

Howard County Ag Survey Released

COLUMBIA, Md. — In February 2003, the Agricultural Marketing Program of the Howard County Economic Development Authority, mailed a survey to the owners of all agriculturally assessed parcels in the county, and to all farmers known to rent land in Howard County. The purpose of the survey was to collect information for the analysis of land use policies, to evaluate agricultural development support programs, and to gauge the farming community's own initiatives in adapting to the "new" agricultural paradigm throughout the region.

Survey results indicate that agriculture in Howard County's rural west looks increasingly like a tapestry of small farms involved in direct marketing enterprises such as turf, nursery horticultural products, fruits and vegetables, agritourism, and horses. Though small in acreage, these farms vary greatly in the diversity of their production and their total gross sales.

Direct marketing, particularly through on-farm sales, is the dominant marketing outlet for as many Howard County producers. Farms that sold a majority of their crops through direct markets usually did not depend on retail alone, but on wholesale markets as well. But those selling through auctions or cooperatives engaged in very little direct marketing. The number of methods utilized by different size operations is not significantly different.

Economic indicators of the viability and sustainability of the agriculture industry in Howard County need to be measurable and attainable. These indicators should be reviewed on a yearly basis, but in reality, it takes several growing seasons to affect substantial changes in production patterns and marketing. In addition, legislative advocacy, educational opportunities for the farming communities, and reconnecting agriculture to community development and revitalization are all imperative for a healthy agricultural industry.

Howard County will never produce the volume and kinds of agricultural products that are grown in larger Maryland counties because of high land costs, development pressures, and natural resource constraints. Yet for every restraint there is an opportunity: abundant local markets, an increasingly aware citizenry, and strong local government support that recognizes agriculture's unique contributions and challenges in Howard County.



What Are My Options? More Than One Way To Lift A Cow

Peter Dippel, DVM

This article is the last in a three-part series discussing down cows. Thus far the articles have addressed common causes of down cows. Dippel is a veterinarian with Lancaster Veterinary Associates, Salunga.

SALUNGA (Lancaster Co.) — The first thing to mention as far as treatment is hobbles. This is for cows that have the strength to get up, but not the coordination to keep their back legs together underneath them.

This can happen with splitting out and ripping adductor muscles, or with damage to the nerves innervating the adductor muscles. It involves a hobble or strap or rope that connects both back legs to each other, preventing them from splaying out.

Many down cows have been able to stand up just with placing hobbles on their back legs. Make sure the straps are not tied so tight that it cuts off blood flow to the feet. Tie the hobble to give the cow enough room to take small steps.

If the cow cannot rise with the hobbles, or splitting out is determined to not be the problem, the next decision to be made is whether or not to lift her.

Flood Tanks

There are several ways to lift cows, including float tanks, hip lifts, balloons, and slings. What you choose depends on how much you are willing to spend, the value of the cow, the extent of

her paralysis, the amount of time you have, as well as what you have access to.

Although float tanks are ideal, they are generally the most expensive. This option should not be used unless the cow is at least attempting to get up on her own, or if she is a valuable cow.

The process involves winching her into the tank, filling it with warm water, and letting her float for up to 12 hours. Then the water is drained out and hopefully she can stand up by herself. If she goes down, or cannot get up again after laying down, then she can be floated again.

Not only does this method get the weight off of her legs, but the warm water therapy is great for her muscles and joints. Here in Lancaster County, there is company that delivers float tanks to the farm for about \$150 for a local call.

The charge is an additional \$75 for every refill of the float tank with heated water, so it can soon become very expensive if she needs to be relifted a few times.

Hip Lift

Another option, which is often maligned by dairy vets and farmers, is the hip lift. If used properly, it can be a good, economical way to lift cows. This procedure involves a big clamp with pads that tightens around her hip bones.

It should be placed tight enough on the cows hips so that it will not slip off, but no tighter. The problem with these is that they can cause damage in the hip area as well as pain for the cow if they are made too tight, or if she is lifted repeatedly.

However, they are cheap, and if the producer doesn't want to float her, hip lifts are better than doing nothing or just rolling her.

A veterinary practice may loan the lifts out for free for any dairyman that needs it for a down cow. After it is attached, lift her with a come-a-long or a skid loader until she can get her back feet under her. Usually they will stand up with their front feet once their hind end is raised.

Once she is standing, lower the lift slightly to see what happens. If she looks like she can stand without the hip lift, remove it. Be very careful doing this. If she cannot stand by herself, and you remove the hip lift, she will fall down and possibly do more damage to her body.

If you think she cannot stand by herself, then leave the hip lift on for a few minutes. If she makes no attempt to stand on her back legs, and just hangs in the lift, then only hold her there for a few minutes and then lower her to the ground.

If she stands by herself and puts most of her weight on her legs, but it is doubtful that she can stand without the hiplift, then let her stand for a longer period of time.

If she does not stand by herself, or if she lays down and cannot get back up again, it may be necessary to lift her several times a day.

She should be lifted at least twice a day, but no more than four times a day. It is reported that cows that were lifted over a course of two weeks eventually were able to stand by themselves, so do not give up hope if they do not stand right away.

Slings

Slings are another alternative.

They are usually made out of reinforced canvas with a pole down each side, with cutouts for the legs and the udder.

Balloons

Balloons are placed under the cow and then inflated to lift her rear. If at all possible while lifting her, milk her out while there is access to the udder, so that if she finally does stand by herself she will not have dried herself off.

Rolling

If the dairyman does not want to lift the cow for whatever reason, but wants to see if she will eventually get up, rolling her from side to side every three hours can be very helpful.

This gives each leg a chance to be out from under all her weight bearing down on it. Usually at least two people are necessary to roll a cow from side to side. This also should be used with other treatment methods.

For example, in between lifting her, roll her every three hours. Other symptomatic therapy involves anti-inflammatories such as aspirin, banamine, or dexamethasone, but these should be used with discretion because of side effects. If she is pregnant, dexamethasone should not be used.

How long to continue with lifting her or other treatment options depends on how much patience the producer has and her response to the treatment.

If she seems to be responding favorably and seems to be putting more weight on her limbs, then she should have more time.

If she is making no progress and up to two weeks have gone by, there probably is little hope for her recovery.

The prognosis for every down cow is different because it depends on how much damage was done by the initial insult, and how well the dairyman is managing her while she is down.

Prevention

While successfully treating a down cow so that she eventually stands up is good, preventing her from being down in the first place would probably have been better.

Many cows cannot be prevented from going down, because not everything is under the control of the dairyman. For example, if the cow calves with a tremendously big calf and develops calving paralysis, this is not really the dairyman's fault.

However, there are a few things dairyman can do to reduce the number of down cows on the farm. Using calving ease bulls will usually result in first calf heifers delivering smaller sized calves, and thus they will be less likely to develop calving paralysis.

During the months before a heifer freshens she should be fed a balanced ration, because improper feeding can cause big calves at freshening.

Also, cows should be fed proper dry cow and transition rations to keep the incidence of milk fever as low as possible.

If cows are continually slipping on concrete and going down, consider investing in black alley mats especially in high traffic areas.

Work on eliminating the root cause of the problem, because it is much easier to prevent a cow from going down, than treating her once she is down. If she does go down, lifting her and nursing care can be a very big time commitment, but if she finally stands by herself, the reward is great.

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