

Downed Cattle

Our topics for this week are:

- Getting a downed cow to stand
- Lifting a downed cow
- Moving a downed cow

Downed (downer) cattle are those that have lost their desire or ability to stand and move. Common causes include milk fever, leg injuries, or calving (obturator nerve) paralysis. Downed cattle may recover but need shelter and nursing during the recovery period. Downed cattle cannot be sent to commercial slaughter for human consumption.

NOTE: Working with downed cattle can be especially dangerous. However, cattle that are down and cannot escape inclement weather may die if not moved to shelter and a more favorable treatment environment. Most of the methods used for rescuing downed horses can be applied to cattle, but with a few exceptions, financial constraints preclude the extraordinary efforts that are more commonly used on downed horses. A local veterinarian should always be called to provide any needed medical care, sedation, or guidance in a rescue effort.

Getting a Downed Cow to Stand

It is always best to try to have downed cattle stand with their own strength, if possible. First, the handler needs to try to determine if the cow is physically able to stand. Second, he should make sure that there is sufficient room for the cow to stand and that the surface is non-slip. Third, all of its legs need to be underneath the cow's body. Last, the handler must provide incentive and sufficient time for the cow to stand by clapping or shouting, slapping on the cow's neck or chest, preferably with a used grain sack or other means of making a noise without bruising. Another method that is often effective is for a handler to rock the cow's body with his knees. In extreme situations, an electric prod should be used sparingly. Twisting or lifting with the tail should not be done due to risk of causing a fracture or paralysis. If the cow stands, she should be permitted several minutes to adapt to standing before encouraging any walking.

Lifting a Downed Cow

Attempts to lift a downed cow should be done over a non-slip surface to provide traction if efforts are made by the animal to support its own weight. Straps or ropes under the chest and abdomen can be tried on smaller cattle. Placing a large air bag underneath the torso and inflating it can be effective. A **web strap harness sling** may be used underneath the torso and the cow lifted with a pulley system or power lift.

A **hip hoist** is a clamp placed over the pin bones of the hip to lift the rear of a dairy cow. The pelvic bones of beef cattle are usually not prominent enough to use a hip lift. This avoids any pressure on the abdomen or mammary glands when lifting. The cow must have enough strength in her front legs to support her weight for the hip lift to be effective. The lift does not support the cow's body. It only assists their own efforts to stand. Slings and hip clamps are for

brief periods of lifting and should not be used for extended periods, i.e., more than one hour.

Rehabilitation tubs for aquatic therapy are available for cattle in some veterinary hospitals. These support much of the weight of a cow by the buoyancy of their body. The water should be maintained at 100°F and the cow's head supported with a halter and lead rope.

Moving a Downed Cow

Downed animals should never be dragged because of that friction injuries to their skin. Downed cattle can be pulled onto a flatbed trailer or a livestock trailer using a glide (heavy canvas may be an adequate substitute), a ramp, and a block and tackle. To move short distances, downed cattle can be pulled or rolled onto a skid, such as a detached farm gate that acts as a travois and then pulled by a tractor. After removing the cow from the skid, it should be assisted to lie on its sternum, propping it with hay bales if needed. If the cow cannot stand without assistance within a day, it should be assisted with a hip clamp or sling, if available.

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. All downed cows should be examined by a veterinarian.**
- 2. Hip hoist clamps can only be used on dairy cattle.**
- 3. Downed cows that cannot stand but must be moved should be moved with a glide or skid, not dragged on a floor or the ground.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.