

Casting a Cow with Ropes

Casting methods are means to lay a cow down and immobilize it when restraint chutes or tilt tables are not available or appropriate for the procedure to be done. Any time a cow is laid on its side there can be risk of displaced abomasum or bloat if handled roughly or forced to remain recumbent for too long, preferably less than 30 minutes. Cows within 2 months of calving should not be cast due to the risk of induced abortion.

An appropriate ground surface should first be selected. The ground selected for casting should be clear, smooth, and somewhat soft. Cattle will lay down if a rope squeezes their chest and their abdomen (Reuff's or "half-hitch" method) or puts pressure beneath their front legs and over their back (Burley's, "Flying W", or Criss-Cross method). With either method, the lead rope should be held by an assistant or tied low, near the ground, to a sturdy object. Both methods require 40 ft of rope.

Half-Hitch Method

To perform the half-hitch method of casting, a loop is placed around the cow's neck and tied with a bowline. A half hitch is placed around the chest just behind the cow's elbows. The rope is thrown under the cow or a pole with a hook can be used to retrieve the rope on the other side. Another half hitch is placed around the abdomen, avoiding the udder or prepuce, depending on the gender. The remaining line is pulled back steadily in line with the cow's spine and the cow is gradually laid down on its side. Cattle should be laid either on their back (ventrodorsal) and propped with hay bales with their front legs stretched forward and their back legs stretched back with cotton ropes, or on their right side so that the left side can be uppermost and observed for gas accumulation.

If laying on its right side, the front legs are tied with 6 ft cotton ropes after flexing the leg so that the hoof is near the elbow and restrained with a clove hitch around a pastern, leaving about 8 inches extra. The long end is wrapped around the radius and the pastern 3 to 4 times and then the rope is tied with a slip knot (sheet bend with a bight for quick release) to the 8 inches left over from the clove hitch. Similar ties can be used on flexed hindlegs with a clove hitch on a fetlock, figure 8 wraps incorporating the fetlocks and tibia just above the hock, and slip knot tie.

Burley Method

The Burley method of casting cattle was named for Dr. D. R. Burley of Georgia. It is preferred by dairymen since the ropes are not placed in front of the udder and the cow goes down on its sternum and must be rolled over on its side. There is no pressure on the chest or udder and no knot to tie around horns, neck, or front leg. Therefore, its application and release are quicker. It is also possible to control which side the cow rolls onto. However, it is harder to pull two ropes with enough strength to cast a cow than one rope as with the half-hitch method.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Casting a cow with ropes provides good restraint of their entire body when a tilt or rotating table is not available for lateral (on their side) positioning.**
- 2. A cow on her side should not be restrained in that position for more than 30 minutes.**
- 3. The half-hitch method is easier for one person to lay a cow down, while Burley's method is preferred by dairymen for dairy cows due to less pressure from ropes is applied near the udder.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

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.