

## Prolapses in Beef Cattle

Prolapses in cattle are a dirty problem that can be a real health frustration for beef cattle producers. Uncared for or improperly treated they can result in significant economic losses.

Prolapses are the result of tissues that normally are a tube inside the body turning inside out and bulging from the body. The rectum, the vagina and the uterus commonly prolapse in beef cattle.

Vaginal prolapses occur most commonly in heavily pregnant beef cows. They are associated with increased pressure in the abdomen of these cows. Fat cows are more prone to the problem because fat increases the pressure in the abdomen. Rations that create very full abdomens also increase the risk. Two common situations where this occurs is during the winter when cows are on poor quality hay and in the spring when lush pastures with high water contents result in cows filling themselves greatly. The late stage of pregnancy increases belly pressure and also is associated hormones that prepare the rear-end tissues for calving so that these softer, swollen tissue permit a prolapse.

Rectal prolapses occur in the following settings:

Calves a few months old with diarrhea, especially from coccidiosis

Calves on high concentrate rations that are so palatable that they fill themselves excessively

Bull or steer calves riding tall cows that are in heat

Cows that are straining, sometimes with a prolapsed vagina

Prolapses are quite easily recognized when pink tissue is seen protruding beneath the tail. Veterinary attention should always be given the same day a prolapse is observed. If prolapses are not replaced their condition quickly deteriorates. Tissues swell, dry, get sunburned and may be torn against structures or damaged by other cattle. Sometimes cattle with prolapses are not able to void so considerable discomfort and straining occurs.

Appropriate treatment includes not only replacing the prolapse but apply a suture from one wall of the vagina to the other to prevent recurrence.

Short term, cattle treated appropriately for prolapses usually do quite well. Once replaced, the swelling subsides and straining usually ceases. Occasionally continued straining or a recurrence requires further veterinary attention.

Pregnant cows, of course, cannot deliver their calf through the suture holding in the prolapse. Sometimes inducing calving with a shot will allow predicting when the calf will be born so that the suture may be undone. Following calving the suture must be replaced as recurrence of the prolapse after calving is a possibility.

Longer term, most cattle that have prolapsed should not be used for breeding. Inevitably cows with vaginal prolapses will have the same problem the next year. Rectal prolapses may be hereditary so it is recommended that these animals be used for meat production as well.

The uterine prolapse is a special problem. It will only occur during the first day or so following calving. It is a true veterinary emergency since it is so prone to injury and the large arteries inside the uterus may rupture as the cow moves around, resulting in the cow bleeding to death internally. Cows should be handled very gently until the uterus is replaced. The sooner the treatment is given, the better the chances for a favorable outcome. Sometimes there is confusion over whether the prolapse is vaginal or uterine. A prolapsed uterus is much larger, typically going down almost to the cow's hocks. It will also have large deep red caruncles to which the cotyledons were attached. These will range from quarter coin size to fist size.

Prolapses are an unpleasant health event in a beef cattle operation. Recognizing them early and treating them appropriately will minimize their economic outcomes.