

# Down Cattle Management

## DOWN CATTLE ARE AN EMERGENCY

Cattle that are unable or unwilling to stand are defined as down cattle.

Only the provision of immediate care will prevent further problems and allow recovery.

Using poor and unplanned procedures when dealing with down cattle can cause an animal welfare issue.

## PREVENTION

Strategies to help reduce the risk of down cattle include:

- Quiet handling techniques;
- Prevent metabolic problems at calving;
- Mastitis prevention;
- Deeply bedded maternity pens, close monitoring and prompt intervention when needed at calving;
- Injury prevention – Address slippery or uneven floor surfaces, poor lighting, steps, tight turns, narrow alleys and overcrowding;
- Lameness prevention implement routine hoof care program;
- Careful movement of high risk cattle (e.g. periparturient, weak, cattle with locomotion issues);
- Housing design to optimize cattle flow; and
- Analysis of records – For early identification of risks.

## Determine why the animal is down

A complete physical exam of a down animal is needed initially and may include:

- Observation of animal's alertness and posture;
- Determination of body temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate;
- Evaluation of mucous membrane colour and hydration status (skin pinch, sunken eyes);
- Palpation of the udder and examination of milk samples; and
- Evaluation of position and swelling of limbs.

A veterinarian can assist with:

- Auscultation of the abdominal and thoracic areas;
- Rectal exam including palpation of organs in the caudal abdomen, pelvis and vertebral column;
- Extension and flexion of limbs, especially the hind ones;
- Assessment of pupillary light and cranial nerve reflexes; and
- Blood sampling to test for abnormal metabolic parameters and organ or muscle damage.

## Care of down cattle

Down cattle should be housed in a location where they can be readily supervised.

Ensure the animal is lying upright (in sternal) and not flat out on its side. Ensure the animal's hind legs are tucked in to its flank and the animal is supported to stay upright (e.g. propped with a bale). Provide:

- A soft surface to lie on. On a hard surface, muscle/nerve damage occurs in a very short time (less than one to two hours);
- Shelter from the sun, rain, extreme cold or heat and with protection from predators;
- Movement, by rolling animal from side to side every two hours initially;
- Fresh water in a container that will not spill, or water offered hourly;
- Fresh feed that is easily consumed;
- Good non-slip footing (e.g. sand applied around animal). If the animal goes down in a tie stall, make sure the gutter is covered;
- Udder pressure relief by milking routinely;
- Encouragement to stand; and
- Medications such as anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) and analgesics, as recommended by your veterinarian.



### WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN LIFTING OR MOVING DOWN CATTLE

- Do not use hip lifters/clamps for extended support due to trauma they can cause to hip bones and muscles.
- Never use hip lifters as a means to move animals from one location to another.
- Cattle must not be pulled, dragged or otherwise moved through mechanical force applied directly to the animal. Do not pull, drag or lift by the neck or legs unless human or animal safety is at risk and there is no other option. Even then, only do so for a few feet, with force being applied for a very brief period of time.

### WHEN TO CONSIDER EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia should occur when the animal:

- Is in an inaccessible location and cannot be moved humanely;
- Is in pain that does not respond to treatment;
- Has an incurable condition (e.g. broken bones, dislocated hip, grave prognosis);
- Is not alert and/or not responding to treatment of an underlying condition;
- Deteriorates despite treatment (e.g. animal is not or stops eating; animal is not willing/able to lay in sternal position – always laying out on its side); or
- Has complications that cannot be dealt with adequately (e.g. pressure sores).

## Lifting and moving down cattle

Lifting may help some downer cattle to stand and can help assessing injury. However it should be done with **great caution** to prevent causing further injury, distress or pain. Consider consulting a veterinarian prior to attempting

### When attempting to lift down cattle:

- Ensure enough people are present to help;
- If the animal is unable to support its weight, lower the animal immediately onto a soft bedded surface
- Monitor the animal closely for swellings, dislocated hips, muscle tendon or nerve damage, pressure sores or pain.

The following devices can be used to lift cattle: body slings, float tanks or hip clamps/lifters.



### To move down cattle:

Use: rubber mats, stone boats, plywood sheets, or **full body** slings.

Tractor, skid steer or loader bucket can also be used. However, extra caution is required as they can be dangerous to animals and people.

Refer to Table 1 in full guide for details on lifting and moving methods.

## Methods of euthanasia and next steps

There are only three acceptable euthanasia methods:

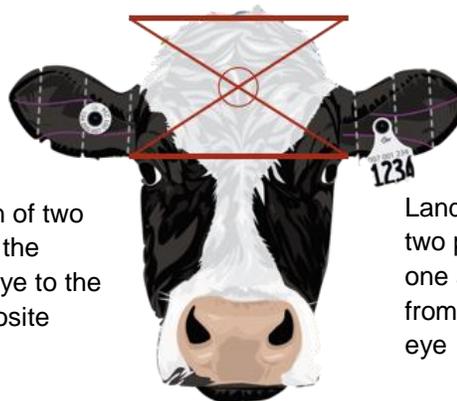
- Intravenous administration of barbiturate overdose done by a veterinarian;
- Captive bolt followed by a secondary kill step using the correct landmark. Confirm insensibility immediately post-stunning by testing for corneal reflex (touch the eyeball; no blinking should occur);
- Secondary kill steps include injection of KCL, exsanguination or pithing.
- Gunshot – use the correct landmark and correct sized firearm.

### Confirm death immediately after euthanasia and before leaving or moving the animal:

All of the following must be true:

- No corneal reflex – touch the clear front of the eyeball; no blinking should occur;
- No breathing – movement of the chest indicates breathing (breathing may be slow and erratic); and
- No heartbeat – best evaluated by placing a stethoscope over the left lower chest area under the elbow; check immediately and then again after seven minutes.

Landmark: Intersection of two lines each drawn from the outside corner of the eye to the base or top of the opposite horn



Landmark: Half-way between two parallel lines drawn laterally; one across the poll and the other from the outside corner of each eye