

## How now down cow?

September 2018 Newsletter prepared by Dr. Hull

These past few weeks I have been to a number of down cow calls, so I thought a brief review of conditions that cause cows to go down might be a good idea for a newsletter. These past few months of extreme heat stress, combined with seasonal nutritional changes can increase the odds of cows going down.

Cows can find themselves recumbent due to injuries and exhaustion, so doing a thorough physical exam and talking with the hired help to understand exactly where and how she went down is important. Disease related conditions such as toxic mastitis, toxic indigestion, HBS, etc can make the cow sick enough that she is unable to rise. These can often be challenging to identify and treat, so having a plan with your herd health vet to manage these diseases is a must. Nutritional/metabolic issues can lead to mineral deficiencies that can cause a cow to go down. The exciting part is that Northwest Vets has a machine in our office that can run a blood sample and tell you what mineral values are low. It costs \$40.00 and takes about 15 minutes to run once we have the blood sample. Feel free to take a tube of blood prior to you treating her with anything and we can let you know what treatments are going to work the best! As a review, here is a rundown of those main minerals that can be lacking.

**Calcium:** This one is your classic milk fever cow. If the cow doesn't have any other issues besides low calcium, and the supplemental calcium is given quickly after the cow goes down, most cows can recover and get back up with proper treatment. There are a lot of different types of calcium products, so talk this over with your herd vet and make sure you are using the best kinds of calcium for you and your herd.

**Phosphorus:** cows low in phosphorus can often mimic a milk fever cow, not wanting to get up, but doesn't respond to the typical calcium administration. Many of our clients use Fleet enemas to treat low Phosphorus, but just be careful to get the Fleet enema that has Sodium phosphate as the active ingredient. If the enema is mineral oil based, it will not be effective for your down cow. At our office, we do have Sodium phosphate boluses that you can purchase and use in place of the Fleet enema. Talk with your herd vet to see what option is best for you!

**Magnesium:** Being low in Magnesium is often what people call "grass tetany", and the cow tends to be bright, alert, eating and drinking, but unable to rise. There are a lot of commercial magnesium products out there, but not all of them are a very "available" source of magnesium for the cow (not all forms of magnesium are absorbed the same in the cows' blood stream). Epsom salts when given as an oral drench can be very effectively absorbed, so chat with your herd health vet about the right treatment protocol for you.

**Potassium:** A cow low in potassium will show signs of being depressed and have muscle weakness. If a cow is off feed for a couple of days, it can lead to her being low in potassium. We have oral boluses of Potassium at the office as a supplement, but it needs to be carefully dosed. Giving too much Potassium can be lethal to the cow!

And a newsletter about down cows wouldn't be complete without talking about caring for the cow once she is down. It is very important to get the cow moved off concrete surfaces. It only takes 6 hours of a cow being down to do severe damage to the nerves and muscles in her legs. Cows should never be dragged, they should be rolled into a skid steer bucket or rolled onto a sled/platform and then moved. They need to have access to feed, water, and shelter from the sun, rain and wind. Northwest Vets has training modules on how to properly move down cows if you or your employees are interested, so please talk with your herd health vet for more information.

Hoping you all have a successful harvest season, and enjoy the fall weather once it finally decides to get here!

