



NON-AMBULATORY AND INJURED-AMBULATORY CATTLE

STATEMENT

The AABP believes that all cattle, including non-ambulatory cattle, must be handled humanely in all situations. A veterinarian should be involved in the development of protocols or procedures for the timely assessment, prognosis, and implementation of a management plan for each non-ambulatory and injured-ambulatory animal receiving treatment.

DEFINITIONS

- **AABP** American Association of Bovine Practitioners (cattle veterinarians)
- **BOVINE ANIMAL OR CATTLE** Any cow, bull, steer, heifer or calf
- **NON-AMBULATORY** Disabled or compromised animal unable to rise, stand and/or walk without human assistance
- **“DOWNER”** A bovine animal that is non-ambulatory
- **INJURED-AMBULATORY** Any bovine animal that, as a result of injury or disease progression, is disabled or compromised and unable to walk normally
- **SAFE AREA** A pen, paddock, or isolated space providing protection from elements and predators, equipped with a suitable substrate for traction and adequate separation from other cattle to prevent competition or injury. Whenever possible, a covered, well-ventilated area should be used.
- **NURSING CARE** The supportive management of a non-ambulatory animal includes providing a clean, dry, soft, comfortable area to lay, ensuring non-tip feed and water containers are within easy reach and checked at least twice daily, and consulting a veterinarian for a specific treatment plan or protocols. This care requires the animal’s body weight to be shifted by rolling or lifting at least twice daily (ideally, every 6 hours) to prevent pressure sores and secondary musculoskeletal damage. Provide udder pressure relief for dairy cattle by milking as necessary.
- **TERMINAL MARKET** A slaughter facility or packing plant.
- **NON-TERMINAL MARKET** A market where animals are bought and sold, for example, a sale yard or auction market; a non-terminal market is not a slaughter facility.

SECTION 1: GENERAL STANDARDS OF CARE FOR NON-AMBULATORY CATTLE

Identification and assessment of non-ambulatory cattle

- **PROGNOSIS** A veterinarian or trained caregiver must determine a prognosis for recovery as soon as possible, preferably within 12 hours. Response to therapy must play a role in development of prognosis.
- **GOOD PROGNOSIS CRITERIA** Typically

includes animals that are bright, alert, willing to eat/drink and making multiple attempts to rise in a 24-hour period.

- **POOR PROGNOSIS CRITERIA** Typically includes animals that are severely injured or diseased, in distress, unable to maintain sternal recumbency unassisted, severely dehydrated, severely obtunded, pain that



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cannot be controlled, or making no progress within 24-48 hours.

- **ACTION** Animals meeting the Poor Prognosis criteria should be promptly euthanized or humanely slaughtered on the premises.

Movement and handling

- **REQUIREMENT** Animals with a Good Prognosis that fail to respond to initial treatment (e.g., milk fever) or are at risk of injury from herd mates must be moved to a Safe Area.
- **EQUIPMENT** Animals must be moved by qualified personnel using veterinarian-approved methods (e.g., bucket, sled or sling) that minimize stress over the shortest distance possible. Do not allow any part of the animal to touch the ground during movement.
 - Do not use hip-lifters or clamps to move or transport an animal.
 - Dragging is an unacceptable method of transporting cattle. Do not pull, push, drag or lift an animal by the head, neck or legs unless human or animal safety is at risk.

Implementation of care and evaluation

- **ONCE MOVED TO A SAFE AREA** the caregiver must implement Nursing Care according to a

written standard operating procedure (SOP), in consultation with the veterinarian-of-record.

- **MONITORING** While receiving care, the animal must be evaluated at least twice daily for evidence of improvement or signs of deterioration.
- **EXIT STRATEGY** If a Safe Area (or humane transport to a Safe area), or adequate Nursing Care cannot be provided, or if the animal deteriorates or fails to respond to care within 24 hours, the animal must be promptly euthanized or humanely slaughtered on the premises.
- **RE-EVALUATION** If an animal under Nursing Care fails to progress within 24 hours, the prognosis must be re-evaluated by a veterinarian or the attending care team to determine if continued treatment is appropriate.

On-site slaughter eligibility

- **ONLY ANIMALS FREE** of systemic clinical signs associated with central neurological, infectious and/or zoonotic diseases that have met all applicable drug withdrawal times may be considered for on-site humane slaughter. Home-slaughtered animals must never enter the public food supply.

SECTION 2: SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS BY STATUS

2.1 Injured ambulatory cattle

(weight-bearing vs. non-weight-bearing)

- **HOUSING AND SUPERVISION** Injured animals should be treated under the supervision of a veterinarian. Whenever possible, they should be housed separately from the main herd to prevent further injury or competition.
- **NON-WEIGHT-BEARING (FRACTURES/ SEVERE LAMENESS)** Animals with musculo-

skeletal injuries, such as broken legs, that cannot bear weight on all limbs are NOT fit for transport. They must not leave the premises except for veterinary attention or direct transport to a custom slaughter facility within a reasonable time frame. If treatment is not an option, they must be promptly euthanized or humanely slaughtered on-site.

- **WEIGHT-BEARING** If treatment is not a viable



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option, animals deemed “fit for transport” by AABP guidelines may be shipped directly to a state or federally inspected slaughter facility or custom slaughter plant.

- **PRECAUTIONS** To prevent further suffering, do not commingle injured animals with others during transport. It is recommended to provide deep bedding or substrate for traction in the trailer and exercise extreme care during loading, handling and unloading.
- **IF SHIPMENT** to a facility cannot be arranged, the animal should be promptly euthanized by an AABP or AVMA-recommended method or humanely slaughtered on the premises.

2.2 Non-ambulatory cattle at markets (non-terminal and terminal)

Non-terminal markets (sale barns/auction yards):

- **PROMPT ACTION** Based on a veterinary assessment or an assessment protocol developed with a veterinarian, the prognosis for recovery must be determined and action

taken as soon as possible, preferably within 12 hours.

- **RESOURCE CHECK** Treatment should only be initiated if the market has the specific facilities and qualified personnel available to carry out the full Nursing Care plan.
- **MANDATORY EUTHANASIA** If it is determined that appropriate personnel, facilities or required resources are unavailable, or if the animal has a poor prognosis, the animal must be euthanized immediately using AABP or AVMA-recommended methods.

Terminal markets (slaughter plants):

- **MANDATORY EUTHANASIA** Any animal that becomes non-ambulatory at a terminal market must be promptly euthanized using an AABP or AVMA-recommended method.
- **FOOD SAFETY** A non-ambulatory animal euthanized at a terminal market must not enter the food supply (9 Code of Federal Regulations §309.2).

TRANSPORT DECISION MATRIX FOR NON-AMBULATORY OR INJURED AMBULATORY CATTLE

For any of the following scenarios, humane transport direct to a veterinary care facility under veterinary guidance is permissible.

SCENARIO	PRIMARY ACTION	TRANSPORT ALLOWED?
Non-ambulatory: Good prognosis (on farm)	Nursing care in safe area	No
Non-ambulatory: Poor prognosis (any location)	Euthanize or on-site slaughter	No
Non-ambulatory (terminal market)	Mandatory euthanasia (9 CFR §309.2)	No
Ambulatory fracture/Non-weight-bearing	Euthanize or on-site/local custom slaughter	Remain on-site or immediate individual transport to custom slaughter
Ambulatory injured (Weight-bearing)	Separate/treat or direct slaughter	Yes (Direct only)