

‘From the Ground Up’

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It’s Hot. Water Smarter.

Summer is here and with it brings much warmer temperatures. You may have noticed yourself reaching for the water bottle but have you thought about the water needs of your livestock. While we are concerned with how clean and fresh the water we drink is, the quality of water provided to our livestock is often overlooked.

Water is the most critical and essential nutrient for livestock species. A decrease in water consumption can cause many problems such as decreased feed intake, dehydration and failure of body functions. The amount of water that will be consumed varies by species and temperature. For example, on average cattle will need a minimum of 15 to 20 gallons per head per day during the summer months. Poultry owners will typically see water consumption double or even quadruple when temperatures are high.

There are many different watering sources that can be used for livestock from farm ponds to automatic watering systems. Farm ponds are best suitable when they are able to be fenced off to allow access only to a small portion. Another option for supplying water to livestock is the use of troughs or tubs. In backyard poultry operations gravity flow waterers are typically used. Rabbits use water bottles or bowls. All of these come in a variety of different shapes, sizes and materials to best fit the needs of the numbers you are watering and the area they are being placed. With the use of any type of manual fill waterer you will need to check and re-fill frequently. There are also many automatic type watering systems for use in all species from cattle to rabbits. Even though automatic, the watering systems will still need to be monitored to insure that animals are being able to receive water and that there isn’t a break, clog or malfunction in the system. Choosing the right watering system will vary based on individual needs and vary between operations.

Have you heard the saying “Why would they drink it if you wouldn’t?” This is referring to the maintenance of water quality. During summer months, cattle will stand belly deep in ponds which decreases water quality with the addition of manure and urine. Increasing water quality in a pond was already mentioned above by fencing livestock out of all but a small portion. In other watering sources such as troughs they may need to be dumped or drained and washed out. Automatic systems may need nozzles, floats or the tank where water is held cleaned periodically. Temperature of water is another factor to consider as animals prefer to drink water that is at or below body temperature. Deeper troughs and ponds are going to stay at a cooler temperature than if they are shallow or small. In all watering systems, but ponds, you can select the location they are placed. Placing them in an area that does not receive direct sunlight will keep water temperature lower. When water levels get low, small animals such as squirrels have a tendency to fall in the trough and not be able to get back out causing contamination of the water. If you

find something has fallen in the trough remove it and clean the trough immediately. Water with a foul smell or taste will cause a decrease in water consumption and is caused by both organic and inorganic contaminants.

At the end of the day, choose the watering system that works best for you and your operation. Keep it clean and void of contaminants to ensure the animals will drink it and not cause harm. Monitor both the water levels and animals frequently during warm weather to insure that consumption is at a rate it should be and animals are remaining hydrated. As always, keep water around to keep yourself from becoming dehydrated as well.