

Farm animals in hot weather

Hot weather conditions can cause very serious welfare problems. If you are concerned about the health and welfare of your animals contact your vet.

All animals should be offered shaded areas with access to plenty of clean water at all times.

Where animals are housed, measures must be taken to ensure ventilation is adequate. The number of animals held within farm buildings should be reduced considerably, to enable sufficient air to circulate. This is a particular concern associated with poultry kept for meat production, such as broiler chickens, turkeys and ducks, which are very susceptible to heat stress. Additional fans can help to reduce the effects of heat stress, provided this is carried out in a controlled manner. Animals in such buildings should also be monitored frequently to assess any changes that indicate that more drastic action is needed.

If the decision is taken to bring dairy cattle inside during very hot weather, then they must have access to unlimited amounts of clean drinking water at all times. Some farmers may feel the need to milk the cows a little later in the afternoon when it is slightly cooler. If this is not possible, then cooling the animals down with water whilst they are waiting to be milked may be necessary. If animals have to be fed, then it is advisable to feed them at either end of the day when the weather is not so hot.

In the case of animals kept at an agricultural show ground, they are often kept in large marquees with limited ventilation facilities. In such a situation, it is important to try and force ventilation inside the marquee or to take the animals outside - where there is access to both air movement and shade.

Pigs are also very susceptible to heat stress and their cooling mechanisms are limited as they are unable to sweat except through the tip of their snout. They will pant to try to cool down. For outdoor pigs, try to ensure that they have some sort of artificial or natural wallows available in order for them to lose heat through evaporation. Insulated arcs can also help to prevent outdoor pigs from becoming too hot. Misting in the dunging area can help indoor pigs to cool down. In extreme cases of heat stress (i.e. they collapse), it may be necessary to hose them down to get them cool as quickly as possible and to prevent death. If in doubt about what action to take seek immediate advice from your veterinary surgeon.

Newly shorn sheep should also be monitored very closely because, paradoxically, they are probably more susceptible to heat stress than a fully fleeced sheep, as the fleece acts as insulation against the heat. However, moving fully fleeced sheep around in hot weather can increase the risk of heat stress.

The transportation of animals in hot weather should be avoided unless this is absolutely necessary. Where possible, this should be done during the coolest part of the day - night time is usually the best for this movement. Transport, as well as handling, imposes additional stress on animals and this makes it more difficult for them to cope with the heat.

Further information:

- Defra booklet [‘Pigs: Solving the Problem of Heat Stress’](#)
- Defra booklet [‘Heat Stress in Poultry – Solving the Problem’](#)