

Extreme HEAT WAVE! Keeping the barnyard residents comfortable



I don't need an outdoor thermometer to tell me that we are having an extreme heat wave. Since we all work outdoors, I can tell from my family members faces and the dial on the AC that it is hot hot hot. And then there is always the reliable barometer of how long can the dog stay outside before he, too wants to share the AC.



How do the Barnyard Critters do in the Extreme Heat Wave?

But normally our chickens, ducks, cows, goats, etc. don't have the luxury of coming inside to cool off. How do we keep them from being heat stressed during an extended period of super hot days? First, it is important to not overreact. Animals tend to handle the heat better than people do. Animals will take their activity level down a few notches and be less active during the heat of the day. This morning my goats were ready to take a siesta around 10:30 AM as the temperature climbed past 80 degrees.

Here are some steps we take on our farm to lesson heat stress on the flocks and herds.

1. Supply some shade. In the chicken area, we hung a tarp over

a corner of the fencing and put a roost bar under it. If you are going to be nearby the coop in the evening, leaving the door open until dusk will help the coop cool down. Of course weigh this against any predator threat.

2. Place water pan in the shade and a pan of food, too. This gives the chickens a place to go that is not in the sunlight and not in the coop which can also keep heat in.

3. Inside the coop, I make sure the water is not getting too warm. A fan keeps air circulating, which keeps the heat from building. Frequent checks to make sure the young pullets in the grow out pen are not over heating will help too. I have a crate ready to move them to the shade outside if the temperature climbs too high, but they are safer where they are in the building. A lot of things on a farm are a tradeoff aren't they?

4. If possible, avoid cleaning around the animals during the heat of the day. Allow them to rest and sleep through it.

5. For herd animals like cows, sheep and goats, place their hay in the shadier area. We don't have much grazing area and our ruminants are fed mostly hay. So I can adjust where I put the hay to keep them a bit cooler. This is not the time to chase an unwilling goat or sheep around to do a hoof trim or any other maintenance care. Wait for a cooler time.



this particular year, shearing was delayed due to heavy rains so it was very important to keep the sheep calm and near some shade

6. Treat the flock to something cool like watermelon when available. It's sweet taste, vitamins, minerals and water content will help them endure the hot temperatures. You can also make a large flock Popsicle by filling a container with water, adding herbs and greens and freezing it. Place the frozen treat out in the shade and watch them chip away at the icy treat.



one hot chick! notice the wings being held away from the body to cool down a little

7. Our rabbits enjoy a frozen water bottle to cozy up to during a heat wave. Make sure that there water is in a shady spot and provide a place where they can cool down lying on the dirt or a cooling mat.



8. Don't over feed grain during a heat wave. The extra energy in grain can make the animals even hotter. I cut back the amount they get during the summer months.

Plan Ahead to Ward off Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

As with any good management practice, heading off a problem before it happens can lead to a happier end for all. If you take steps to keep your animals cool before they show signs of heat stress, you have a better chance of your flock and herd surviving an extreme heat wave.

If you have any tricks or tips to keeping your farm animals cool during an extreme heat wave, please share!

