

Chapter 9

Non-Ambulatory Cattle



Cattle can become non-ambulatory (commonly referred to as “downers”) for several reasons, including injury, diseases, or nutrition-related disorders.

A prompt diagnosis should be made to determine whether the animal must be humanely euthanized or will respond to additional care. Signs of a more favorable prognosis include the ability to sit up unaided, eating, and drinking.

Care for non-ambulatory cattle is the responsibility of livestock owners and caretakers, who must make every effort to provide proper care. Non-ambulatory cattle should be provided with adequate shade or shelter and access to water and feed in a location that provides good footing.

Cattle that are non-ambulatory cannot be sent to a livestock market or to a processing facility. If the prognosis is unfavorable or the animal has not responded to veterinary care, it should be humanely euthanized.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is humane death without pain and suffering. The producer may need to perform on-farm euthanasia because a veterinarian may not be immediately available to perform the service. The person performing the procedure should be knowledgeable of the available methods and have the necessary skill to safely perform humane euthanasia; if not, a veterinarian must be contacted.



Some Indications for Euthanasia

- Fractured leg irreparable); severe trauma
- Loss of production and quality of life (severe mastitis, etc.)
- Diagnostic (eg. Potential for human disease, such as rabies)
- Advanced ocular neoplasia (cancer eye)
- Debilitating or toxic condition
- Extended withdrawal time for sale of meat and poor prognosis

When euthanasia is necessary, an excellent reference is the Practical Euthanasia of Cattle guidelines, which is provided at the end of this chapter. These guidelines were developed and published by the Animal Welfare Committee of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners. Additional resources including desk cards and wall charts for posting are offered by the University of Florida Department of Veterinary Medicine at http://www.vetmed.ufl.edu/lacs/humane_euthanasia.

Disposal

Producers should also use proper methods of carcass disposal in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations. If utilizing a rendering service, keep deceased livestock in a screened area away from public view but close to the farm entrance for biosecurity purposes.