

# Best Practices and Key Considerations for On-Farm Euthanasia




## When to Euthanize Cull Cows?

**Euthanasia is a practice used to relieve animal suffering and distress.**

It is sometimes necessary to euthanize an animal when there is no chance of recovery from disease or injury. Any time you plan to ship a cow, the first thing you should do is assess her fitness to withstand transportation.

If she is **NOT** fit for transport, you should also ask yourself:

- Is this animal likely to respond to treatment?
- How likely is it that this animal will recover?
- Is the animal experiencing pain and distress that cannot be treated?
- Has the animal responded to previous treatment?
- Can you move the animal without causing pain?

 If the answer is **NO** to any of these questions, the animal should be promptly, and humanely euthanized.

## How to Euthanize Cattle

Once the decision to euthanize an animal has been made, euthanasia should occur promptly by trained personnel to ensure the least amount of suffering.

### Have a Protocol

Euthanasia is a sensitive practice and is often difficult for many producers. Given its serious nature, it is important that every farm has a plan in place that identifies who is responsible, how it will be done, and what to look for. Developing a plan in consultation with your herd veterinarian will help to ensure this practice is done correctly, and humanely.

### proAction®

An important part of the Animal Care module of the Dairy Farmer's of Canada's proAction® initiative to demonstrate the industry's commitment to animal care and welfare requires that all Canadian dairy farmers have a written standard operating procedure (SOP) that outlines the farm's protocol for euthanasia.

**Listed below are the 3 minimum elements that MUST be included in your SOP:**

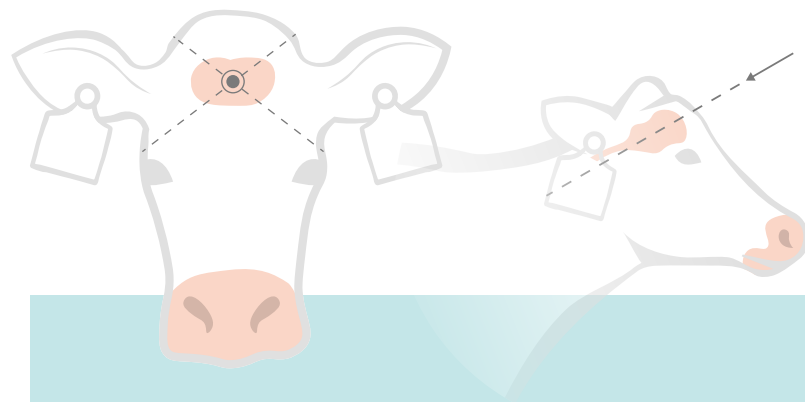


Figure 1: Proper positioning on the head of the animal is critical to ensure a gunshot or captive bolt is effective. The appropriate positioning is high up on the head of the animal, **NOT BETWEEN THE EYES.**

## 1. Acceptable Methods of Euthanasia

### Calves

- Free bullet: .22 caliber gun
- Penetrating captive bolt followed by pithing, bleeding, or cardiac puncture
- Injection with barbiturates and other drugs administered by a licensed veterinarian

### Cows, Bulls, and Mature Heifers

- Free bullet: .22 magnum or high powered rifle from no more than 10 metres (32 feet) (**Figure 1**)
- Penetrating captive bolt followed by pithing, bleeding, or cardiac puncture
- Injection with barbiturates and other drugs administered by a licensed veterinarian

## 2. Confirmation of Death

Death should be confirmed immediately following the procedure.

The chart below presents the most appropriate methods for confirming death:



## 3. Animal Movement

- After the euthanasia procedure has been conducted, do not move or leave the animal until death has been confirmed

**Additional considerations surrounding euthanasia include:**

- Ensuring proper disposal of the carcass within 48 hours
- Recording the reason or rationale for euthanizing the animal for herd level monitoring

## Euthanasia Isn't Easy: Ask for Help

Euthanizing an animal can be one of the most difficult decisions to make and carry out. But, it is important to remember that there are others that can aid in making decisions or carrying out this procedure.

Your veterinarian is an excellent resource that can provide advice on individual cases that may require euthanasia and can carry out the procedure for you. They are also well-equipped to provide the proper training and resources to improve your comfort level.