

Cattle FACS: Non-Ambulatory Cattle ("Downers")

Good management practices, proper livestock handling and prompt attention to sick cattle are routine management procedures producers should follow to avoid the occurrence of non-ambulatory cattle. Non-ambulatory animals must be dealt with in a humane manner while minimizing economic hardship.

DEFINITIONS:

- a non-ambulatory animal (commonly referred to as a "downer") is unable to stand up or walk, even if assisted
- an infirm animal is still ambulatory but has a disabling condition
- a cripple is an animal which is obviously lame on one or more limbs but still able to get up unassisted and move about relatively freely
- infirm and crippled animals often become "downers"

EFFECTS ON THE INDUSTRY:

- economic loss: on farm disposal versus sale
- pose handling difficulties for marketing agents and the transportation industry (extra costs may be passed on to producers)
- the public perceives "downed" cattle as indications of negligent animal care; this perception will erode the public's confidence in our ability to responsibly manage the welfare of our cattle

WAYS TO PREVENT NON-AMBULATORY LIVESTOCK:

- **identify and manage lame, thin and sick cattle promptly; most cattle in transit go "down" because their initial problems were ignored**
- adequate space, secure footing, properly designed and maintained housing and loading equipment reduce costly accidents, injuries and bruising
- marketing animals while they are still in good physical condition reduces transit occurrence of non-ambulatory animals
- keep hooves well trimmed to prevent falls and promptly treat foot problems that can cause lameness
- follow good management and sanitation practices to minimize bacterial infections such as foot rot
- handle cattle quietly and gently to prevent injuries

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

WAYS TO HANDLE NON-AMBULATORY LIVESTOCK:

- even with the best precautions, animals may still sometimes become non-ambulatory
- when non-ambulatory situations occur due to accidents, medical complications or terminal illness, these **animals must be handled promptly and humanely**
- deliver an injured, but otherwise healthy, non-ambulatory animal directly to a processing plant; ensure the vehicles and equipment required are capable of properly handling non-ambulatory animals
- consult your veterinarian for advice

OLDER, THIN OR INJURED CATTLE:

These cattle are at higher risk of going "down" on the farm or in transit. If an animal is "down" the producer needs to decide:

1. will medical care get the animal back on its feet?
2. can the animal be humanely moved to an abattoir?
3. should the animal be humanely put down on the farm?

CALVING DIFFICULTIES:

- delayed and/or difficult calving may be a sign of a large calf; a veterinarian should be contacted
- the correct amount of traction to pull a calf from a first-calf heifer is that which two people (or 250 lbs.) can accomplish without mechanical assistance
- provide calving areas with secure footing, ample space, bedding and with wide gates
- in general, prevent calving paralysis (pinched nerves) by following proper calving procedures including correct and careful use of calving devices and early intervention

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