

## Are Your Poultry Ready for Winter?

As we have been experiencing freezing temperatures overnight and even a few light snowy days, it is important to remember that our livestock go through different needs. Poultry are sensitive to the colder temperatures. Winterizing your coop and adjusting your management practices are vital to keeping your flock healthy, happy, and warm. In the winter months, egg production decreases, frostbite is a challenge, and water will continue to freeze. Fires in barns and chicken coops are common in the winter months as folks try to keep their animals warm. Be cautious of any electrical hazards that can result from trying to keep heat in the coops/buildings.

Frozen water is inevitable, it is important to check the water twice a day to make sure your birds have access to fresh water. Without water, poultry will stop eating. Automatic waterers can also freeze if not heated or insulated properly. Check these waterers for leaks that can contribute to increased humidity problems in the coop. Heated water bowls and containers help keep water from freezing, but you need to be cautious as these devices can malfunction and cause a fire. Plastic waterers can split or crack more easily when freezing. Rubber or aluminum buckets will not.

Poultry require more feed during the winter months to stay warm. However, they will likely want to eat less in the winter. It is important to feed a well-balanced diet. Free-choice feed can help encourage poultry to eat during the winter. They will adjust their eating according to the temperature. You can scatter high-energy feed such as grains or oil seeds in the coop to help encourage birds to be active and keep them from pecking at each other due to boredom. Feeding some scratch late in the day also helps poultry stay warm through the night. Be sure that your flock has access to grit during the winter months, this is especially important if the ground is frozen, or snow-covered, or they have limited outdoor access.

Winterizing your coop is important to maintain a healthy flock. Be sure to check your coop for drafts. Inspect your coop for holes where air, moisture, or vermin can enter. When blocking drafts, do not eliminate ventilation, but control the airflow to prevent humidity and ammonia accumulation. Ventilation is important to prevent the building of ammonia from the litter and to reduce moisture levels in the coop. A building with a roof or eave vent and a partially open window will provide the needed ventilation for a dry, warm place for your birds.

Remove all used bedding and clean the coop before adding a large quantity of new, dry bedding for the winter. Bedding materials may include wood shavings or chips, straw, soft hay, ground corn cobs, or shredded paper. This bedding keeps the flock warm through an insulation effect. Deep bedding can increase humidity levels, so litter management is critical in the winter months. Check the moisture level in the coop daily; when adding large amounts of bedding you will need to clean the coop more often and regularly adjust, mix, or fluff the bedding levels to provide a warm and dry coop.

Injury from frostbite occurs most commonly on extremities such as feet, combs, and wattles. Frostbite causes the cells in this area to freeze, causing cell death and subsequent changes in color and texture. Gray, black, or brittle areas are indicators of frostbite.

To avoid frostbite, remove the snow from the chicken run or straw areas to protect their feet when outdoors. Inside the coop, make sure that all the chickens can roost off the floor at night. Roosting allows the chickens to lie on their feet to avoid standing all night. Provide at least 6-8 inches of roost space per chicken. Roosts should be 1½ to 3 inches in diameter.

If you notice frostbite on a chicken, there are some basic treatments to attempt. Bring the animal into a warm space, slowly warming the affected extremity back to the correct temperature. Do not attempt rapid warming of the affected area as this may cause further damage. Gentle use of warm—not hot—water foot soaks to warm the feet may be beneficial but do not attempt on the comb or wattle. Monitor the affected extremities carefully for infection and contact your veterinarian if you suspect infection. In some extreme cases of frostbite, the loss of the extremity can occur.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your poultry overwinter, feel free to contact the local extension office.

#### Upcoming Events & Reminders

For those with real trees, be sure to add around 1 gallon of water each day for a 6-foot tree.

#### Save The Dates-

February 20<sup>th</sup>- GAP Training for Tobacco Producers, if you plan on attending, please call the office to register.

February 27<sup>th</sup>- Fertilizer and Pesticide Applicator's Training at the Adam's County Fairgrounds. For those who need to renew, letters have been mailed out with registration information.

March 1<sup>st</sup>- Cow Calf School at Raines Farm. The focus will be on optimizing herd fertility. More details with registration to come.

April 4<sup>th</sup>- Women in Ag Southern Regional Day Conference in Chillicothe, more details to come.