

February 19, 2018

SNOW OR WATER – WHAT’S THE DIF?

Snow sometimes can be a good source of livestock water. Research from Canada and several northern states have shown that cows can eat 30 to 40 pounds of snow per day to meet their water needs. And some ranchers already rely on only snow to provide water on their winter pastures.

To be successful using snow as your water source, several conditions must be met. First off, the snow must be clean and fresh. We’ve all heard jokes about eating yellow snow, but it’s no joke if that is what your cows are depending on. Snow that’s crusted over, filled with dirt, or heavily trampled is not adequate.

Second, the cows must be in good shape. It will take body heat energy to melt the snow they eat so thin cows or sick cows should not be forced to rely on snow for water. Lactating cows also should have a good source of liquid water.

Make sure the cows are eating an adequate diet to provide the extra energy needed to melt that snow. Cows that go off feed or aren’t eating enough might be having trouble getting enough water from the snow. After all, they do need to learn how to effectively graze snow to get enough water.

Lastly, be sure to have an alternate water source readily available. Snow availability and snow conditions can change rapidly.

Snow can be used as the only source of water for many livestock, saving time, money, and potentially extending grazing to remote areas or later in the season. However, monitor intake and cow condition carefully to be successful.

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