



# Cattle Producer's Handbook

Animal Health Section

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## Cow Mortality Disposal

*Clell V. Bagley, D.V.M., Extension Veterinarian, Utah State University*

*John H. Kirk, D.V.M., M.S., M.P.V.M., Extension Veterinarian, University of California*

*Kitt Farrell-Poe, Ph.D., Extension Water Resources Specialist, The University of Arizona*

Currently, many cows that die on the farm are picked up by rendering services and removed from the farm. However, recent public concern about Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE's) may soon impact the cattle producer's ability to dispose of dead animals.

Because of concern about Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), the feeding of mammalian protein in sheep and cattle feed is now prohibited. This may have an impact on animal rendering and result in additional costs involved with the disposal of dead animals.

This is no small problem as an estimated 1 or 2 percent of cows die on ranches each year. It is important for producers to become aware of the disposal options available to them as well as the public health, nuisance, and environmental impacts involved.

Regardless of the disposal method that is used, several guiding principles should be considered. First, the cattle producer must take responsibility for disposal; otherwise the county or state authorities (environmental or public health) will intervene and prescribe the necessary disposal steps. Disposal should be timely to prevent a local nuisance or impact on public or animal (domestic or wild) health. A reasonable disposal time is 24 to 48 hours after death.

When selecting a temporary holding site, great care should be taken to prevent unnecessary exposure of dead animals to the public. The disposal method should preclude access to the carcass by wild animals and birds. Various setbacks or distances from property lines, streams, underground water, and other structures are necessary to protect public health and water supplies. All these principles should be considered before any disposal method is put into practice.

### Carcass Disposal Choices

#### Rendering

Where the service is available, rendering is usually the method of choice. In some areas, it is unavailable or so costly for "pick up" of dead animals as to be prohibitive. The frequency with which pick-ups are made may also be a determining factor. It is important to avoid offending neighbors and others who pass by the farm with foul odors and unsightly carcasses.

Many producers prefer that the vehicle used to pick-up the dead animals not enter areas of their farmstead that may result in exposure of their live animals to disease agents. Prohibiting their entry is a form of biosecurity and is certainly reasonable and desirable. But, it is not acceptable to lay the carcass alongside the entry road or by the highway without some screening to obscure the view of the carcass.

A screened entry to a temporary holding area may be a solution for some operations. Examples of appropriate screening include fences, bushes, etc.

A refrigerated carcass storage unit for use before pick-up would be ideal and provide a better product to the rendering facility. Such a unit would conceal the carcass from view and contain and control odors. A unit sufficiently large to hold a carcass would require an initial investment (\$2,000 to \$5,000) as well as power and maintenance costs (\$1 to \$2/day). It would also need to be cleaned and sanitized periodically.

#### Burial

Burial has long been one of the easier solutions for disposal of cattle mortalities, and it is still a reasonable alternative for some areas. A trench can be dug using a backhoe and then animal carcasses put in and covered