

## When Things Go Wrong in the Chute

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As we get into the busy fall season it's important to remember the do's and don'ts of processing. Whether it's cows at preg check or feeder cattle coming into the yard, there's been a lot of money invested already in these animals and processing lets you establish some 'insurance' against certain diseases and conditions. It's disappointing to see side effects from processing so here are some issues I see and how to avoid them.

**Shoulder Bruises:** As a vet, this is the most common problem I'm involved with that can be linked to processing. The animal hits the headgate hard and develops a large swelling in front of the shoulder about 7-10 days after going through the chute. This can lead to a pretty serious infection and I tend to open them up if they're bigger than a football to prevent excessive trim and condemnation at slaughter. Some care needs to be taken when opening them to avoid hitting the jugular vein, which can be very close to the bruise, and to control excessive bleeding if the abscess is deep in the muscle tissue. Excitable cattle and self-catching headgates can be predisposing factors, but sometimes these just show up.

**Infections:** Implant infections and scar tissue are a problem because the implant won't release as it should and you lose the benefits of implanting. The implant gun should be kept in the holding tray in between animals, with the needle between the brushes and a 50:50 mixture of Hibitane and water that is high enough to keep the brushes wet. Start with clean Hibitane solution and change it if it gets dirty. Also place the implant into a clean ear. If the ear is a little dirty then brush it with some Hibitane solution and if the ear is really dirty, use a steak knife to scrape away manure then brush with Hibitane solution before implanting. Keep the implant needle sharp, changing it every 200-300 hd to avoid scar tissue.

Ear tag infections can get severe enough to lose the tag. Avoid these by disinfecting the ear taggers before and after processing with Hibitane. Again, avoid putting a tag through a dirty ear, just as above.

Castration infections from banding or cutting can be serious. Continue to monitor any type of castrations for the next week or two for signs of infection, which will be seen as swelling at the top of the scrotum. The animal should be pulled and examined and treated. Always use clean equipment when castrating, and keep the scalpel in Hibitane in between animals if cutting. Prevent post-op infections by keeping calves in a very clean pen until they are fully healed.

Vaccine lumps and bumps rarely get big enough to cause a problem but they are unsightly and can indicate an issue with hygiene during processing or a mild allergic reaction in the animal. Start with clean needles and change them every 10 animals and in between mixing up new vaccine. This also keeps your needles sharp. The injection site for products is in the neck in front of the shoulder, with injection sites 6" apart when using multiple products. More injection site reactions are associated with clostridial vaccines, dirty needles, and wet hides. If abscesses and scar tissue develop this can affect trim at slaughter. Do not keep vaccines that had a dirty needle inserted into the vial or else you can end up with abscesses.

**Animal injury:** Unfortunately, animals can hurt themselves when going through the handling system. I've had serious problems with heavily pregnant cows that go down in the chute, especially when the sides don't open. We have to get pretty creative with ropes and straps and machinery, but never just hook onto a leg and pull backwards because that will cause serious injury to the cow and she might never stand again. When animals go forward out of the chute, make sure to have really excellent footing there for them because they tend to jump forwards forcefully, and they can break a leg or even their back when they jump and slip. A box with sand works well. You want safe animal handling facilities that promote natural cattle flow, funneling them into the alley with minimal yelling and prodding. Watch for slippery flooring or tight corners or places where cattle can get a foot or a leg caught. If a system is set up well and the workers are knowledgeable then the cattle will stay calmer (and so will the cowboys!).

**Excessive bleeding:** Whether implanting, dehorning, or castrating, hemostasis is critical. You may be surprised to see implanting included here but there's an artery in the ear that you have to watch out for. I've seen cattle bleed to death over a couple days because the implant kept the artery open. Dehorning bleeding is much more obvious and techniques like pulling veins, cautery, or elastic around the poll can stop this quickly, just remember to remove any bandages/elastic the next day to prevent further injury. Castrating can be a bit tougher because there is naturally some blood during cutting. Keep calves on very clean straw and make sure they all get up and look okay that evening and the next day; if one looks weak or staggering or won't get up, call the vet ASAP! The main thing to look for after any of these procedures is that the bleeding has stopped within a couple hours.

**Anaphylaxis:** This side effect is quite rare but quite deadly. Soon after vaccination the animal will appear wobbly and shaky and maybe drooling and puffing. Without immediate treatment with epinephrine they will die of anaphylaxis, a sudden allergic reaction. If you suspect this occurred, please contact your vet for more information.

Processing is an important job and though not every problem can be avoided, there are steps to take to minimize them: good handling facilities with good footing, clean and sanitized equipment, proper technique, and good animal aftercare all play a significant role.