



**DAIRY  
FARMERS  
OF CANADA**

## The Dos & Don'ts of Down Cattle Care

**Any animal (calf or adult, male or female) that is unable to stand should be treated as an emergency.**

Cattle that cannot stand are either too weak, ill, or injured, and must be addressed immediately. Prompt diagnosis, appropriate treatment, and handling with great care will maximize the chances of recovery.

As per proAction® guidelines, every team member who handles cattle should be familiar with low-stress cattle handling techniques and husbandry practices to help prevent down cattle, and be trained in how to manage down cattle effectively to ensure the best chance of success. Have your team members and veterinarian provide input on your Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) so that everyone is prepared to provide the best possible care.

**The next page includes some basic guidelines of what to do (and NOT do) when caring for down cattle.**

## Moving Down Cattle

DO	DON'T
<p>Ensure there are enough people available to help move animals safely.</p>	<p><b>Carry or move animals using hip lifters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This can cause damage to their hips and spine</li> </ul>
<p><b>Move animals with great care to prevent further injury:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a skid steer, loader, or tractor bucket, stone boat, sheet of plywood, rubber mat, or full body sling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pull, push, drag, or lift animals by the neck or limbs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This should only be done in extreme situations when animal and/or human safety is a concern and there is no other option</li> <li>In these cases, they can only be moved this way for a few feet, for a very brief period of time. Carefully protect the animal as much as possible, and once it is safe, move them with an appropriate method</li> </ul>
<p>Train team members so they are familiar with your down cattle SOP to ensure they are prepared for such an emergency.</p>	<p><b>Use an electric prod on an animal that is unable to stand:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This causes unnecessary pain and distress</li> </ul> <p><b>**Electric prods should only be used in extreme situations, such as when an animal's safety is at risk. For example, a prod can be used once as a last resort to assess if a down animal is able to stand. If the animal does not respond, further use of the prod is not permitted.**</b></p>

## Lifting Down Cattle

DO	DON'T
<p>Encourage standing either with a full body sling, hip lifters, or a float tank using extreme caution.</p>	<p><b>Carry or move animals using hip lifters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This can cause damage to their hips and spine</li> </ul>
<p>Use low-stress handling techniques.</p>	<p><b>Use hip lifters on animals that cannot bear weight or stand with assistance.</b></p>

## Housing Down Cattle

DO	DON'T
<p>Ensure animals are provided with good footing, and ample clean, fresh, deep bedding and are supervised regularly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prop cattle up with bales so they can lie sternally (or 'sitting up')</li> <li>Ensure their hind legs are tucked up near their flank</li> <li>Use a heat lamp to rewarm young calves</li> <li>Provide shelter from the elements (e.g. shade in the sun)</li> <li>Provide frequent, easy access to fresh food and water</li> </ul>	<p><b>Let urine and manure accumulate where down cattle are lying:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint infections or sores can develop when animals are lying on wet bedding</li> <li>Mastitis infections can occur in lactating animals whose udders are not kept clean and dry</li> <li>Wet bedding can contribute to navel infections in young calves</li> </ul>

**Prevent down animals from being further injured by:**

- Being stepped on by other animals
- Gutters
- Scrapers
- Electric fences
- Predators

**Allow animals to lie flat out on their sides or on hard surfaces for prolonged periods:**

- Muscle and nerve damage occurs very quickly

## Caring for Down Cattle

### DO

### DON'T

**Determine why an animal is unable to stand:**

- **Metabolic:** some common issues include mineral imbalances (calcium, phosphorous)
- **Infectious:** most commonly, toxic mastitis in cows and diarrhea in calves
- **Nutritional:** vitamin and mineral deficiencies
- **Injury:** calving injuries, broken limbs, back, hip, soft tissue injury from slipping and falling, entrapment, severe lameness, blood loss
- Carefully move the animal to a comfortable bedded area or treat and provide care in place

**Leave cattle without identifying why they cannot stand:**

- This is an emergency situation
- In the event of severe injury, euthanize promptly

**Complete a full physical examination:**

- Observe the animal's alertness and ability to lie sternally
- Evaluate and record respiratory rate, heart rate, temperature, mucous membrane colour, and hydration level
- In lactating animals, strip out teats and examine milk

**Hesitate to call your veterinarian for a full examination and diagnosis if unsure of the underlying issue or treatment necessary for recovery.**

**Provide pain control through the use of a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory as directed by your veterinarian.**

**Let animals suffer without providing pain control.**

**Routinely milk lactating animals to prevent painful udder engorgement.**

**Let leaking milk, manure, or urine accumulate where lactating cattle are lying:**

- This will increase their risk of developing mastitis and sores

**Provide water in a bucket that is not easily tipped over, or offer water hourly.**

**Allow animals to become dehydrated which will exacerbate any health issues they have.**

**Offer easy-to-digest feed to cattle and milk to calves.**

**Tube milk to calves that will not drink:**

- Tubed milk is deposited into the rumen, which ferments and can cause acidosis

**Provide intravenous fluids for dehydrated calves.**

**Tube calves that cannot stand:**

- The risk of aspiration (fluid in the lungs) is high which can contribute to the development of pneumonia

**Gently roll the animal from side to side several times a day (ideally, every 2 hours).**

**Let animals lie in the same position, or flat out for long periods of time:**

- This contributes to muscle and nerve damage

## Decision-Making for Down Cattle

### DO

### DON'T

**Monitor down animals closely and recognize if their condition is improving or deteriorating.**

**Let animals remain down for more than 2 days:**

- Their chances of recovery are dramatically reduced the longer they remain recumbent

**Euthanize animals that are trapped and cannot be moved safely or humanely.**

**Drag, push, pull, or lift animals by the limbs or neck:**

- This should only be done in extreme situations when animal and/or human safety is a concern and there is no other option
- In these cases, they can only be moved this way for a few feet, for a very brief period of time. Carefully protect the animal as much as possible, and once it is safe, move them with an appropriate method

**Euthanize animals that are in pain, or suffering from severe injury or illness with no reasonable prospect of improvement, or are not responding to treatments within an appropriate time frame.**

**Move or leave a euthanized animal until you have confirmed death, meaning it:**

- Is no longer breathing
- Does not have a heartbeat
- Does not blink when its eye is touched (no corneal reflex, indicating loss of consciousness)

**Call your veterinarian for advice, or to assist with the euthanasia procedure if you are uncertain or uncomfortable.**

**Let down cattle suffer:**

- Do the right thing for the animal; if it does not show signs of recovery, euthanasia is the next best option