

Animal Handling for Vulnerable Cattle



Good animal husbandry is the hallmark of Canada's dairy industry. Making sure all cattle, from the top performing to the most vulnerable, are handled with care reflects the high standards farmers strive to meet.

Which Animals are Vulnerable?

proAction® requires that prompt medical care should be provided to cattle that are sick, injured, thin, severely lame, in pain, or suffering. These animals should be housed separately to facilitate their recovery.

Vulnerable animals include those that:

- Have recently recovered from illness or injury
- Are weak or old
- May have lost body condition
- Are lame
- Have recently freshened
- Are calves that are inexperienced with handling



Vulnerable animals may not be able to sufficiently compete with herdmates to access resources that they require for health and production, so they will benefit from special care.

Managing Lame, Injured, Ill, and Thin Animals

More Space Supports Recovery

Adult cattle that are experiencing lameness, injury, and illness should be housed in clean, spacious (120 square feet per animal), deeply bedded packs, and have minimal competition for both food and water.

Animals that are in pain or compromised are less able and less likely to push between animals to access feed. They may also have less capacity to maintain steady footing while being moved in groups, or tolerate displays of dominance from their herdmates.

Housing these animals separately will reduce the distance they are required to travel for resources.



Vulnerable animals often require therapeutic care in the form of antimicrobial or anti-inflammatory medications, and need to be housed and handled in a manner that is conducive to their recovery and allows for separation of their milk, when needed.

This will also allow for close monitoring and treatments as required and directed by your veterinarian.

Quiet Handling is Key

Quiet, low-stress, and gentle handling should be employed at all times. Vulnerable cattle need extra care and empathy from farmers or farm workers. Ensure staff are aware of your expectations for handling vulnerable animals. They should also be aware of how animals show signs of pain and understand these animals may change their gait and/or be unsteady. They may also change their gait to accommodate an injury and therefore may be more unsteady.

Be Aware of Your Options

For animals that are lame, injured, ill, or thin, consider proactive culling before they become unfit to ship, or euthanasia if their condition does not improve. While difficult, these decisions can help to reduce or prevent suffering.

A Proactive Approach: Consider removing animals from your herd when they are better able to manage transportation, and arrive at the next stage of their journey healthy.

Prior to shipping, be sure to evaluate health factors that may change during transport (see next page):

Notable Health Factors:

Prior to shipping, be sure to evaluate these health factors that may change during transport.



What is her body condition score?

- Animals lose condition during transport, and animals that are very thin at the time of loading are at increased risk of arriving at their final destination having lost significant weight. Cattle with a body condition score <2 are considered unfit for transportation, and can only be transported under a veterinarian's recommendation to a location to receive veterinary care



Is she lactating?

- Many cows may need to be dried off prior to shipping, unless they are going directly to slaughter from the farm (within 12 hours or less). Current federal transport regulations require that lactating animals should not be transported unless they are milked at intervals sufficient to prevent udder engorgement



Is she lame? Does she have painful hock, knee, or neck injuries?

- Lameness and injuries can affect an animal's ability to stand comfortably and safely on a truck, as they need to be able to navigate the bumps and turns in the trailer

Freshening is a Stressful Time

After calving, many physiological changes occur to enable dairy cattle to produce milk. These animals are also moved from the milking herd to dry cow pens, then from fresh cow pens back to the milking herd, which can lead to the establishment of new social hierarchies. It is important that farmers successfully manage this transition in addition to the stress and pain that may be associated with calving. A successful transition will speed up a cow's recovery, improve her health and comfort, and reduce the risk of metabolic disease.

Reduce stress by:

Giving Them Space

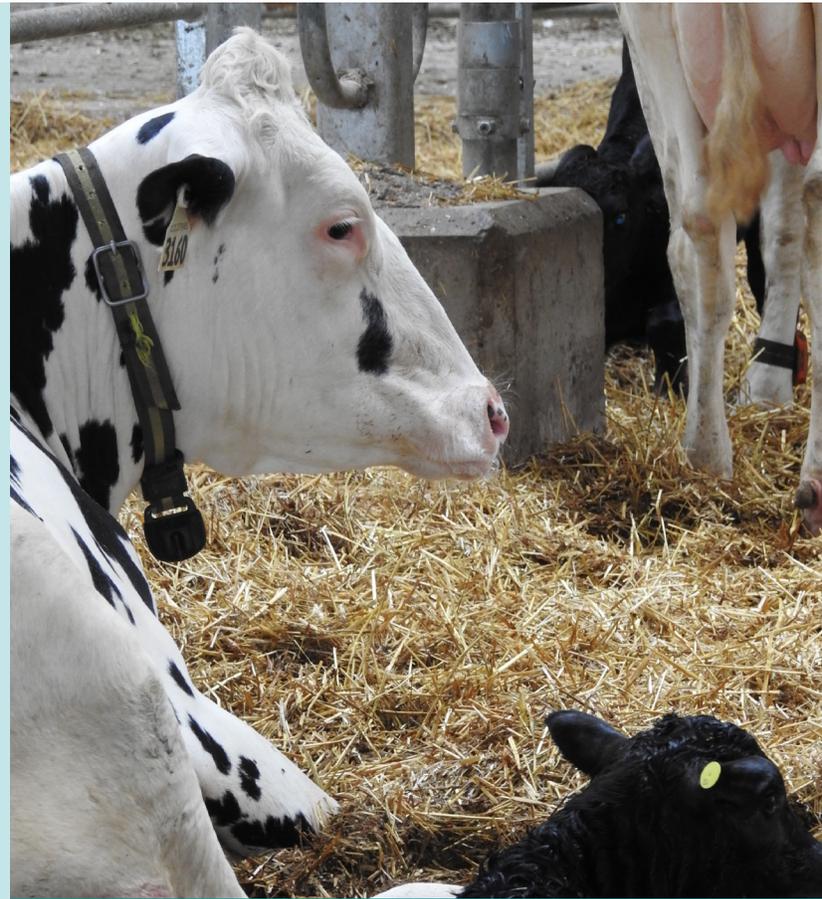
- Ensure appropriate stocking density in your pens to give cattle ample space to access feed and water. Thirty (30) inches of feed bunk space per animal is considered an appropriate stocking density, as this may reduce the number of animals that are pushed away from the bunk

Using Low-Stress Handling

- Handle cattle using low-stress handling techniques

Moving in Pairs

- Whenever possible, move cattle into new pens in groups of two. This will reduce disruption to the social structure of the group cattle are being moved into, and newly introduced cattle will have a familiar companion



By reducing stress and competition, you can ensure fresh cows continue to eat well, which reduces the likelihood of ketosis.

Dealing With a Difficult Calving

Calving is a painful event. After a difficult calving, fresh cattle require extra care and monitoring. **If a cow is unable to stand following calving, contact your veterinarian.** Determine if there is any tissue or nerve damage, and discuss what kind of nursing care is needed. This may include pain control, regular turning, and encouragement to stand.

Take Your Time With Calves

Patience is extremely important when handling calves. The way they are handled at a young age can also influence their comfort and cooperativeness with being handled later in life. These animals are inexperienced with handling and lack the coordination to move quickly or efficiently. Understand that these animals are shy and unsure of what is expected of them.

Make handling experiences positive early on.

Consider halter training, get children involved in calf care, and ensure that staff have a positive attitude, have been coached on proper handling techniques, and strive for best management practice standards.

Use patience and move slowly! Ensure calves are always handled by staff trained in gentle, quiet handling techniques. Calves do not have a flight zone or point of balance in the same way that adult cattle do. Newborn calves can be moved using wheelbarrows or carts, and older calves can be moved using rolling pens or halters.



Ensure anyone handling your calves practices patience and has a positive attitude toward animal care and welfare. This includes anyone involved in feeding, treatment, animal health procedures, and transfer of animals to other farms or facilities.

Inappropriate and/or improper handling of any animal on the dairy is unacceptable.



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