

## Calf Disease Risk, The Biggest Threat

*By Dr. Al Martens  
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In order to contract an infectious disease like E. coli calf diarrhea or Pasteurella pneumonia in a calf, the calf must be exposed to the disease. Pretty simple, correct? Except not so simple in a continuous production system. So, when there is a disease problem in calves, we look at the colostrum quality, the vaccine protocol, the housing air quality, maybe calf movement. We run all kinds of tests to diagnose pathogens. There are lists of contributing factors we investigate. The big question is what is causative disease, and how do we prevent it?

Most diseases originate with either mom or other calves in a group. Your healthy cow has lots of disease organisms that she is immune to, but that doesn't mean that disease bugs aren't in her manure, or on her tongue, or in her breath. Mom **is** the biggest risk to the calf. Twenty years ago, there was a big push to reduce Johne's disease, and some farms went to immediately removing the calf from mom. Immediately removing went to the extreme of pulling the calf the last couple feet during delivery, onto a clean tarp, and taking the calf out of the reach of mom. The calf went into a clean calf pen with no further contact with mom or other adult animals. It worked very well in breaking Johne's spread but another positive side effect on many farms was that calves stopped having disease problems with contagious diseases, especially scours.

An added issue with mom and disease risk is that animals just prior to parturition have a reduction in their own immune response. Diseases like salmonella can multiply and be shed at higher levels from the dam, and you won't be aware of it. As an aside, this immune suppression is another reason fresh cows have more disease problems.

With calf disease problems, stop a minute and look at where the calf has been. Look at the birthing pen, how clean is it? Look at interaction with other cows that may be in the pen. What is the first thing a newborn ingests?

Please remember, just because something done wrong worked for a long time, doesn't mean it will always work.



## Mobile Cow Floating Service Returns to WVS Practice Area

Dairy production means early mornings, long days, pride in a job well done and, as we all know, hard decisions. When a cow goes down, treatment and time are crucial to the cow's likelihood of returning to the herd. When medicine or vet services aren't an option, cow floating provides an alternative hydrotherapy utilizing hot water to buoy the downer. Floating a cow removes pressure from muscles and nerves, allowing the cow to regain function and strength to stand. It can also prevent damage from an injured cow lying down too long.

Amity Breeze Ag & Cattle Co launched in February 2026 and provides mobile cow floating services to our local area. Hot water and an Aqua Cow Rise System tank are transported to the farm in need, the down cow is pulled into the tank via a mat, ramp and winch system, and the tank is filled with hot water allowing the cow to float for 8-12 hours.

Amity Breeze is based in Brandon and serves farms in Dodge, Fond du Lac, Columbia, Green Lake and Winnebago counties. To learn more or to request float services, visit [AmityBreeze.com](http://AmityBreeze.com) or call Tom at (920) 204-2745.



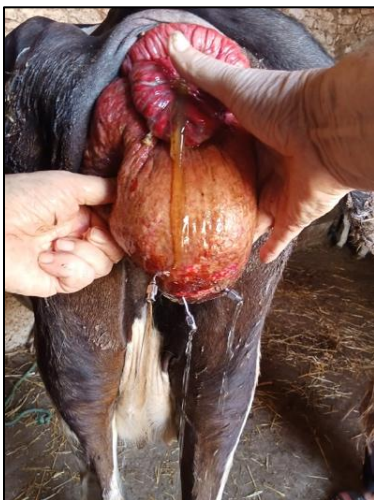
## The Next Generation of Vets

On a recent Saturday morning, we held a palpation lab at Nehls Bros. Farm by Juneau for students from the University of Wisconsin Veterinary Medical School Bovine Club. We prioritize teaching students and believe learning by doing is a crucial part of becoming a good doctor.

## ***Call Vets for Assistance with Anything Prolapsed***

Recently Dr. Nick was presented with a cow that had prolapsed its bladder and it made me think about how producers react to issues with the back end of cows. I've only seen one case where the bladder inverted on itself, and the inside surface of the bladder was a basketball sized bulge hanging out of the vagina of a cow. It is very rare.

This picture is of a prolapsed bladder below the vagina and is an



easier fix. My point is that if you aren't sure what is happening behind a cow, call for help because using a scalpel blade or knife will result in an unfixable issue and a cow that at best goes to slaughter ASAP.

*At left is a photo of a prolapsed bladder. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#) license.*

# The Value of Beef Calves & Their Future

I had someone ask me recently when will bull calf prices be reasonable.

“What’s reasonable,” I asked? He replied, “Like \$600.”

“How long will this last?” he asked.

Buyers and sellers never agree on what is reasonable, especially with memories of calves selling for \$150 per head. And someone is always losing money, then looking at the parties that currently are making good returns.

Things are different, and the only way we return to the stability of my career until the last four years will require one of the following.

The drought out west disappears, and the beef cow herd explodes, and this will take 3 to 5 years to significantly bring prices down.

South America begins exporting huge amounts of beef to the US. South America is the only continent with large amounts of unused land. This could happen but it will take time to establish the infrastructure, like transportation and packing plants. Even then it will be mostly frozen beef unless those countries get disease issues under control.

The last scenario would be that the federal government stops supporting corn prices. Then western corn belt crop growers would hopefully convert millions of acres of marginal land back to pasture. Don't hold your breath with subsidized crop insurance, those guys would rather drive tractor a couple days a year than go to the effort of tending to a beef cow herd.

The American consumer is pretty wealthy compared to 50 years ago and beef demand is holding up well.

I recently saw a steak in a nice restaurant, 24 ounces, \$75. That was a special.