



Winter is Coming!

By: Nicolina Foti

Creeping up at the end of August, a homesteader's schedule is fairly packed. But as fall creeps around the corner, we have the chilly morning reminder winter is close behind. And with fall comes winter preparation. Preparing for winter is something that it is never too early to start.

On a homestead, summer is a time for growing and managing, but I am always on the lookout for things to prep to make my life easier for those winter months.

When it comes to livestock and housing, one of the most important things to be mindful of is airflow. Whether it is horses, cows, goats, or chickens; airflow is essential. Knowing the difference between airflow and a draft is critical.

Airflow in a barn allows for fresh air to circulate and allow for moisture to escape. A draft will blow through a barn and remove any heat generated by the livestock and will also enable the elements into the barn area. For example, when winterizing chicken coops, many people will put a plastic wrap or film around the inside of the barn or outdoor run. When doing this, it is essential to leave a gap at the top of the plastic wrap to allow moisture to escape from the coop. Chickens create a great deal of moisture even during the winter months, and that moisture needs a place to go, if not, that moisture will breed bacteria and disease.

With larger livestock, most of the time, they are out during the day. This is the perfect time to leave barn doors open and allow the barn to air out. This will allow fresh air to circulate throughout the barn and allow dust, moisture, and ammonia to air out. What is important is when the barn is closed up for the evening or during spouts of lousy weather, the barn can hold the heat in.

Water can be another winter dilemma. It is always a battle with remembering to plug in the water heater or to fill the water tanks while trudging through 4 feet of snow. Therefore, planning in the spring-summer and fall months is important. Such as putting a water spigot out to where you house your livestock during the winter months. Have a hose system in place if you have to run hoses for water. For example, we've always told people we ran hoses to water our horses during the winter. It is shortly after that statement that people think we are crazy. For years we ran hoses to water our horses, and we stored them outside, and we never had frozen hoses. We would run a pulley to the peak of our tallest barn and hoisted our hoses up to the peak. That way, the hoses are evenly hung, then we would grab the end of them and drain all the water out, leaving them hung till the next time we had to water the horses. It was a simple system, but it worked. Nowadays, I have moved to the lighter, flexible hoses. I can fit 250ft of the hose into a muck bucket, and I store it in the mudroom of the house where it is heated. I bring the bucket outside, pull the hoses out, fill the water tank, roll the hose back up. When I'm done, I roll the hose into the bucket, and since it's in the heated mudroom, I don't have to worry about frozen hoses. Another option is running water lines out to the barn. This can be expensive, but if done correctly, it is something that will last "forever," and when watering livestock is as simple as just flipping a switch; it feels worth it. A much simpler option and one that many people do is hauling water buckets. When you have small livestock such as chickens or a small number of goats hauling buckets of water is also an option. But this is something that if you have to carry out more than two buckets at a time, it will get old fast.

Thinking about barn doors, some of us have the opportunity to design their barns and buildings. One thing to think of is how easily accessible the barn will be in 5 feet of snow. For example, big red barn doors are beautiful, but sliding barn doors when the track is on the outside of the barn requires more labor to free the doors during the winter, such as clearing the door opening and the length of the tract. Compared to sliding doors placed on the inside of the barn, you only have to clear out the barn door opening. A really great replacement for sliding barn doors that would be of a larger comparison is garage doors. They are light, can be well insulated, and you don't have to worry about the door getting pushed off the track by snow or frost. This can be costly, but it is a great long term investment. When looking at single person doors, how you install them makes all the difference. Making them swing inwards can avoid the similar problems you have with large sliding barn doors.

One of the last things to think about before the snow flies is the snow. In the northeast, we are bound to get snow. We never really know how much or when, but it will come. So, something to think about is where are you going to put all of this snow, and how will it affect your daily routine? Snow pileup turns into water runoff. I have seen many cases where people did not think of the snow pile up from falling off the barn roof. They then had the snow melting and backing up into the barn and leading to flooding. There are many issues with flooding in the barn, but just imagine the problems when everting thaws floods and then refreezes over night. I have seen barns flood and overnight freeze solid, trapping equipment, and livestock.

While these are only a handful of things to do to prepare for winter, they are updates and or renovations that will take some time, but the hardships they save you when its negative twenty degrees is worth it.

For more information or questions contact Nicolina Foti.

nvf5@cornell.edu

Or call the office at 518-855-8995