

“Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow” is a great holiday song that may be even more pleasant if people could control where the snow falls.

“We can somewhat control where the snow falls by where we plant trees and shrubs, especially in windbreaks in rural areas,” says Dennis Adams, Nebraska Forest Service forester.

Properly planned windbreaks can significantly reduce wind velocity, thus affecting the distribution of blowing snow.

By modifying wind flow, blowing snow can be distributed across an open field or deposited within a zone, instead of the driveway, work area or livestock pens.

“Properly designed windbreaks can save on labor and energy needed for snow removal and reduce stress on livestock,” said Adams.

Field windbreaks can spread snow across protected areas, provide moisture for crop and rangelands, increase productivity because of the soil moisture and add to economic return in both yields and crop protection.

Research has found winter wheat yields can increase 15-20 percent, said Adams. Windbreaks in rangeland also provide protection for spring calving or other new born livestock.

The width and location of a field windbreak for depositing snow are important. A single row of a tall deciduous tree species, planted 15-20 feet between trees and perpendicular to prevailing winter wind can provide snow distribution in a field 10 to 15 times the height of the trees. Snow blowing over the tree tops falls to the ground on the leeward (downwind) side of the windbreak.

A denser field windbreak may cause too much snow near the tree row. This may trap too much moisture near the windbreak which can delay field operations in the spring.

Farmstead or feedlot windbreaks are planted to reduce the force of winter wind in the sheltered zone on the leeward side of the trees and shrubs. Feedlot windbreaks can get livestock out of strong winds and driving snow.

In addition the animal is less stressed aiding in better animal health. Both home and feedlot windbreaks should be at least 150 to 300 feet from the area to be protected.

Typical windbreaks for snow control around farms, ranches, or feedlots consist of four to six rows (a row of shrubs, two or three rows of conifers and one or two rows of tall deciduous trees).

Planning, design and ordering of trees and shrubs assistance is available at Natural Resources District or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offices. Tree orders are now being taken by NRD's.