

Down Cattle Care



DOWN CATTLE:

Cattle of any age or sex that are unable to rise and/or stand on their own.

In addition to the stress of being unable to rise, the weight of dairy cows puts a lot of pressure on limb muscles, which can cause significant muscle damage. Prompt and systematic action to assess the case and provide the care required is essential to maximize the chances of success and improve welfare. In addition to completing the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Down Cattle Management, documenting the known or suspected cause in the animal's file or logbook would help prevent future cases and make necessary corrections.



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Veterinarian intervention

After assessing the animal's general condition, the first step when a cow is unable to rise is to consult your attending veterinarian immediately.

Together, you can determine the appropriate time for his visit, the health exam and the next steps.



Realistic expectations:

Down cattle cases often cause a sense of uneasiness and helplessness for the farm owner and staff.

Studies show that even if the best care is given quickly (optimal conditions), the animals only have a **35% to 40% chance of survival.**

Prompt euthanasia then becomes the best care to provide.

Consult the “Decision Support in the Management of a Down Cattle” factsheet for quick and concerted actions with your veterinarian

01 Evaluating optimal conditions and providing essential care



As soon as a case arises, the animal and the **CURRENT** conditions must be quickly assessed.

Assess the general condition and presence of injuries

- ✓ Assess the animal's appetite and awareness.
- ✓ Take the animal's temperature.
- ✓ Examine the limbs and back for obvious fractures or wounds.
- ✓ Examine the udder: colour, swelling, wounds.

Provide basic care

- ✓ Ensure easy, competition-free access to **WATER** and **FEED** (e.g., dry hay) at all times, at a level lower than the animal's muzzle. In free stalls, stop the scraper if necessary.
- ✓ Prevent further injury (e.g., splaying risk) by placing **HOBBLES** on the animal's rear legs.

Evaluate the time and staff (ideally 3 or more people) available **TODAY** and **COMING DAYS** to provide care to the animal.

Objective: Making the animal comfortable and safe

- ✓ Assess whether the animal should be moved and if this can be done **without increasing its suffering**.
- ✓ If a decision is made to move the animal, assess the location where it will be transported to or kept:
 - Is my hospital pen free? Is it clean? Does it have enough bedding?
 - Can I free up the stalls on either side of the animal if it is not moved?
 - Do I have barriers to isolate the animal?
- ✓ Milk the cow twice a day to avoid udder engorgement, or more often if there is mastitis.



Make sure you have the necessary tools on hand

Quickly make sure you have the **necessary tools on hand**, such as a halter, rear leg hobbles, ropes or straps, pulleys, a hand puller and a sled to move the animal appropriately. It is strongly recommended that you consider mechanizing the animal's transport as it will facilitate the process.



Consider euthanasia

If it is not possible to make the animal comfortable and safe, **consider euthanasia**.

If euthanasia is the solution, be sure to use an acceptable method, verify the animal is unconscious and then confirm the animal is dead before moving it and disposing of the carcass according to the **guidelines** in effect in your region.



WHAT NOT TO DO when an animal is down:

Ignore the situation

Take action as soon as an animal is down. **Waiting will make the situation worse and is not an option.**

Lose your calm

The animal is unable to stand up. Trying to encourage the animal to stand up can worsen the situation.

*Do not use sharp objects. If the use of electric prods is absolutely necessary to assess if the animal is able to stand, **do not use them more than twice.***

Try too many treatments

Give only what is recommended by the veterinarian (e.g., too much calcium or anti-inflammatory medication is harmful to the animal and causes significant side effects [abomasal ulcer]).

*Inject **correctly** and in the **proper sites**.*

02 Housing down cattle appropriately

Ideally, you should house the animal in an individual pen with an area of at least 15 m² (160 ft²). The pen should contain abundant dry, clean bedding (**at least 30 cm thick**) and provide easy access for staff and equipment required for handling. The animal must be separated or protected from others at all times. Provide adequate ventilation and protection from the elements.

If an individual pen is not available:

- ✓ **Group pen:** The down cow must be placed out of the way, ideally isolated from the other animals using removable barriers to avoid being injured and trampled.
- ✓ **Pasture/outdoor area:** In summer, the down cow can be placed in the pasture, out of sight, in an area that is shaded, protected from inclement weather and not muddy.
- ✓ **Tie stall (as a last resort):** Cows housed in the stalls on either side of the down cow must be moved. The cow must be untethered and positioned in the middle of the stall. The gutter curb must be covered using a solid board (not wire screening) or filled with straw. Ideally, dividers (if present) should be removed to limit the risk of injury.

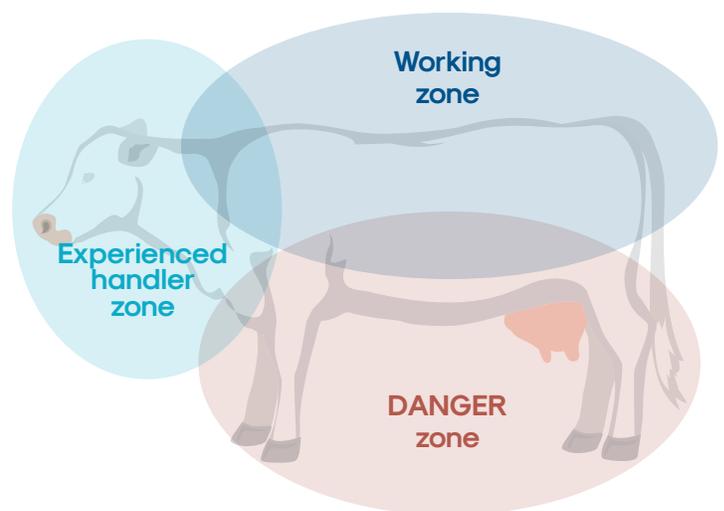
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03 Organizing a team safety first!

To avoid making compromises that could worsen the situation, **at least 3 people** must be available to move and lift a down cow: one person for the head, one person to turn the rear legs (tied together beforehand with a hobble) and one person to position the equipment.

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04 Moving down cattle

Here are the main reasons for **moving down cattle**:

1. Inadequate housing

- ✓ A stall that is too small to turn the cow or stall features that could create pressure points (e.g., on the shoulders or hips).
- ✓ A surface that is too firm with little bedding, a surface that is too slippery for the cow to stand or a large amount of manure under the cow.
- ✓ Unsafe housing because of the gutter curb or scraper that could cause injury or because of other cows that could injure the udder/teats/tail/legs.

2. Thermoregulation problem (day and/or night)

If a cow is left outside in the sun without shade, in a cold alley or building in winter, or outside and exposed to rain, cold winds or snow, thermoregulation problems can occur and these conditions can make it impossible to provide some elements of the care required (e.g., water in a bucket or solution in a bag that would freeze).

3. Constant/heavy traffic in the area

An animal that went down in an area where it prevents the passage of other cows or equipment (alleyways, milking parlour/robot, feedbunk, scraper).

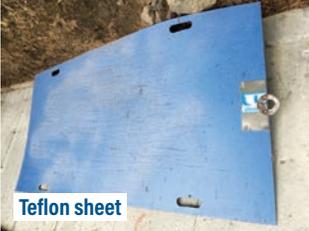
4. Transport to a hospital is required

The cow must be moved out of the barn and safely loaded into a closed trailer using safe and properly functioning equipment.



If the animal needs to be moved, but it is impossible to do so without making the situation worse (additional pain or injury), you must euthanize the animal without moving it, in accordance with your euthanasia SOP.

Equipment that can be used to **MOVE** a down cow:

Equipment	Description	Pros	Cons	Cost ¹	Demonstration of use ²
 <p>Farming Animal Skidder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial sled made of flexible, high-density plastic and equipped with straps Dimensions: 60 in x 96 in x 1/4 in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glides easily over all surface types Easy to handle when turning corners Very safe for the animal Easy to disinfect Highly durable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costly to purchase 	\$\$	
 <p>Teflon sheet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homemade sled made from a Teflon sheet to which anchors are added Minimum dimensions: 4 ft x 8 ft x 1/4 in thick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexpensive Can be made on the farm Glides easily over all surface types Very safe for the animal Easy to disinfect Durable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harder to manoeuvre when turning corners since it is a rigid sheet (does not fold), unlike the Animal Skidder 	\$	
 <p>Wooden board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum dimensions: 4 ft x 8 ft x 1/2 in thick Create anchors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readily available Can be made on the farm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not flexible and does not slide very well May cause injury 	\$	
 <p>Flexible mat/rigid canvas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum dimensions: 4 ft x 8 ft Create anchors to pull on the mat using mechanical assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readily available Can be made on the farm with mats or canvas (type used on campers, big bags, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cause injury due to uneven ground Can tear easily 	\$	Similar to Teflon sheet or wooden board

¹\$ less than \$500; \$\$ between \$500 and \$1,000.

² Read the QR code with your smartphone camera or visit:

www.lactanet.ca/en/down-cattle-care



Never use hip lifters or clamps to move down cattle.

05 Lifting down cattle

If the decision is to attempt to help the animal stand up, it is important to ensure the animal meets the following criteria:

- ✓ Is alert, aware of its immediate environment, with a good head carriage.
- ✓ Has no significant open fracture(s) or wound(s).
- ✓ Has been examined by the veterinarian.
- ✓ Tries to stand up on its own.
- ✓ The condition of the animal indicates it will likely be able to stand on its own.

Before and during an attempt to make a cow stand up, encourage the animal manually and by using your voice and broadcast sand or a fine abrasive material to increase traction. If the animal is unable to stand on its own after 5 minutes or if it seems very uncomfortable, the animal should be brought back down. More than 2 hours must pass between 2 attempts at mechanical lifting, for a maximum of 2 to 4 times a day. The animal's condition and your veterinarian's recommendations must always be taken into consideration.

Equipment that can be used to HELP down cattle STAND UP:

Equipment	Description	Pros	Cons	Cost ¹	Demonstration of use ²
 Hip clamps	• Metal frame to be assembled with straps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be assembled almost anywhere • Easy to use • Can be operated by 2 people • Easy to disinfect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improper use may cause additional injury • Can be difficult to assemble on an uneven surface 	\$\$\$	N/A
 Body sling with ³ or without a mesh liner	• Set of straps with or without a mesh liner for the abdomen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to put on the animal • With the mesh liner, reduced abdominal compression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a tractor • Difficult or impossible to use in a building with a low ceiling 	\$\$	See the video of 1 tonne seed bag
 1 tonne seed bag	• Sheet made by cutting the two opposite sides of the bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be made on the farm • Negligible cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a tractor • Must be well positioned to prevent the animal from tipping • Can be difficult to get under the cow (requires a metal rod bent at one end to pull the bag under the cow) • Caution: May tear 	-	
 Upsi-Daisy ³	• Set of straps with a metal support for the rear legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be operated by 2 people • Easy to disinfect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a tractor • Can be hard to assemble and use • Difficult or impossible to use in a building with a low ceiling 	\$\$	
	Hip Lifters: use this device only to assist an animal that is able to stand and support its weight when lifted. Pressure from the device can easily cause muscle and nerve damage. A well-cushioned hip brace can be tolerated for 10 minutes twice a day.				

¹ \$ less than \$500; \$\$ between \$500 and \$1,000. ² Read the QR code with your smartphone camera or visit: www.lactanet.ca/en/down-cattle-care

³ Could be used to move a down cow over a short distance: be mindful of the udder and legs when putting the animal down.