



*Putting Knowledge to Work*

## **Youth Livestock White Paper – 3/1/2006 – 0001**

### **Proper Summer Care for Youth Livestock Projects**

As summer begins with its many activities such as camps, vacations and summer sports leagues, we find ourselves quite busy and we may fail to stop and observe our 4-H project livestock. We need to pause and take a moment to consider what we are doing and be sure that we are giving our animals the care they both need and deserve.

As the temperatures continue to rise, water becomes very critical for all our animals and pets. The importance of clean, fresh, cool drinking water cannot be over emphasized. Water for 4-H project animals is extremely important. If they are unable to get a good cool drink during certain periods on hot days they will not grow to their potential. The result will be underweight animals at show time.

Periodically, we all need to look at our own situation and evaluate the need for change in the way we care for our project. Here are some possible problems to look for in your current water system.

If you are watering in a trough, many times pigs will lie in the trough in the late morning to cool off and will splash most of the water out. Other times they may play with the water trough and tip it over and spill it. As a result, your pigs may have to go without water until you show up at the pen to feed and water them in the evening. The best solution for this is to have a water trough that the pigs cannot lie in or tip over. These can be made from one half of a hot water tank by putting a wide based leg system under it so that it is difficult to turn over. Place rods across the top so they cannot get in the trough but are still able to get their snout in to drink. A trough made in this manner and placed in an area that will be shady all day keeps clean relatively cool water available at all times. Another solution could be to check your pig's water at least once an hour.

Quite often we use nipple waterers on a hose to water our pigs. The hose may be laying across the yard in direct sunlight and as a result, the water inside can be hot enough to burn the pig's mouth resulting in injury or at least could be too hot to drink. If you use this type of a watering system, you need to shade the hose so that the water remains cool. This can be done by covering it with straw or something similar or by burying it several inches deep so the sun's heat does not warm the water as it sits in the hose. Nipple waterers can be used with large diameter PVC pipe as a reservoir to be filled once or twice a day. In this situation, gravity may not provide enough pressure for adequate flow of water. You can correct this problem opening the back of the nipple and drilling a small hole in the plastic control to allow for more water flow.

Other problems often occur in open stock tanks for sheep or cattle. Dead animal that have fallen into the tank present a problem if left to decay in the water. Too often we forget to look at the water in situations where you only need to water once a week or so. Try to use a small water tank and add fresh water every day. Remember also to clean the tank frequently to prevent growth of algae and bacteria which may be hazardous to your animals. Keep the area around the tank dry and easily accessible to the livestock. They should not have to swim or stand in mud up

to their knees in order to get a drink. They all need clean fresh water to drink. Look around at your pens and see that your animals have easy access to clean fresh water 24 hours a day.

Another concern for your animals is protection from weather. Be concerned about your animals comfort, because comfortable animals gain and act better. On a hot day you will make every attempt possible to get out of the sun and get somewhere that is cool and shady, if not air conditioned. Your livestock respond in the same way. They attempt to find a shady spot with a cool breeze during the heat of the day. Many times your pen prevents them from finding that nice comfortable spot, so you need to provide it for them by building a shade.

Once again, pigs are very susceptible to sunburn and to heat stress because they do not sweat. They must have shade during the heat of the day in order to survive. Your shade needs to be located so that they have shade during all hours of daylight.

In addition you need to provide protection from storms, such as hail, heavy rain and strong winds. Hail in Eastern Colorado can be very brutal on your animals. Often it can get to golf ball size, and if your animals have no protection they can be injured severely or even killed.

Heavy rains may also cause problems with self feeders if they have leaks or are in areas where water may stand temporarily. Wet feed in the bottom of a feeder will prevent flow of clean dry feed and your animals may not have enough feed to meet their needs. Clean fresh feed is important to your animals and you must check your feeders regularly.

The next time you go to your pen to feed and water your animals take a few minutes to look around and see if you may be overlooking something that might be detrimental to your animal's welfare. Think about living in your animal's pen and any situation that may present problems for your animal. As your animal's caretaker it is your responsibility to provide the best care possible.

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