

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

By: Ben Sims

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Agriculture Extension Agent

“Keeping Animals Cool”

Spring show season has been upon us for some time now, but fair season is fast approaching. Typically, with that fair season comes very warm temperatures that cannot only be hazardous for human health but our animal’s health as well. Fair time is meant to be a fun experience for all, so we want to be sure we are taking every precaution necessary to keep our animals safe.

This starts with watching our animals closely and knowing the symptoms of heat stress. Cattle handle heat differently than other animals. They particularly struggle with the ability to sweat, which makes them reliant on getting rid of heat through their respiratory system, such as breathing the heat out. In order to preserve their energy, they usually dissipate the heat during the night when it is cooler. This process of returning to a regular temperature takes 4-6 hours.

One way you can tell if your show cattle are affected by heat stress is to look for unusual behavior from the animal. This could like reduced feed intake, increased time standing around and crowding around water. In the show barn, animals may also display an increase in breathing rate. To keep animals cool, you can make sure barns get plenty of ventilation. Of course, each situation is going to be unique to your own operation and you should always keep animal comfort in mind. Other factors to consider are whether that animal has had a history of illness, what their hair coat color is and if they still have their winter coat.

Another method to avoiding heat stress is to reduce animal handling during the hottest part of the day. Weighing, processing, sampling, and shipping cattle are all necessary tasks that can be time sensitive, but they should be strategically conducted during the very early morning hours to ensure cattle comfort. Be sure to also provide plenty of water to cattle at all times and avoid instances of prolonged non-access to water followed by immediate full access. The amount of water cattle need doubles as the heat increases from 70 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

We need to also be mindful of the moisture levels from washing areas. Some locations can artificially increase the humidity and cause unneeded stress on livestock. Many of these animal heat stress management practices apply to sheep, goats, and swine as well. A trick that can be used to keep our rabbits and poultry cool at the fair is to place a frozen bottle of water in their pen to help keep them cool during the hottest parts of the day.

Information comes from K-State University beef extension veterinarian, Dr. A.J. Tarpoff.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.