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# Planning Dairy Animal Well-Being: Developing the Plan

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The American Veterinary Medical Association defines an animal in a good state of welfare (as indicated by scientific evidence) when it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior, and not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. As caretakers, the approach to dairy well-being begins with maintaining the health of the animals in our care. The health-care plan includes grouping or housing animals that need special attention. These groups include the transition, maternity, sick and rehabilitation pens and tend to house the most vulnerable cattle on the farm.

## Have a plan in place

A farm's animal well-being plan must include how to care for these animals. In situations when the animal is compromised, individuals on the farm must know how to respond appropriately. Plans should include how to handle down animals and implement treatment plans. Written plans should be accessible to everyone on the farm. Primary caretakers should be trained in properly handling animals.

As part of the plan to manage compromised cattle, one should set a culture of care on the farm.

## Set the culture of care

Managing down cattle is a crucial role on the farm. As employers and managers, we need to set our employees up for success when responding to a down

cattle. Employees need to have clear expectations of their job as well as written protocols and standard operating procedures.

The care of the compromised animal should be the first priority of those involved. Train employees the proper procedures to be followed and lead by example to show how you would like cattle to be handled and cared for. Animals should be handled compassionately. Use positive language, and show patience. Cattle that are moving slowly are not *lazy*, and cattle that don't get up are not being *stubborn*.

Each employee should be accountable for how they handle a compromised animal. Evaluate employees and hold them accountable for their position. If they are not the right person for the job, move them to another area best suited for their skills.

Down cattle are an important priority and they are to be handled with care and respect.

## Treat animals with respect and patience

Humans pose the greatest threat to the overall security of cattle. Everyone who works around cattle must understand basic cattle behavior.

All caretakers should be trained in low-stress handling techniques. Cattle are prey animals and they have two responses to perceived threats: flight or fight. Their first inclination is to flee, and we can use our knowledge of their flight zones to move them in a desired direction.

Rushing cattle occurs when caretakers don't realize that people walk faster than cattle. The normal moving speed of healthy cattle is 2-3 mph. The average walking speed of humans is 3.1 mph. If cattle begin to walk fast or run, caretakers must immediately stop moving until they resume walking. Evaluate

handling skills or the facility itself when cattle are constantly running.

Running or rushing is particularly problematic on concrete. Concrete is usually slippery, and cattle are awkward and unsteady when running. Floor surfaces must be maintained, and cattle must be allowed to stroll along at their pace. Moving and re-grouping cattle increases their risk for slipping and falling.

Cattle become unpredictable due to pain and/or stress, and they become hazardous to humans when we back them into a corner or they are down and can no longer flee. All caretakers need to be trained in down cattle safety zones.

Do not punish people who report down cattle. Yelling “What happened?” with impatience is only shooting the messenger and worse yet, rather than report, caretakers may try to handle the situation in a manner that makes it worse.

When encountering down cattle, remain calm, ask for help, think before acting, don't react and practice your 'size up & situational awareness'. Don't refuse help or guidance and don't create a bigger problem.

### Communicate responsibilities

Communication is key when it comes to caring for cattle. Establish protocols, or standard operating procedures (SOP) for handling down cattle. The protocol should include: identification of the down cattle, individuals needed to conduct the protocol, and the steps to manage the down cattle.

Every farm has a unique chain of responsibility. Every caretaker has basic responsibilities for every animal, but not everyone is expected to make major decisions (i.e. moving down cattle, treatment, and euthanasia). Establish who is responsible for decisions regarding down cattle, and limit down cattle responsibility to a few select people.

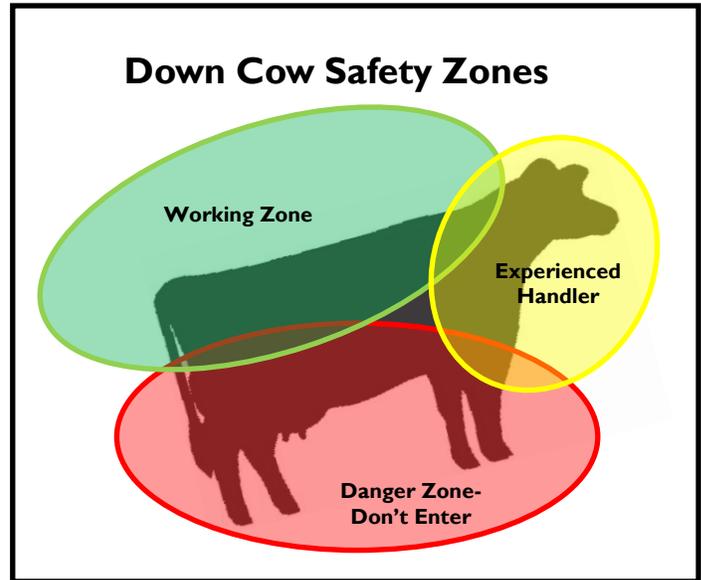
Down cattle team members should be the most patient cattle people on the farm; train and retrain them and give them the tools they need. Provide their contact information to everyone and be sure you have 24 hours, 7 days a week coverage. These team members must have daily contact with cattle in some manner, but their responsibilities cannot prevent dedicated time to dealing with downers, which represents an emergency.

Your down cattle team becomes the assigned and recognized authority. They may include the owner, family member, or manager. It is their duty to assess health, determine appropriate treatments, and contact a veterinarian after 12 hours without the downer's improvement. Their duties also include assessing

underlying issues. Are repairs needed? Is retraining needed or do protocols need to be re-evaluated?

### Fulfilling roles

When encountering down cattle, it is everyone's responsibility to immediately assess the animal and the area, while taking appropriate action and not exceeding training abilities. Worker safety is a priority, so remember the safe down-cattle working zones.



### In summary:

Work with your veterinarian, county UW-Extension agent, other farm consultants, and the most patient cattle-people on your farm to develop the compromised cattle plan specific for your farm. Doing so demonstrates your commitment to quality animal care.