



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

Euthanasia in Cattle

Procedures to follow in case of emergencies or to prevent further animal suffering from illness or accident.

When raising cattle, there is always a risk an animal will become seriously injured, fail to thrive or become so ill that any treatment is unsuccessful or impractical. Experienced livestock owners occasionally need to make decisions regarding when animals are beyond treatment and it is simply more humane to euthanise the animal. Active rather than passive (let them die on their own) euthanasia of poorly convalescent cattle is an accepted practice and the owner's responsibility.

Firearms

The use of a firearm is most appropriate when the animal is partially mobile and it would cause undue suffering to move the animal to a restraining chute. The safe use of firearms is critical and means no person, livestock or property should be in the line of sight between the shooter and the animal or behind the animal. The bullet should enter the animal directly from the front (midline, between the eyes and ears), in line with the rest of the animal's body and pitched in line with the slope of the neck (Figures 1 and 2). If the animal is young, and the head is turned to the side, the bullet may pass through, endangering other animals and people.

A large bore shotgun (20 gauge or greater) is a good choice for a confined area such as an auction yard or feedlot pen, as it will quickly and effectively kill the animal. A shotgun can be used if the distance is not over 10 metres. If the animal is non-ambulatory, using a .22 caliber rifle is acceptable since the distance between the end of the muzzle and the skull is short. However, occasionally destruction of the brain is insufficient and the unconscious animal may need to be bled to quickly euthanise. It is acceptable to use a high-powered rifle in an open field if no buildings, roadways, vehicles, other animals or people are nearby.

Lethal Injection

(Should be done by a veterinarian or trained technician)

Pharmaceutical mechanisms used to produce death cause either a narcotic overdose or paralyse the life functions (heartbeat, respiration) with a noxious chemical. The animal must be restrained before the injection (usually an intravenous one), can be given. Euthanasia by injection is usually without struggle, vocalization or bleeding and is therefore the method of choice in a public place.

Animals destroyed by lethal injection should be buried to prevent scavengers from consuming the carcass and being affected by drug residue in the tissues. Lethal injection is also the preferred method if it is necessary to preserve brain tissue for laboratory use (for example, when rabies is suspected).

Captive Bolt

A captive bolt device uses a small powder cartridge that when activated, drives a bolt through the skull and into the brain, causing immediate death. Again, the animal must be incapacitated by its injury or restrained in a chute. The device must be placed either on the front of the head (midline, halfway between the eyes and ears) or behind the skull (midline, very high on the neck, device pointing to the nose). See Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 – Location of the brain within the skull of an older bovine and the correct placement and direction of shot or captive bolt penetration. Note the direction into the skull is perpendicular to the face of the skull and in alignment with the line of the neck.



Figure 2 – Shows that the general lower position of the brain in a calf, means the correct placement of the captive bolt or the aim of the firearm is lower as well. Note the direction is the same as in a mature bovine and the point of impact is in the centre of the skull between the ears.



Stunning

To stun, an animal must be incapacitated by its injury or restrained in a chute, so there is no movement. A stout blow with a heavy hammer or maul, striking the front of the skull midline between the eyes and ears (Figures 1 and 2) will cause severe cerebral injury and immediate death. For euthanasia, the blow must be forceful enough to crush the brain thereby causing all life processes to cease, especially heartbeat and respiration.

In case of an emergency please refer to the telephone numbers below:

- Saskatchewan SPCA: 382-7722
(Provincial Office – Saskatoon)
- Saskatchewan Brand Inspectors: 933-6191
(Provincial Office – Saskatoon)
- Saskatchewan District Veterinarians:
 - 780-5220 (Regina)
 - 975-4185 (Saskatoon)
 - 778-5030 (Swift Current)
 - 554-2202 (Wynyard)
 - 786-5300 (Yorkton)
 - 937-3633 (Battleford)
 - 691-3450 (Moose Jaw)
 - 927-2255 (North Portal)
 - 953-8614 (Prince Albert)
- Saskatoon Processing Co.: 934-4887



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

502 - 45th Street West, 2nd Floor, Saskatoon, SK S7L 6H2
Phone: 306-249-3227 Fax: 306-244-4497
e-mail: facs@sasktel.net
website: www.facs.sk.ca

FACS represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal care and handling practices in agriculture.

Associate Memberships are available from \$50.00 – \$199.99 + GST.
Active Memberships start at \$200.00 + GST
Receipts are issued for all memberships.

This FACS initiative is funded by the Saskatchewan Beef Development Fund and endorsed by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association, Saskatchewan Dairy Association, Saskatchewan Livestock Association, Saskatchewan Livestock Markets and Order Buyers Association, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association.