

## Overview

Livestock owners have a moral obligation to ensure the welfare of animals. Therefore, when disease or injury conditions arise that diminish quality of life, results in loss of productive function, or create pain and suffering that cannot be effectively relieved by medical means, euthanasia is indicated.

"Euthanasia" is a Greek term meaning "good death". In this context, its objectives are met when death is induced which causes no pain or distress to an animal.

To avoid pain and distress to the animal, techniques which are used must cause immediate loss of consciousness. This must be followed by cardiac and respiratory arrest that ultimately results in loss of brain function and death. Persons who perform this task must be technically proficient, mentally capable, and have a basic understanding of the anatomical landmarks and equipment used for humane euthanasia of animals. If there is any degree of question or discomfort with the procedure, a veterinarian should be consulted.

## For more information

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## On Farm Euthanasia of Cattle

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## Indications for Euthanasia

- Fractures of the legs, hip or spine that are not repairable and result in immobility or inability to stand.
- Emaciation and/or debilitation from disease or injury that may result in an animal being too weak to be transported.
- Paralysis from a traumatic injury or disease that results in immobility.
- Advanced cancer eye.
- Disease conditions for which cost of treatment is prohibitive.
- Disease conditions for which no effective treatment is known (i.e. Johne's Disease, lymphoma), or when prognosis is poor or time to expected recovery is unusually prolonged.
- Diseases that involve a significant threat to human health (i.e. Rabies suspect animals). **Animals with neurologic disease should be attended to by a veterinarian who can properly euthanize the animal and obtain brain tissue for diagnostic purposes.**



## Optimal Point of Entry for a Bullet



- Cattle less than 500 lbs can be euthanized with a .22 rifle or a .410 or 28 gauge shotguns.
- For heavier cattle, a .22 magnum or larger firearm should be used. Alternatively, a 12, 16, or 20 gauge shotgun loaded with slugs or No. 4, 5 or 6, size birdshot is acceptable.
- Use a solid point bullet instead of a soft or hollow point to increase likelihood bullet will penetrate the skull of heavier animals.
- Do NOT place muzzle directly on head. If possible, position the muzzle 1 to 2 feet from head for rifles or pistols and 1-2 yards for shotguns.
- The point of entry of the projectile should be at the intersection of two imaginary lines, each drawn from the outside corner of the eye to the base of the opposite horn.
- If possible use a livestock marking crayon or paint to draw the "x" and intended point of entry onto the head of the animal.

## Confirmation of Death

Death must be confirmed before disposal of the animal. **Both of the following** should be used to evaluate consciousness or confirm death.

- Lack of a heartbeat.
- Lack of respiration.

The presence of a heart beat can best be determined with a stethoscope placed under the left elbow. Please note that a pulse is usually not palpable under such circumstances and should not be used to confirm death.

Movement of the chest indicates respiration but respiration rates may be very erratic or absent in unconscious animals. Therefore, one must be cautious in the interpretation of respiration for confirmation of death.

One may test for evidence of a corneal reflex by touching the surface of the eyeball. Normal or conscious animals will blink when the eyeball is touched. However, lack of corneal reflex is not sufficient for confirmation of death by itself. Absence of a corneal reflex, failure to detect respiration, and absence of a heart beat for a period of more than 5 minutes should be used to confirm death.

