



Managing Down Cattle

A farm's animal well-being plan must include how to care for down animals. In rare situations when an animal is compromised, farm workers must know how to respond appropriately, with the animal's best interest in mind. Written plans (standard operating procedures, SOPs) should include how to handle down animals and implement treatment plans. Caretakers should be trained in proper down animal handling. This factsheet addresses assessment, encouraging standing and caring for down cattle.

ASSESSING DOWN CATTLE

Answer these questions during your initial assessment.

- 1) Is there an illness that prevents standing? If the answer is 'Yes', then who should be contacted to provide treatment? For example, everyone should know the symptoms of milk fever; she needs to be treated first before asking her to stand.
- 2) Is the floor slippery or wet? Fix either by spreading sand, lime, or bedding to provide traction. Make sure there is adequate front lunge room (four feet) before asking adult cattle to stand and be sure the area you ask them to lunge into is better than the area in which they currently rest.
- 3) How is the animal lying? If they are lying normally and the area provides safety and traction, then proceed to ask them to stand.

If their back legs are split out, then protect yourself while getting their legs back together. Halter their head and using a rope or set of hobbles, tuck one back leg under their belly while rolling them onto the same side as the tucked leg. Keep their head turned so they are looking back and cannot lunge forward. Prop against the shoulder so they can't lay flat and tie the halter to their back leg using a quick release knot. Be

prepared to cut the halter if they struggle and flip themselves with their head trapped under their body.

Is the animal lying flat out? Are they cast? 'Casting' happens on an uneven surface where the animal becomes over-centered, and they are unable pull themselves onto their sternum. Cattle in this position will often thrash and beat their head on the ground/floor while attempting to right themselves. Weaned cattle or adults will bloat if they are laying with their head lower than their body for an extended time (and especially if they are on their right side with their rumen up). Get help to halter their head and place a rope low on the down rear leg. Tuck the down rear leg forward, then while pulling the rope under their belly to keep the leg tucked and pushing on the down shoulder, roll the animal onto their sternum. Prop their shoulder so they can't lay flat.

- 4) Are they caught or trapped by anything? If the answer is 'yes' and it's a simple fix, then remove the obstruction. Use your situational awareness for more complicated situations to determine whose help you need and how to contact them. For example, you may first need permission, and then expertise to cut a gate apart.

ENCOURAGING STANDING

First, use situational awareness; don't ask them to move into a worse situation.

Acceptable guidelines for encouraging cattle to stand include approaching at an angle from the rear toward the shoulder (not from the front), yelling and clapping hands, pushing on the animal's hindquarters or ribs, using a pen or pencil to 'poke', and shaking a cow paddle or noisemaker. Electric prods may only be used after workers are trained in their responsible use.

Unacceptable methods include poking with sharp objects, hitting with any objects, hitting the face or head, jumping on animals, punching, or kicking, and excessive electric prod use.

Activate Your Down Cow Team

If they still cannot stand, are not in a safe place in which to stand or asking them to stand will make everything worse, then you will need to first move them to a more secure location. Call the down cow team to take over. Plan by selecting, training and equipping team members so they may efficiently and safely respond to down cattle emergencies.

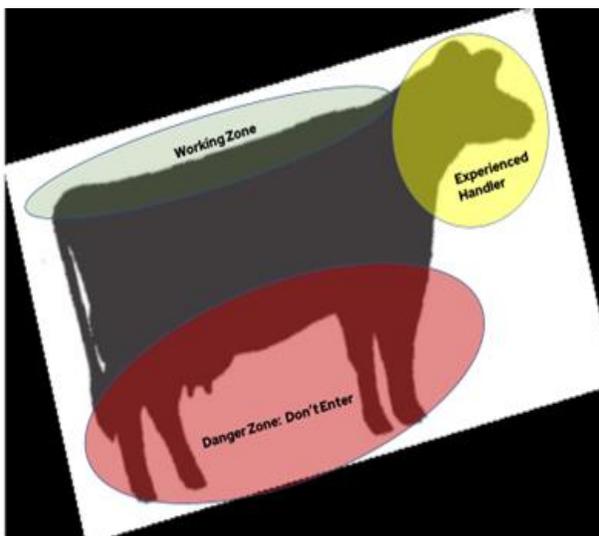
It is helpful to know the animal's current and prior temperament. Are they normally temperamental or flighty? Do they appear calm or are they breathing fast, ears forward, and eyes excited? In either case, they may rush too fast and make their situation worse

as you assist them. It may be better to use a halter and lead rope to be able to turn their head and guide their speed and direction. You may need to set up a temporary pen around the animal before asking them to stand.

Always remember that cows, in their pain and fear, may turn on you. So, stand back and know your rapid exit path.

If you are successful and the animal stands, consider moving them to a dedicated recovery area. Watch for shaking or wobbling to first determine if they are strong enough to walk; and then move them slowly and carefully. Avoid high-risk entrapment areas (alleyways, corners, gutters, etc.).

Do not ask them to walk if they are not bearing weight on all four limbs. Have plans in place for what is to be done if they are only able to stand on three legs. Such plans may include creating a temporary well-bedded pen around them, slinging them in this temporary pen, or moving them with the aid of the sling. Seek veterinary diagnosis of a non-weight bearing limb. For example, with injuries to the rear legs, cattle are highly unlikely to recover from a torn gastrocnemius muscle but with care and time they may recover from peroneal nerve damage.



Safe Working Zones

Stay out of the red zone when handling down cattle. Use caution when handling the head. It's safest to work from the back of the animal. Stuttgart graphic.

Remember bovine anatomy as you attempt to move down cattle. Don't use the head, tail, or limbs as handles. Forces on limbs exponentially increase with friction, so do not drag cattle across the floor. Skin is the primary immune barrier; damaging its integrity adds further insult to their ability to recover. The cow may be in a state where they are unable to "guard" themselves, and you may "rescue" or "move" the body but lose the animal.

Many times, proper technique, not muscle, will result in a successful, safe procedure. Always choose the lowest risk, least technical means of movement. Be

deliberate in your preparations and then once the animal is secured, quickly and smoothly move her. There are many choices of equipment available at various price points.

Hip lifts and slings may be used judiciously. Do not 'hang' animals from lifts; the animals' feet must always have contact with the ground. Use straps or wide ropes in vertical, forward, rear, or side assists to maneuver down animals, including cattle, onto mats, rescue glides made from plywood, stone boats, gates, tarps, or other suitable surfaces.



Forward, rear and side assists
Howard Ketover, DVM



Vertical lifts,
Howard Ketover, DVM,



Bundle cattle before placing them onto a glide or into a tractor bucket. Secure their head to their back leg using a quick-release knot.



Bundling a cow, Robert Leder, DVM

MANAGING DOWN CATTLE

When the animal is not standing within 12 hours after being moved to a suitable surface, the veterinarian must be consulted to determine a diagnosis of the underlying condition. Prognosis and treatment or retreatment plans will need to be decided upon, including the judicious use of pain medications and euthanasia potential.

If adult cattle are unable to stand within the first 24 hours, their chances of ever standing again are slim. If the animal does not change sides on their own, they must be rolled every four hours to avoid further damaging their muscles. They must rest in a well-bedded area and have protection from the elements (rain, wind, constant sunshine). Examine them daily for their ability to stand. Although cattle have gotten up after being down for a week or more, this is very uncommon. Euthanasia is recommended when the animal becomes depressed, quits eating and/or starts to lose body condition, or develops skin erosions or ulcers.

Your veterinarian can best determine long-term outcomes of compromised cattle. Options include: 1) home slaughter for personal use (if they are disease free and free of drug residues), 2) slaughter at a facility for those who are not in severe pain, freely able to stand and walk, capable of being transported and without disease or treatment (drug residue) and 3) euthanasia.

The slaughter of down cows has been a major animal welfare concern for many years, and a federal rule enacted in 2003 prevents this practice. FDA-inspected slaughter facilities cannot accept a cow that cannot stand and walk into the plant for slaughter. Only attempt to market cattle when they can rise and walk under their own power, and you are sure they will survive the marketing and transport process and continue to rise and walk under their own power at the packing plant. This will not guarantee they will pass inspection, but it will allow them to be presented.

Indications for Euthanasia

Euthanasia is indicated when disease or injury diminishes quality of life or creates pain and suffering that cannot be effectively relieved by medical means. Cattle should be euthanized when they are a public health threat, have not cleared all withdrawal times, are non-ambulatory or may be non-ambulatory upon arrival at a processing facility, severely emaciated, have terminal conditions or advanced stages of cancer.

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