

SNOW GUIDELINES

MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Take prompt action – make sure family, staff and neighbours are safe. Work out an emergency plan. Get livestock to sheltered areas with water. Feed them supplements for maintenance till they can get back onto crops and pasture.

Get stock water and some feed as soon as possible.

Water – make sure water is available to stock for at least six hours per day, particularly if feeding large volumes of dry supplements.

- Stock die without it! They will die of dehydration well before they starve.
- Check water races.
- Break ice on troughs daily and take it out to stop re-freezing.
- Use a generator for the water pump if power is off or move stock.

Feed stock with supplements – feed supplements to at least maintenance levels until the ground is beginning to clear and stock can get down to feed. If there is more snow later in the winter, it will be difficult to put condition back on stock, so it is important now. If possible, maintain condition.

Snow raking – coordinate snow raking and rescue of stock with neighbours. Helicopters are worth the cost. You need to contact them early, and where possible coordinate with neighbours.

Access – open tracks and pasture areas as soon as it stops snowing and before snow packs down hard.

Look after capital stock – snow rake breeding stock first, particularly those close to lambing/calving and with multiples.

List what feed you have on hand – the feed on hand needs to last until the end of the winter.

- How much hay, straw, silage, baleage, grain, crop and pasture cover.
- How long will this feed last?
- Ration the feed out so it lasts until the end of winter.
- Decide on what to do about any deficit, e.g. buy feed, sell stock, graze off etc.

Use sheltered paddocks where possible.

Talk the situation over with neighbours, assess the situation and work out priorities.

Stock stress – stock will have been under stress, particularly two-tooths and multiple bearing ewes. Don't forget about your normal drenching and vaccination programme after it thaws.

Electric fences – get electric fences going again as soon as you have got power and the ground is beginning to clear. Take stock off winter feed crops as soon as possible to avoid break-outs and trampled crop. Put them off crop and onto lanes or sheltered paddocks.

Drones – if a drone is available it could be very useful to check the farm and mobs of stock.

FEEDING TIPS

Feed up to 50% more feed before it snows as animals typically eat more before a storm and less during it – if there is more snow later in the winter, you won't be able to put condition back on. Remember to allow for lower utilisation in mud. Initial requirements of the stock are to keep warm. Try to feed 20% above maintenance initially.

Pad feeding – where pasture and crops are snow covered, use a sheltered, well drained paddock with access to water and feed supplements. This will minimise damage to crop, pasture and soils. Keep off crops till the snow is soft enough for the stock to break through or it has thawed. It is common in Canterbury, for example, to shift mobs into sheltered paddocks with reliable water. They can be fed 100% silage, hay, silage and grain for as long as necessary.

Brassicas – if kale and rape are broken off at ground level, they need to be fed off before they rot. If only bent over they will keep growing. Turnips and swedes won't be badly affected; only a small part of the yield is in the leaf.

Fodder Beet – beet works well in snow and stock can get back onto it quicker than other crops. You may lose the tops, but the bulbs won't be damaged and there won't be big crop wastage. Cattle can dig into snow to uncover bulbs and get a feed. Beware that if cattle are not accustomed to beet, break through a fence, and gorge themselves, they can die.

Cereal green feeds – if oats are flattened and bent over in the stem, eat them off as soon as possible. They will rot and go slimy within a couple of weeks. Freezing bursts plant cells increasing the rate of deterioration.

Prioritise – feed damaged and diseased crops early.

Minimise wastage – as crops emerge from the snow feed with long, narrow breaks, shifting two or three times a day if necessary to improve utilisation. A one-metre break reduces trampling by cattle.

Break feeding – if necessary use Waratahs and wire to break feed crops with cattle. Tapes and live strand will go down under the weight of snow.

Runoff – if the greenfeed crop paddocks get sodden and utilisation of supplements is poor, use a run-off paddock and feed supplements there.

Nitrates – check brassicas, any cereal greenfeeds and Italian ryegrass for high levels of nitrates before you start feeding off. If nitrates are marginal then introduce the crop slowly (give them a larger break to increase choice), put stock on with a full gut, feed hay, leave some crop behind (give them a choice) and don't eat the stalk right down.

Concentrates – take care feeding grain or nuts to reduce wastage eg feed out on top of silage, against fence lines, under a backfence electric wire, in the frost or on top of a border. Use whole grain for sheep. Cattle can only digest rolled grains.

Straw – cattle can be held on straw if necessary. Feed straw with brassicas or silage to balance the diet.

Grain – ewes can eat significantly more than 200 g/d of grain once transitioned onto it.

- Have you fed them grain previously? If not start at 50 g/ewe – spread over the top of hay or silage to help them get started and reduce wastage.
- Once all the ewes are eating it then you can increase by 50 g/head/d steps up to 300 g/head/day with care.
- If a grey feed scour develops, drop back feeding of grain immediately as “grain overload” or acidosis is starting.
- Feed grain early, on frosted ground, to reduce wastage. Make sure all stock has access to it.

Changes in diet – don't make sudden changes in diet as the snow melts. Allow time for the gut to adjust. Longer term try to balance energy, protein and roughage.

WHAT DO MY STOCK NEED?

The figures are intake only. Make sure you allow for wastage when working out how much to feed.

kgDM/hd/d	Maintenance	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Ewe – single	0.95	0.95	1.2	1.5	2.7
Ewe – twin	0.95	0.95	1.3	1.8	4.1
Ewe – triplet	0.95	0.95	1.4	2.0	4.1
Hogget – mated	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.35	2.0
Hogget – dry	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.05	1.05
R1 Cattle	4.1	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.7
R2 cattle – 450 kg	5.4	7	7.1	7.2	7.3
Beef cows – in calf	5.8	6	6	6.6	7
Hinds	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.6
Weaner deer	2	2	2.6	4	4
R2 stags	3	3	4	4.5	4.5

For more information, see B+LNZ Factsheet 68 “Feed Planning in a Tough Winter”. The FeedSmart app can also be of use www.feedsmart.co.nz



PREPARING IN ADVANCE

In snow prone areas:

- Develop a snow feed plan for your farm. It can sit in reserve and only has to be implemented come the event.
- Have two-three weeks feed supplements in reserve for snow at 100% of the diet.
- Plant and use broad shelter, e.g. plantations, gullies and bush.
- Have access to a bulldozer or snow plough in snow prone areas.
- Watch weather forecasts and act promptly when there is a snow warning.
- Fill the water tank when it starts snowing.
- Keep food supplies on hand, gas cooker and log burner.
- Use blades or cover comb for post-mating shearing.
- Don't pre-lamb shear.
- Don't lamb too early.
- Feed supplements to young stock early in winter to accustom them.
- Keep a sheltered paddock near home with good cover.
- Shift ewes off higher country by the shortest day.
- Move stock to sheltered accessible paddocks as soon as snow warning put out.
- Snow-rake breeding stock first.
- Use silage for feed value. Hay for maintenance. No straw or hay near lambing.
- Keep a snow plough parked in the open.
- Use the snow plough to clear ground as soon as it stops snowing while snow is light and fluffy. Clear ground for lambing ewes saves lives.

ASSISTANCE

Call Federated Farmers of New Zealand on 0800 FARMING (0800 327 646) or Beef + Lamb New Zealand on 0800 BEEFLAMB (0800 233 352) or Rural Support Trust on 0800 787 254.

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