

Laying a Cow Down for Restraint

Our topics for this week are:

- **Reasons to cast a cow**
- **Risks to cows when they are cast**
- **Methods of casting cows**

Laying down, commonly called “casting” methods for cattle are the 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. Cows within two 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 (half-hitch method) or puts pressure beneath their front legs and over their back (Flying W method). With either method, the lead rope should be held by an assistant or tied low, near the ground to a sturdy object to alleviate tension on the lead rope and halter after the cow is down.. Both methods require 40 ft of rope.

Half-Hitch Method:

The half-hitch method is also referred to as Reuff’s method. This involves placing a loop around the cow’s neck and tied with a bowline knot. 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 that can be used to retrieve the rope on the other side. Another half hitch is placed around the abdomen, avoiding the udder or prepuce. 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. Since recumbent ruminants rise with their hind legs first, tying the hindlegs securely is of more importance than the front legs.

Flying W Method:

The other casting method, the Flying W, also called the Criss-Cross method or Burley method 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 pushed over on its side. There is no pressure on the chest or udder and no knot to tie around horns, neck, or front leg. Although its application and release are quicker and there is control of which side the cow rolls onto, it is harder to pull two ropes with enough strength to cast a cow than one rope 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. The surface to cast a cow should be clear of objects, smooth, and slightly soft.**
- 2. After casting, a cow should be positioned on the middle of its back or on its right side.**
- 3. The half-hitch method of casting is easiest for one person to perform, while the Flying W method is preferred by dairymen.**

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 325 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.