatures followed by muddy conditions from melting snow to additional mud from rain have created special challenges for beef producers. How do we keep cattle performing in less-than-ideal winter climates? These conditions will have an impact on cattle as we move forward into the rest of the winter months and into spring. Monitoring the body condition of gestating cows during times of cold stress becomes critical for calving and rebreeding. K-State beef specialists encourage cow-calf producers to pay close attention to the body condition score of cows. Especially now as many producers have started their calving season and others are very close to the beginning. If we start to see thin cows at calving, then producers need to consider what that looks like in terms of the upcoming breeding season. More than likely, those thin cows are going to take longer to cycle back.

Observing weights on replacement heifers is also important, especially with experiencing close stress conditions like we did in early January. When cold stress happens on heifers, they can't gain as much, and this might set them back from the target weight at breeding time. Take the opportunity to schedule weight checks on heifers approximately 45 to 60 days before the expected breeding season. Bulls require management during harsh winter weather as well. Remember cows are only 50% responsible for producing a calf, the bull is the other 50% so don't overlook them during cold weather. An important aspect of bull management oftentimes is providing bedding for those bulls to lay on. However, the other piece of good management is to semen test bulls before turnout. During harsh winters we are focused on cows in gestation or calves hitting the ground during calving season, so it is easy to overlook those bulls.

Another management to keep in mind during these harsh winters is the feeding sites. Sometimes we need to consider moving the location where we are feeding those animals. If producers are still feeding cows out on pasture, and rolling hay, then we need to start minimizing damage to a particular location. By moving the feeding location, it can help reduce the need to clean up the long-term feeding sites once conditions improve. Concerning the growing and finishing sectors of the industry, poor pen maintenance and muddy conditions take a toll on the gain of fed cattle. Hoof-deep mud can start to impact cattle performance and reduce it by as much as 15%, according to K-State beef specialists. Backgrounding and growing operations may need to account for reduced animal performance in their marketing plans. It will be beneficial to producers that have backgrounding and growing operations to re-evaluate the performance of their calves now to get to their optimum marketing date.

Even though this winter has provided much-needed moisture it has also brought some challenges with the mud. Evaluating your cattle operations now and making critical management decisions can help for months to come. If you have any questions, please contact Kaitlyn Hildebrand in the Concordia office at 785-243-8185 or at [khildebrand@ksu.edu](mailto:khildebrand@ksu.edu).

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