

News Column
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WIND CHILL

I'm not going to complain about 50 degree days in January and February, but if you gave me a choice during lambing season, I'd take a constant 30 degrees with no wind, not even a light breeze.

Even at 20 degrees, I don't make night checks to avoid frozen lambs. As long as the ewe lambs out of the wind and drops her lamb on a light layer of bedding, the lamb should be fine.

Frosty was Samantha's show lamb two years ago. She was born on a night when the temperature dropped to 8 degrees. When I found her at 6:30 a.m., she was covered with a layer of white frost, but she was up and nursing on her own.

This year we have a lamb we call Muddy Buddy. Muddy Buddy was born in late January on a sunny, 45 degree day. It was so nice that Muddy Buddy's momma decided to lamb outside, in a mud hole, where the wind was blowing 10-15 mph. I thought he was dead.

Muddy Buddy was stiff and his mouth was cold. He couldn't lift his head and he definitely couldn't stand. But, I remembered my dad thawing out lambs that were stiff as a board and frozen to the ground, so I figured there was hope.

Dad would bring a stiff lamb to the house at daybreak, place it in a shallow box lined with newspapers to absorb moisture, and slide the box in front of the kitchen heat vent. The vent was located in the side of a cabinet, about six inches above the floor and was fed by a wood burning furnace in the basement. The heat flowed right onto the chilled lamb and it wasn't

uncommon for Dad to return at noon to find a warmed up lamb wandering around the kitchen.

Since our house is heated with a ground source heat pump that doesn't provide a really warm zone near the vent, we warmed up Muddy Buddy with a hair dryer. Pam worked on him for a half hour while I finished chores, but she had stopped by the time I came in. I think the fact that the mud was actually liquid manure – that became quite aromatic when warmed by the hair dryer – may have stifled Pam's mothering instinct. For whatever reason, she quit on us.

I warmed Muddy Buddy for another ten minutes and, because he could now hold his head up, I tubed him with five ounces of colostrum before leaving for a high school basketball game. When we got home at 10:00 p.m., Muddy Buddy was standing up in his box (a tall box), so I took him to the barn to reunite with his mommy.

Beautiful weather in mid-February got us in trouble again when we had another ewe lamb outside on a 45 degree day with 25 mph winds. We have another survivor, but it took this one long enough to recover that her mommy decided she doesn't like her. So, we have a bottle lamb.

Springtime can sometimes be tougher on livestock than cold winter days, especially when there is wet snow or light rain. An adult cow, for instance is comfortable at 18 degrees if she has a heavy winter hair coat. Wet her down though, and she will chill at 59 degrees.

I'm comfortable with lambing at 20 degrees if my ewes have protection from the wind. However, a 30 mile per hour wind will make 20 degrees feel like 1 degree, and that's not going to work very often.

Most of us have been to a pool or a beach on a cool, breezy day. As we move into spring calving, it is worth remembering how cold we feel when we get out of the water on those chilly, windy days. A wet calf or lamb will feel the same way. We grab a towel; they rely on their

mothers to lick them dry. But, livestock producers can help by providing some sort of wind protection, and we need to be ready to step in and help dry them off if their momma isn't doing the job.

Long term, a living tree windbreak is a pretty good plan. My windbreak is 15 years old and should provide good wind protection in another five years. K-State Research & Extension can help with that too, if you're interested. The Kansas Forest Service sells seedling trees, and we can help with windbreak design. Just give me a call.

If you have questions you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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