

Dystocia (Calving Difficulties) Emergency Guide

Dystocia is the inability of a cow or heifer to deliver a calf without assistance. It is one of the **most common and critical emergencies** in cattle management.

Recognizing the Signs

Knowing when to intervene is crucial. Watch for:

- **Prolonged Labor:** The cow has been actively straining for **30–60 minutes** with no visible progress (no calf appearing).
 - **Abnormal Presentation:** You see only one foot, a tail instead of feet, or feet coming out upside down (soles pointing up).
 - **Exhaustion:** The cow has stopped straining entirely after a period of intense effort.
 - **Time Lapse:** It has been more than **2 hours** since the amniotic sac ("water bag") first appeared.
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Urgency & Risks

Delay kills. Acting quickly significantly increases the chances of survival for both the calf and the mother.

Risk Factor	Consequence of Delay
To the Calf	Suffocation, brain damage, or death due to prolonged compression.
To the Cow	Uterine tears, nerve damage (paralysis), severe infection, or death.

Action Plan: What to Do

1. **Assess the Situation:** Observe from a distance first to avoid distressing the cow.
2. **Ensure Cleanliness:** Wash the cow's rear end and your own hands/arms thoroughly with warm water and disinfectant. Use lubrication liberally.
3. **Determine Presentation:** Gently examine the cow to feel for the calf's position.
 - *Normal:* Two front feet (soles down) with the nose resting between them.
4. **Call the Vet:** If the calf is stuck, upside down, turned backward, or if you feel overwhelmed, **call your veterinarian immediately.**
5. **Assist Safely:** If you have experience, assist only by pulling gently in rhythm with the cow's contractions, downward toward her hocks. **Never use a tractor or heavy machinery to pull.**

Note: If you are unsure at any point, **stop** and wait for veterinary assistance.