

Imagine for a moment the following scenario: After a long day at work you get home and check your cows, just as you do every day. On this particular day you find a cow that is lying down, but despite several attempts cannot stand up. The cow is in good body condition, and does not appear to be in distress, but it is clear that there is something wrong. You, the producer, are now responsible for managing what is known as a “downer cow”. This scenario is one that is all too familiar lately for many producers in the area. This week we will discuss the importance of identifying the type of downer cow you have, and how this identification is critical for proper treatment of the animal.

Though producers may experience a downer cow for a few different reasons, the most frequent case we have seen lately is downer cows due to a nutritional/mineral deficiency of some sort. These mineral deficient cows are often recognized as those that seem to be outwardly physically healthy with decent body condition and are not showing to be in serious stress or discomfort. It is not uncommon for these animals to appear “normal” the previous day- not exhibiting any obvious signs of illness. Often, this mineral deficiency occurs in adult females that are in the stages of production anywhere between the last trimester of pregnancy and two weeks postpartum. Cows in this stage of production likely go down due to a mineral deficiency caused by an inability to meet the increase in requirements to sustain pregnancy and/or adequate lactation.

To treat these animals it is most effective to first identify which mineral(s) the cow is deficient in. Downer cows in this stage of production are often deficient in Calcium, Magnesium, and/or Phosphorus. The best way to treat the cow is to test her blood to be certain of what area she is deficient in. Once the blood work is run, a diagnosis can be made, and a more thorough treatment performed. Running blood work on the downed cow may also prove to be beneficial because it can give a good indication of where the herd nutrition stands as a whole. The results can then aid the producer in determining a nutrition plan for the herd, which may prevent more instances of downer cows in the future.

Cows that are down due to mineral deficiency is a result of the cow’s inability to meet her nutritional requirements. This is often because the cows are being provided poor quality hay and not enough mineral. The best prevention you can provide is to ensure that your cow’s nutritional requirements are being met by adequate mineral consumption. As a cattle producer you are responsible for ensuring that your cattle’s nutritional requirements are met. If you have a downer cow, immediate action should be taken so that she can be saved. Remember, prevention is more cost effective than treatment, and a timely diagnosis by a veterinarian can be the difference in life and death. Closely watch your cattle and act immediately if you have a downer cow. If you would like further assistance with developing a method to prevent the occurrence of downer cattle in your herd, please contact us.

Thanks,  
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